

# DECLARATION

## à l'issue du 16ème Forum régional

We, Delegates of national coalitions members of the Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage (COPAGEN), representing different national organizations, coming from nine (9) West African countries, namely the eight (8) from UEMOA, the Republic of Guinea and members of allied organizations met from June 14 to 16, 2023, as part of the 16th edition of the COPAGEN Regional Forum, to reflect on the theme: "Biodiversity and **change Climate: Issues, Challenges and Prospects for Sustainable Food Systems in Africa**".

The various communications, exchanges, testimonials, sharing of experiences and the various contributions made it possible to draw up the Declaration, the content of which is as follows:

Our world is on the brink of a tragedy highlighted by the collapse of biodiversity. This unprecedented ecological crisis is reputed to be one of the most serious threats on the planet, because it directly endangers life on Earth.

The explanatory causes of this worrying situation are well known: the rapid growth of the population and the search for profit encourage the transformation of traditional agricultural systems into intensive systems. Changes in the use of terrestrial and marine spaces (including deforestation and land take) due, among other things, to urbanization and intensive agriculture lead to the destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats. The destruction of forest reserves for various purposes, including agricultural[1] - is increasing at a frantic pace, going hand in hand with soil degradation due to certain harmful practices such as slash-and-burn cultivation, overgrazing...

This situation naturally creates the bed of desertification. Pollution from nutrients such as nitrogen, the introduction into natural environments of foreign organisms, in particular GMOs, the overexploitation of wild animals and seafood are factors in the weakening of ecosystems.

All these practices cause an abnormally high concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which has the immediate effect of exacerbating the phenomenon of global warming.

The increase in global average temperatures would occur more rapidly over the next hundred years than any change experienced by the planet over the past ten thousand. The effects of climate change are already being felt hard in our daily lives: accentuation of thermal amplitudes, recurrence of natural disasters, disappearance of animal and plant species, disruption of seasonal cycles, emergence of new pathologies due to the proliferation of vector agents. ..All this causes massive population displacements, which makes life on Earth a little more unstable and tragic.

Anthropogenic pressures exerted on biodiversity especially in the agricultural sector bear the main responsibility for this combined crisis. Indeed, the share of greenhouse gas emissions directly attributable to the agro-industrial food system is just over 30% according to the FAO.

Solutions forged in the mold of the agro-industrial food system, such as the green revolution and its variants, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, climate-smart agriculture, precision agriculture, etc. are not viable models and sustainable, insofar as it promotes approaches that precisely exacerbate the phenomenon of global warming (use of fossil fuels and synthetic chemical products, etc.).

[1] ) Some estimates state that an average of 78,000 km<sup>2</sup> of forests were destroyed each year, over the period 2010-2018.

However, biodiversity and its constituent elements offer themselves as an ecological and social insurance policy to face the climate crisis. This is why approaches to solutions based on family farming and agroecology, which constitute the foundations of territorialized food systems, must be placed at the heart of development policies, strategies and programs in our countries.

In view of the above,

We, Delegates of the national coalitions members of the Coalition for the Protection of Heritage African Genetics (COPAGEN), and members of allied organizations,

- Mark our opposition to the agro-industrial food system and reject the solutions that are proposed within the framework of this model to deal with climate change;
- Express our incomprehension in the face of the attitude of certain international institutions which seem not to have learned the lessons of the past by supporting agricultural programs resulting from the green revolution, disconnected from the reality of our lands;
- Regret the fact that our rulers are not quick to implement environmental preservation programs based on the proven knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples, which is recognized by major international legal instruments, such as the Convention on Biodiversity[2] (CBD) and subsequent related texts;
- Denounce the pressures suffered by African Governments to open the door of our countries to risky and counter-productive agricultural technologies such as genetic engineering, gene editing, nanotechnology, the new green revolution, climate-smart agriculture , precision farming...;
- Let us particularly draw the attention of the African authorities as to their responsibility in relation to the irreversible damage and the ravages caused by the use of pesticides and synthetic chemical fertilizers in our regions;
- Encourage the African populations in their various components to return to healthier, more sustainable and more equitable modes of production and consumption, which value local agro-biodiversity and the endogenous knowledge associated with it and participate in the development of territorialized food systems, to the local and national economy;
- Call on regional institutions and particularly the AU on the fact that they have a duty to contribute to the development of African populations and not to work against their interests; and that as such the processes that the AU has initiated within the framework of the harmonization of the regulatory frameworks on seeds and GMOs, as well as the Protocol on intellectual property rights within the framework of the Free Zone Continental Exchange Union (ZLECAF), are contrary to this objective;
- Let the industrialized countries face their historical responsibility in the climate crisis and remind them of their obligations to repair the losses and damages suffered by the African countries which are still home to the largest centers of biodiversity resources in the world.

**Done in Conakry, June 16, 2023**



[2] ) See in particular art. 8.j and 10.c of the CBD.