



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher (Ethiopia)

(2000)



Tewolde Berhan Egziabher

...for his exemplary work to safeguard biodiversity and the traditional rights of farmers and communities to their genetic resources.

Tewolde Berhan was born in 1940, graduated in 1963 from the University of Addis Ababa and took a doctorate from the University of Wales in 1969.

He went back to the University of Addis Ababa and was Dean of the Faculty of Science, 1974-78. From 1978 to '83 he was keeper of the National Herbarium, President of Aswara University 1983-91 and Director of the Ethiopian Conservation Strategy Secretariat 1991-94. Since then he has been General Manager of the Environmental Protection Authority of Ethiopia, which is effectively the country's Ministry of the Environment.

During the 1990s Tewolde put much of his energy into negotiations at the various biodiversity-related fora, especially the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In this time he built up a strong group of well-prepared African negotiators who began to take the lead in the G77 and China Group. Africa came out with united, strong, progressive positions, such as no patents on living materials and the recognition of community rights. This strengthened the G77 and China's negotiating positions.

Tewolde was instrumental in securing recommendations from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) encouraging African countries to develop and implement community rights, a common position on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and a clear stance against patents on life. Tewolde also guided the drafting of the OAU model legislation for community rights, which is now used as the common basis for all African countries.

At the 1999 biosafety negotiations in Cartagena, Colombia, Tewolde was the spokesperson for the majority of the G77 countries, called 'The Like-Minded Group'. These negotiations ended in deadlock, but reached a successful conclusion in Montreal in January 2000. Tewolde's leadership of the Like-Minded Group in the negotiations played a key role in achieving an outcome - against strong US and EU opposition - that protects biosafety and biodiversity and respects traditional and community rights in developing countries.

In 2004, Tewelde Berhan was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Science Honoris Causa by the Addis Ababa University, in recognition of his leadership in developing the science of botany in Ethiopia and in conserving biological diversity globally. In 2006, he received a 'Champions of the Earth' award, presented by the United Nations Environmental Programme to outstanding environmental leaders.

Quotation

"I am local, rural, communal. And I find that the whole world is a community. We have made progress in asserting our local community rights globally. We shall continue to do so."

Tewelde Berhan

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