



## Convention on Biological Diversity

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CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION  
ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY SERVING AS THE  
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CARTAGENA  
PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY

Eighth meeting

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Item 9 of the provisional agenda\*

### COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, CONVENTIONS AND INITIATIVES

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

#### I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety for the period 2011-2020<sup>1</sup> contains, under focal area 5, a strategic objective on outreach and cooperation with an expected impact to increase support from and collaboration with relevant organizations, conventions and initiatives for the implementation of the Protocol. Under this strategic objective, there is an operational objective to enhance international cooperation and collaboration in biosafety, with outcomes (a) to establish official relationships with the secretariats of other conventions and organizations and (b) to have the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity as an observer to the Committees on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade of the World Trade Organization.

2. At its seventh meeting, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, in its decision BS-VII/6, welcomed the Executive Secretary's cooperation with, inter alia, the World Trade Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Plant Protection Convention, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention), the European Union Reference Laboratory for Genetically Modified Food and Feed of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, and the Green Customs Initiative. In the decision, Parties were urged to improve and strengthen collaboration at the regional and national levels among focal points of organizations, conventions and initiatives relevant to the implementation of the Biosafety Protocol, as appropriate.

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\* UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/8/1.

<sup>1</sup> Adopted in decision BS-V/16.

3. In the same decision, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol requested the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of funds, (a) to further pursue, at the current level, cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives, including academic and research institutions, from all regions, with a view to meeting the strategic objective in focal area 5 of the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety for the period 2011–2020, on outreach and cooperation; (b) to promote active participation of other conventions and related organizations in the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) online discussion portal; and (c) to continue efforts to gain observer status for the Convention on Biological Diversity in those committees of the World Trade Organization that are relevant to biosafety.

4. The present note provides an overview of the actions taken by the Executive Secretary within the context of the Strategic Plan and in response to decision BS-VII/6. The overview provides information on cooperative actions taken by the Secretariat in collaboration with other organizations, conventions and initiatives with a view to creating synergies among biosafety-related programmes in general and ensuring the effective implementation of the Cartagena Protocol in particular.

5. Additional information on collaborative activities related to specific areas of the Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol is reported in the relevant pre-session documents issued for the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

## II. OVERVIEW OF ONGOING COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

### A. Green Customs Initiative

6. In the context of operational objectives 2.3 and 5.2 of the Strategic Plan, the Secretariat continued as a partner in the Green Customs Initiative during the intersessional period. The objective of the Green Customs Initiative is to enhance the capacity of customs and other relevant enforcement personnel to monitor and facilitate the legal trade and to detect and prevent illegal trade in those environmentally sensitive goods or substances covered by the partner organizations.

7. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat facilitated access on its e-learning platform to the e-learning modules on the Cartagena Protocol that had been developed within the context of the Green Customs Initiative; the modules are intended to be used in training customs officers and other practitioners.<sup>2</sup> The Green Customs Initiative organized a regional Green Customs workshop in Asia and the Pacific, to which the Secretariat contributed by preparing a pre-recorded presentation on the relevant parts of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Secretariat also organized a workshop to strengthen the capacities of border control officials of Caribbean small island developing States with regard to living modified organisms, focusing, in particular, on documentation, identification and detection. At the workshop, the activities of the Green Customs Initiative were also highlighted.

8. The Secretariat also contributed to the tenth and eleventh meetings of the partners to the Green Customs Initiative, which were held on 24 and 25 November 2014 and 14 and 15 April 2015, respectively. At both meetings, the partners provided updates on their activities to date and discussed new activities planned for the coming years. At the eleventh meeting, the partners agreed to update the *Green Customs Guide to Multilateral Environmental Agreements*.<sup>3</sup>

9. The Secretariat's continued participation in the Green Customs Initiative, however, will depend on availability of resources, since each partner organization needs to bring on board its own resources to

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<sup>2</sup> The e-learning modules are available at <https://scbd.unssc.org/course/index.php>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2008. Available from [http://www.greencustoms.org/reports/guide/Green\\_Customs\\_Guide\\_new.pdf](http://www.greencustoms.org/reports/guide/Green_Customs_Guide_new.pdf)

be able to participate in joint activities, such as organizing training workshops, the development of training materials and case studies, as well as attending meetings of partners. The Parties to the Protocol may wish to consider allocating some resources in the budget for the upcoming biennium to sustain the work of the Green Customs Initiative.

## **B. Cooperation with the World Trade Organization**

10. The Secretariat continued to liaise and cooperate with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and to follow discussions and negotiations in committees within that organization, including by liaising with staff of the WTO secretariat. Briefings on pertinent decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol were provided to the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment. The Secretariat holds observer status in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment (CTE) in its regular sessions and is invited, on a regular basis, to the formal meetings of CTE special (negotiating) sessions.

## **C. Cooperation in information-sharing**

11. At its seventh meeting, in decision BS-VII/2, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol requested the Executive Secretary, among other things, to continue collaboration with other biosafety databases and platforms, including those of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), other clearing-houses of the Convention and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

12. In order to facilitate the collaboration among CBD databases, the platform for the CBD clearing-houses has been revamped and harmonized on the basis of an improved version of the Biosafety Clearing-House. As a result the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House (ABSCH) is already fully operational on the new platform, and a new website for the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) was developed. Preparatory work is under way for further upgrading the Biosafety Clearing-House and migrating it to the new platform.

13. As part of the collaboration with other biosafety databases, the Secretariat continued to collaborate with FAO, host of the “GM Foods Platform”, and with OECD, host of the “BioTrack Product Database”. During the intersessional period, the three organizations jointly organized an online forum through the Biosafety Clearing-House (2015), as well as two webinars, on “Good practices for effective national communication mechanisms” (2015) and “Training on effective use of data on the databases” (2016) respectively.<sup>4</sup>

14. With a view to facilitating the sharing of biosafety information by countries, the secretariats of CBD, FAO and OECD continued to collaborate towards more harmonization, as appropriate, of the information submitted to the Biosafety Clearing-House, the FAO GM Foods Platform, and the OECD BioTrack Product Database. It was agreed that the CBD Secretariat would modify the common format for submission of decisions and risk assessment records to the Biosafety Clearing-House in order to offer the possibility to forward the records to the FAO and OECD secretariats, as appropriate, in such a way as to ensure that the records would be automatically submitted to the GM Foods Platform and/or BioTrack Product Database for possible posting. This change, once implemented, would avoid the need for submitting similar information separately to each of the databases, as is currently the case. Furthermore, cross-links between countries’ profiles in the Biosafety Clearing-House and FAO GM Food Platform were added to facilitate navigation between the databases.

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<sup>4</sup> The online forum and reports of the webinars are available at [https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art20/fao-cbd-oecd/discussion](https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art20/fao-cbd-oecd/discussion).

15. References to specific detection methods in the databases of the European Union Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed (EU-RL GMFF) and the CropLife International Detection Methods Database continued to be provided, when available, as links on the LMO information pages in the Biosafety Clearing-House.<sup>5</sup>

16. With regard to capacity-building, the Secretariat has worked closely with the UNEP/GEF Project for Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the BCH (Phase III) by providing assistance related to training activities directed to regional advisors and Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points. A Biosafety Clearing-House Training Workshop is scheduled to be held on 11 December 2016 during the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

#### **D. Cooperation on technical and scientific issues**

17. The Secretariat has continued to establish collaborations with relevant organizations in its efforts to facilitate capacity-building and technology transfer among Parties within the context of detection and identification of living modified organisms (LMOs), with a view to making progress towards the relevant outcomes of the Strategic Plan of the Protocol as well as sharing experiences and building networks within regions. During the intersessional period, three workshops were organized by the Secretariat on detection and identification of LMOs.

18. The first workshop was held in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The outcome of this workshop included a plan of action for the development, in collaboration with relevant organizations as appropriate, of training material for capacity-building activities on the detection and identification of LMOs.

19. Two regional workshops were held: one in Ljubljana for the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region and one in Mexico City for Spanish-speaking countries in the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries (GRULAC) region. The CEE workshop was organized in collaboration with the Slovenian National Institute of Biology and the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. The GRULAC workshop was organized in collaboration with the Intersecretarial Commission on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms and the Centro Nacional de Referencia en Detección de Organismos Genéticamente Modificados. Discussions have been initiated between the Secretariat and representatives of relevant organizations in Anglophone Africa and in Asia and the Pacific, with a view to holding similar workshops in these regions in the next intersessional period.

#### **E. Cooperation with the Aarhus Convention on access to information and public participation**

20. Pursuant to decision BS-VII/7, the Secretariat continued to collaborate with the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention through joint activities. The two secretariats organized online discussions which contributed to the development of two e-learning modules on access to information and public participation with regard to biosafety. The modules are available at <http://scbd.unssc.org>. As a result of joint round table discussions on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding living/genetically modified organisms, the secretariats have jointly developed (a) a checklist of key measures required for ratifying and implementing the two instruments, and (b) a summary describing sources of available technical assistance, tools and materials. The two documents are available in the Public Awareness and Participation Portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House.<sup>6</sup> The outcomes of the events

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<sup>5</sup> The European Union Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed (EU-RL GMFF) and the CropLife International Detection Methods Database are both reachable through links in BCH records of LMOs and are available respectively at <http://gmo-crl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/default.htm> (EU-RL GMFF) and <http://www.detection-methods.com/> (CropLife). Full interoperability with the CropLife database is still to be achieved.

<sup>6</sup> Available at [http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art23/pa\\_main.shtml](http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml).

held jointly by the two secretariats are expected to contribute to the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol's programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs (2011-2015). The reports of the round tables will be available in information document UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/8/INF/9.

### III. ELEMENTS OF A DRAFT DECISION

24. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to take note of the information provided in the present report and consider:

(a) Whether there are aspects of cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives that are not being adequately addressed to meet the strategic objective of the Strategic Plan regarding outreach and cooperation, and, if so, which specific activities could address those aspects;

(b) The issue of lack of resources for collaborative work with other organizations, conventions and initiatives relevant to biosafety, and whether a decision is needed on some remedial actions, such as including a budget for activities related to the Green Customs Initiative and the Aarhus Convention on access to information and public participation,<sup>7</sup> among others, so that the Secretariat could effectively engage with these other organizations, conventions and initiatives and enhance its collaborative actions.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, done at Aarhus, Denmark, on 25 June 1998.