



## MEDIA STATEMENT

### Proposed Licensing of Seeds and Processing Activities May Deny Farmers' Rights

The Malaysian Food Security and Sovereignty Forum is concerned that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI) will proceed to table the Plant Seed Quality Bill which has been in discussion since 2019, during the next Parliamentary sitting. According to the Minister of Agriculture in a 27 March 2021 news article, this new bill would regulate all regulated seeds in terms of processing, testing, sale, distribution, import, and export to ensure that the quality of seeds produced meets the requirements and standards to be set.

Regulated seeds mean any seeds from any plant species or variety that have commercial value prescribed in the regulations by a special board to be formed namely the Seed Quality Board. This would mean that all crop seeds are at risk of having their processing controlled through this law. Regulation of all these regulated seeds will be done through the enforcement of licence on all individuals who want to carry out any process involving regulated seeds as mentioned above. To obtain a licence, the applicant must pay a fee which would be determined, send samples to an appointed laboratory for quality testing and comply with storage, packaging, and labelling standards. Any individual who violates this law can be fined between RM100,000 and RM200,000 or imprisoned for 3 to 5 years.

Quality seeds are important to farmers and consumers. However, the tabling of this Plant Seed Quality Bill in Parliament has far-reaching impact beyond “seed quality” control, denies the rights of farmers, and only supports commercial seed producers. Further, this proposed law would prohibit the practice of saving, exchange, and sale of seeds by farmers, which has been a common and traditional practice for farmers in Malaysia for a long time. The imposition of fines and imprisonment on farmers simply because they carry out their traditional practices are considered unfair, oppressive and could provoke protests as seen in Indonesia and India, especially if the government is not mindful about this.

The proposed law which requires farmers to perform laboratory tests and obtain certification only encourages monoculture practices in the agriculture sector where varieties introduced in the market will gradually decrease and will discriminate farmers' varieties and seed systems thus destroying biological diversity in general, thereby risking the country's food production. For small farmers who sell seeds on a small scale at local markets, strict packaging and labelling conditions will deny them the right to sell and the right of buyers to buy their preferred seeds.

Big corporations or companies will control the Malaysian seed system while small entrepreneurs and farmers who process seeds will slowly disappear and the role of government agencies will be reduced. These companies will carry out seed processing starting from testing the variety to distributing and selling the seeds. Even more unfortunate would be when government money is used to subsidise this private seed system and discriminate against the local seed system. When this happens, farmers' choices will be limited and they will have to follow the conditions and systems that the company has set such

as using a predetermined system of pesticides and fertilisers. Indirectly, seed prices will also increase.

We would like to remind MAFI that the traditional varieties of farmers, as well as the role of small farmers, are recognised by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and also the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

We urge MAFI to first disclose this Bill in full and call for a public consultation process before it is tabled in Parliament. The last consultation process with members of this Forum was held sometime in 2019. It is crucial that another consultation with a wider audience is undertaken with the full Bill in sight as we do not know if MAFI had even considered the recommendations that were put forth by the Malaysian Food Security and Sovereignty Forum. Further, any legislation on seed quality should only apply to commercial companies that sell seeds to ensure that the seeds they sell to consumers are genuine and of good quality. Small scale farmers, individuals who are gardening enthusiasts and those who run community gardens should be free to save, share and sell seeds as long as they are not commercially done.

**Malaysian Food Security and Sovereignty Forum**

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**Supported by;**

See attachment.

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