BIOTECHNOLOGY COALITION OF THE PHILIPPINES (BCP) STATEMENT ON THE RECENT COURT OF APPEALS DECISION ON THE WRIT OF KALIKASAN AGAINST BT TALONG AND GOLDEN RICE

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The Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines (BCP) is profoundly concerned over the recent decision of the Court of Appeals granting the petition for a Writ of Kalikasan. The decision effectively stops the commercial planting of Bt Talong (Bt Eggplant) and Golden Rice as well as the introduction and development of new biotech crops in the country. While the decision is framed around specific agricultural products, its ripple effects threaten to slow or even reverse progress across all domains of biotechnological research and development in the Philippines. This could reduce the nation's ability to meet current and future challenges in agriculture, medicine and healthcare, industry, and beyond.

This ruling disregarded the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting the safety and benefits of these modern biotechnology products. Bt Talong and Golden Rice – similar to other genetically engineered products approved for commercial use in the country – are the fruits of decades of rigorous scientific research and development by reputable public institutions such as the University of the Philippines Los Baños and the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice). These products have undergone extensive biosafety assessments and field trials, demonstrating their safety and potential in decreasing pesticide use and reducing the incidence of night blindness – critical issues in Philippine agriculture and public health.

Golden Rice is engineered to produce beta-carotene in its edible grain. Beta-carotene is a precursor of Vitamin A, an essential nutrient in preserving human eyesight. Vitamin A deficiency can lead to blindness

and even death and is a severe health problem in the Philippines. Golden Rice was developed as a supplemental strategy to reduce this deficiency, particularly in populations with limited access to diverse diets or where rice is a staple food.

On the other hand, Bt Eggplant, has been proven to significantly decrease the use of harmful pesticides, reducing environmental strain and health risks to both the ecosystem and human health. Farmers growing Bt Eggplant benefit from higher productivity and reduced costs for chemical pesticides. This significantly increases incomes uplifting the living standards of farmers and stimulating rural economies through increased spending and investment in local services and infrastructure.

The decision of the Court of Appeals limits the options available to farmers for crop selection, directly affecting their ability to choose crops that might be more profitable, sustainable, or suitable for the specific conditions of their farmlands. Bt eggplant is a very profitable crop that avoids the spraying of harmful pesticide thereby increasing the farmer's income, protecting farmer's health and conserving farm biodiversity.

This decision of the Court of Appeals discourages scientific research and innovation using the powerful tool of modern biotechnology within the Philippines. Modern biotechnology has proven its usefulness in creating new effective medicines such as the vaccines that stopped the pandemic of Covid 19. Modern biotechnology has and is producing products and processes that reduce our dependence on fossil fuels – the use of which produce the greenhouse gases that increases temperatures and drives climate change. The decision to halt the commercial propagation of genetically modified crops could lead to a significant reduction in research funding, as donors and funding agencies often seek stable regulatory environments before committing resources. Similarly, potential international collaborators may view the regulatory atmosphere in the Philippines as uncertain or hostile to biotechnology, deterring partnerships that could advance local science and technology.

While the BCP respects the judicial process, we are compelled to advocate for a balanced, responsible, science-based approach to decision-making that fully considers the extensive scientific evidence and practical benefits these technologies offer. The current court decision overlooks these benefits and, if left unchallenged, will impede the nation's progress toward sustainable development and technological innovation in agriculture and other areas.

The BCP urges the Court of Appeals to reconsider its decision and to base its rulings on sound scientific evidence and risk assessments conducted by competent regulatory authorities. The precautionary principle should not be interpreted as a blanket prohibition on new technologies but rather as a call for responsible and evidence-based decision-making.

We also call upon the Philippine government to continue supporting and promoting the responsible development and adoption of agricultural biotechnology. This includes institutionalizing the current science-based regulatory framework, investing in research and development, and educating the public about the benefits and safety of these technologies.

The BCP stands ready to engage with all stakeholders, including the government, academia, civil society organizations, and industry to foster a constructive dialogue regarding agricultural biotechnology. Together, we can harness the actual and potential benefits of modern biotechnology to secure a prosperous, sustainable future for all Filipinos.