

MPs to re-debate GMO Bill

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and Nicholas Wassajja

The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oulanyah, has directed the Government to re-table before Parliament, the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2012, for reconsideration.

In December, President Yoweri Museveni declined to assent to the Bill, citing lack of protection of consumers, indigenous crops and animals by the proposed piece of legislation.

Presiding over the House on Tuesday, Oulanyah told the MPs that after receiving the Bill from the Government, Parliament would reconsider the proposed law to capture President Museveni's concerns.

"The minister responsible should lay the Bill before the House so that it is referred to the committee for consideration," Oulanyah said after reading the President's letter verbatim to the MPs.

The House, which has been on recess, resumed business on Tuesday to among other things, scrutinise the National Budget framework paper which was tabled before Parliament in December last year.

In his communication, Oulanyah directed the clerk to Parliament, Jane Kibirige, to extract the original text of the Bill as sent to President Museveni for assent, for the incorporation of Museveni's proposals.

In his letter, Museveni asked MPs to review various clauses of the Bill which include sections 3, 15, 16, 25, 26, 35 and 36.

The President also asked the House to reconsider the title of the Bill. He stated that: "I am writing in connection with the "Bio-safety Law" which, in fact means "genetic engineering", Why was it not named clearly?"

According to Museveni, using the term "modern bio-technology" is vague. He added that genetic engineering for crops and plants must be clearly stated and so should the genetic engineering animal species such as controlling of diseases.

He further stated that the labeling must be clear and failure to label the



Wilt resistant genetically modified banana plants being developed at Kawanda

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Oulanyah

GMO products clearly should attract severe punishment. In October 2017, Parliament passed the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Act 2012, to allow Ugandan farmers access genetically engineered products to boost agriculture biotechnology research.

The Act, which calls for the establishment of a national biosafety committee, institutional biosafety committees and also provision of mechanisms to regulate research and general release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) had been shelved for five years.

Before it being passed into law, the Bill faced criticism by various stakeholders saying it would affect Uganda's organic crop varieties such as organic bananas.

Museveni has in the recent past declined to assent to certain Acts of Parliament, and returned them to the Legislature for repackaging and consideration.

Last year, Museveni returned the Income Tax Amendment Bill to Parliament for consideration. The MPs had passed the Bill exempting them from having their allowances taxed.

The Bill was re-considered and later signed by the President after it had been reviewed.

Suspended MPs

Meanwhile, Oulanyah indicated

that the suspension of MPs Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda (Kira Municipality) Jonathan Odur (Erute North) and Anthony Akol (Kilak North County) had elapsed.

The MPs were suspended for three consecutive Parliament sittings in December last year by Speaker Rebecca Kadaga, for allegedly masterminding chaos as the House was considering the Constitution (Amendment) No: 2 Act, to lift the presidential age limit.

Oulanyah, however, noted that the suspension of the other MPs Allan Ssewanyana (Makindye West) Gerald Karuhanga (Ntungamo Municipality) and Mubarak Manyangwa (Kawempe South) was still standing until January 17, when they will finish their seven sitting suspension of seven sittings.

Oulanyah urged MPs Ssemujju, Akol and Odur to report back to Parliament to perform their legislative roles.

The MPs have since taken Speaker Kadaga to court, challenging their suspension which they said was illegally done.