**Illegal Seed Practices – a threat to farmer livelihoods, food security and sustainable agriculture.**

*A draft statement prepared by the International Seed Federation*

Seed is the most important input in crop production. Reliable, quality seeds are vital to agriculture and the food supply chain. High-quality seeds enable farmers to boost crop productivity, improve livelihoods, and feed a growing population. The International Seed Federation (ISF) is concerned about the increase in illegal seed practices1 as reported by ISF members. In some countries during recent growing seasons, more than 50% of crop seed sold to farmers was illegal or counterfeit.2 Continuing sales of illegal seeds threaten farmers’ access to quality seed.

Farmers pay particular attention to the seed they purchase and plant to ensure varietal purity, germination percentage and freedom from weeds and invasive species. The quality and type of seed determine how the crop will grow and whether there will be a good harvest. The harvest determines the farmers’ income, livelihood, and local food security.

Illegal seed practices compromise seed quality when harvested grain is packaged and sold as genuine seed for sowing; when seed packages are mislabeled with false variety names; and when minimum seed quality standards are not met. If farmers lose confidence in the seed sector, they may miss out on other important benefits such as guidance on how to achieve the best harvest provided by genuine seed producers and suppliers.

The use of illegal seeds can ruin the reputation and economic prospects of an entire agricultural region or national commodity, thereby undermining continuing investment by breeders and seed producers to develop, produce and deliver better quality seeds.

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1 Illegal Seed Practices (ISP) covers all issues referred as counterfeit seeds, fake seeds, fraudulent labelling, intellectual property infringements, regulatory offenses, trademark infringements and trade secret thefts in the seed sector.

2 World Bank. 2017. Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2017. Washington, D.C: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1021.

Those who undertake illegal seed practises are misleading and exploiting farmers. They place farmers’ livelihoods at risk and decrease the overall capacity of sustainable food production. Moreover, these practices are commonly connected with criminal activities, such as tax evasion, fraud, corruption and even labor exploitation all of which have a negative impact on society.

All stakeholders in the seed value chain, from plant breeders to seed producers, processors, traders and distributors, strive to deliver high quality products so that farmers can be confident in the added value of improved quality seed.

ISF and its members are committed to providing reliable seed products which meet strict quality standards to ensure significant and guaranteed benefits for farmers. In contrast, when illegal seed practices reduce farmer confidence in products from reputable breeders and distributors, there is a negative impact on the development and commercialisation of high quality products.

ISF and its members engages with farmers and officials to fight against illegal seed practices. We are seeking a predictable business environment where strong legal protection stimulates a vibrant local seed industry to promote agricultural productivity and sustainability. Effective laws and a successful track record of enforcing these laws are critical to deterring seed counterfeiters.

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