

Israel joins the United Nations treaty for the conservation of Genetic Diversity

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The State of Israel, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and in collaboration with the Volcani Institute, joined the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). This Treaty is aimed at serving as a platform for global cooperation, in order to preserve genetic sources for plant food crops of special nutritional importance and to encourage the cultivation of a variety of species resistant to extreme climate conditions. This, in order to ensure the continuation of production, improvement and maximisation thereof, is a tool to establish a regular supply of fresh plant-based food even under the reality of an extreme and changing climate.

The Treaty focuses on steps and actions for the preservation and cultivation of 64 specific plant crops defined as having a special benefit to human health and food security, such as Wheat, carrots, chickpeas, lentils, oats, etc. As part of the Treaty, the participating countries undertake to act to preserve biodiversity, which helps in cultivating food sources, at two key levels: Preservation within the genetic bank as plants growing in the fields, and preservation outside the site. In this manner, access is provided to those genetic sources for research and cultivation purposes, which allows work to be done towards reducing the continuous erosion of these sources, in conjunction with the expansion of the genetic pool of the crops through gene banks from all over the world, and the promotion of cultivation processes that will minimise the sensitivities of certain crops and genetic dilution (erosion), as a result of climate change.

The Ministry of Agriculture explains that the State of Israel's joining this Treaty will first and foremost allow researchers, developers and farmers to gain access to central genetic resources for the development of varieties adapted to climate change, through collaborations between the Israeli Gene Bank and various genetic repositories from all over the world, in parallel to fostering the State of Israel's position as a key actor in globally gearing up for climate change.

Yakov Poleg, Senior Deputy Director General of the Centre for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, said "The signing of the Treaty is another important milestone in the gearing up on the part of the State of Israel for the climate crisis and it expresses our commitment in the matter of the preservation of the genetic diversity found in the sovereign domains of the State of Israel."

Dr Einav Maizlish-Gati, Director of the Israeli Gene Bank at the Volcani Institute, stated, "The signing of the Treaty will allow us, at the national level, access to additional genetic sources in order to increase the range of attributes available to us when we come to deal with climate change and to ensure food security for the residents of the State of Israel. Our joining the Treaty is of additional importance in making the unique biological diversity, that exists in Israel, accessible to our partners in the world in a manner that will allow us to maintain sovereignty over the local genetic sources."