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**SOUTH AFRICA**

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

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**MEDIA STATEMENT**

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## **Decolonise food production: a response to SONA 2018 from Biowatch South Africa**

Now that the elation surrounding SONA has subsided we can look more soberly at what is being proposed. While the President spoke glowingly about the potential of commercial agriculture, what he didn't say is that it is a colonial model that has failed spectacularly to feed the nation and create jobs. It is also one of the most environmentally destructive forms of land use, contributing significantly to climate change and utilising the lion's share of our scarce water resources. Its use of toxic pesticides and fertilisers has led to large-scale contamination of our soil and water. Furthermore, government support of genetically modified crops has put maize, our staple food, in jeopardy. A different approach to agriculture is sorely needed to deliver household food security and livelihoods and to produce sufficient nutrition in a rapidly changing climate.

An answer lies in agroecology, practiced successfully by millions of small-scale farmers across the African continent, who rely on a diversity of crop varieties and animal breeds for food and fibre. This is not a backward step. Agroecology is increasingly recognised as a viable and innovative practice that can be scaled up with adequate policy support. We need urgently to reverse the damages of our colonial agricultural past, to retrain agricultural extension officers to support the majority of South Africa's farmers, and to reclaim and restore arable land as a productive rather than as an extractive activity. We need to revalue our traditional seed and indigenous knowledge systems. Now is the time for our government to move in a new direction and to reposition resources so that small-scale farmers can reach their full potential. This would meet many of our national development objectives. It would give hope to our youth, give more people a stake in our future, create economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods for the many, and feed the nation. We urge action and public debate on these questions.

ENDS

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