

Call for Sweeping Moratorium on Gene Drive Research and Application at UN Biodiversity Conference

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (<https://www.cbd.int/>) is currently holding their Biodiversity Conference in Cancun, Mexico. Monday 160 organizations from six continents released a statement calling for a global moratorium on all work on gene drives, including laboratory research.

([HTTPS://WWW.CBD.INT/CONFERENCE/2016](https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2016))
COP13 LOGO

The statement reads:

“In view of the significant ecological, cultural and societal threats posed by genetically-engineered gene drives, including threats to biodiversity, national sovereignty, peace and food security, we the undersigned call upon governments at the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in accordance with the precautionary principle, to put in place a moratorium on 1) any further technical development and experimental application of gene drives, and 2) environmental release of genetically-engineered gene drives.”

You can download the letter here (<http://igtrcn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CBD-Gene-Drive-Sign-on-Letter-English.pdf>) along with the signatories.

([HTTP://IGTRCN.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2016/12/CBD-GENE-DRIVE-SIGN-ON-LETTER-ENGLISH.PDF](http://igtrcn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CBD-Gene-Drive-Sign-on-Letter-English.pdf))

DOWNLOAD LETTER HERE

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Dana Perls of Friends of the Earth said, *“These genetic extinction technologies are false solutions to our conservation challenges....We*

want to support truly sustainable and community driven conservation efforts. Gene drives could be co-opted by

agribusiness and military interests. We need a moratorium on irreversible and irresponsible technologies such as gene drives.”

([HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/
BARBARA_HENDRICKS_\(POLITICIA
N\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Hendricks_(politician))

GERMAN MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT, BARBARA
HENDRICKS

([HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/
BARBARA_HENDRICKS_\(POLITICIA
N\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Hendricks_(politician))

These opinions are gaining some traction with government officials such as the German Minister for the Environment, Barbara Hendricks. She has released a written statement (http://igtrcn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Antwort-von-BUMB_Gene-Drive.pdf) voicing her lack of support for the release of gene drives into the environment.

Recently a group of scientists and researchers have released a letter pushing back on these calls for extreme measures. They say:

“We urge you to support ongoing and new gene drive research, building on cautious and responsible practices and broad stakeholder dialogue.

The potential for gene drive technology is very significant. It is a novel tool which may enable interventions that are durable, cost-effective, and highly efficacious, complementing existing efforts to improve human health and environmental sustainability.”

([HTTP://TARGETMALARIA.ORG/OPEN-LETTER/](http://targetmalaria.org/open-letter/))

VIEW LETTER HERE ([HTTP://TARGETMALARIA.ORG/OPEN-LETTER/](http://targetmalaria.org/open-letter/))

The complete text of their letter with signatories can be found here.

([http://targetmalaria.org/open-](http://targetmalaria.org/open-letter/)

[letter/](http://targetmalaria.org/open-letter/)) (the author of this blog is a signatory)

The letter does not advocate for any specific program or use of the technology but highlights its potential to be applied in positive ways and that while a careful and reasoned approach is certainly warranted, but calls for blanket bans on all forms of gene drive research “would be unwarranted, damaging and irresponsible”

Clearly a topic worth watching. You can get COP13 meeting updates on the Convention on Biological Diversity’s website (<https://www.cbd.int/>) and on social media -the official channels are @CBDnews and @COP13mex with hashtags #COP13 #biodiversity and #UNBioConf2016.