Dear President of China, Mr Xi Jinping

Closing speech outside the Syngenta Headquarters in Basel Switzerland, 20 May 2017 | Ueli Gähler, MultiWatch Basel

The Chinese Dragon has arrived in Basel. We are full of admiration for China, your country. And we are full of admiration for the dragon, which is a symbol of luck, a symbol of fertility and power. But the Chinese dragon should not be confused with the Basilisk. This legendary reptile is the symbol of Basel. It is a dangerous creature: a single glance from the Basilisk will turn any living being into stone. No-one can bear the stench that is the breath of the Basilisk, a breath that is poisonous to boot. The Basilisk, the king of serpents, is a devilish symbol of death. It is a monster as all Harry Potter fans will know. Dear Mr Xi Jinping, what you have bought is not a lucky Chinese Dragon but a stinking, poisonous, deadly Basilisk.

Day before yesterday, the seed and pesticide giant Syngenta was transferred into the hands of the People's Republic of China. With all due respect, honoured Mr Xi Jinping, you have been duped. You paid a lot, 43 billion Swiss francs, for the company. You could have made a far better investment: By this summer, the UN are looking to raise one-tenth of this sum, 4.3 billion US dollars, to put a halt to a famine in Africa. You, Mr President, have just transferred vast amounts to two of Syngenta's biggest former shareholders. In doing so, you have in effect underpinned two deadly US American snakes – BlackRock and JP Morgan Chase, two murderous capitalist speculators.

When it comes to human rights, Syngenta's intransigence has exhausted our patience. For the past ten years we have demanded compensation for the widow and orphans of Keno. The leader of MST, Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, was murdered as he resisted Syngenta's land grab. For the past seven years, we have demanded the reinstatement of Imran Ali, a labour union president in Pakistan. Syngenta has made no concessions whatsoever. Mr President, please put an end to such scandalous practices.

Please heed the words of Ms Hilal Elver, the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Take note of her report to the Human Rights Council, which has found that every year 200,000 people die of pesticide poisoning. Almost all of these deaths – 99 per-cent – occur in the Global South. Given Syngenta's global market share in pesticides of 23 per-cent, how large is their share in such deaths each year? Now it is you, Mr President, who are responsible for Syngenta's most toxic herbicide, Paraquat and Atrazine – and for massive bee mortality, as well.

China acted very sensibly last year, when it banned the dangerous weedkiller, Paraquat. We ask you now, Mr President, to make sure that no more of it is sent to countries in the Global South. Ms Hilal Elver recently called for an international treaty to eliminate dangerous pesticides. It is your turn now to assume responsibility.

We are sorry but you have been duped, Mr President. Syngenta is no lucky Chinese dragon. It is a stinking, poisonous Basilisk. Tales about the magical power of genetically modified seeds are greenwash, fairytales, a web of lies pure and simple. None of Syngenta's and Monsanto's genetically modified seeds have brought an increase in productivity per area. None of them have brought a reduced use of pesticides – not in the US, and not in Canada, either. On the contrary: Monsanto's weedkiller Roundup has already lost the race against pesticide-resistant weeds in the US. This is a failed technology. More pesticides, not less, are used because of it. It is also a technology that has created an impenetrable jungle of patent claims that hinder research, especially in countries in the Global South.

Patents on plants are tantamount to robbery. Farmers around the world have been robbed of their traditional right to produce and use their own seeds. Stop the robbers, Mr President. Curb the power of global agribusiness companies. Transform Syngenta's patents into Open Source information. Write Syngenta off!

Thank you.