

## Farewell, Erna!



Erna Bennett talking with farmers in the mountains of Greece while collecting wheat varieties during her time at FAO

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It was with great sadness the passing of Dr. Erna Bennett on 3 January 2011 at her home in Scotland. Erna was 86 years old. She was a world-renown plant geneticist and one of the early pioneers who coined the term "genetic resources" and warned the world about the tragedy of "genetic erosion". She joined the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 1967, where she succeeded in mobilising FAO to become involved directly in collecting the genetic resources of crop plants in many countries, especially their centres of diversity and origin, while there was still time.

While at FAO, Erna became increasingly concerned that the efforts to conserve the world's precious and irreplaceable seed diversity stood in grave danger of being hijacked by powerful private interests. In FAO, as the most outspoken and broad minded scientist, She struggled against interest in control over the world's agricultural biodiversity through the application of intellectual property rights on seeds. She battled within FAO for many years to keep for UN system free from any private pressure. She was eventually forced to resign from in 1982. Since then, she has stayed active on these and other issues – lecturing, writing and advising – but out of official circles.

Erna was also a very friend of Geneconserve and expressed one of her latest feelings and lucid reflections in this article <http://www.geneconserve.pro.br/artigo046.pdf>.

You can read more about Erna on this link.  
[http://www.geneconserve.pro.br/bio\\_erna.pdf](http://www.geneconserve.pro.br/bio_erna.pdf)

**Comment of Nagib Nassar**

I missed the personal contacts and inspiration of a great friend and a great scientist. Erna provided me and the whole generation the idea and the sense of agrobioidiversity , coined for the first time term of genetic resources and paved the movement to keep them alive. She motivated a whole generation , taught , struggled and batted for what she believed during all her life. Erna inspired me and others the value of giving a social purpose to scientific work. Courage was her principle, Sacrifice for others was her flag. Geneconserve has published for her in many occasions since creation of the journal, the first at this link.

[http://www.geneconserve.pro.br/bio\\_erna.pdf](http://www.geneconserve.pro.br/bio_erna.pdf) Later ,published this dedication  
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Erna will live always and forever in my mind and my heart.