



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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Press Release

The Governing Body of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety Holds its First Meeting

Montreal, 15 February 2004 – More than 1000 delegates representing governments and relevant organizations will convene in the Malaysian city of Kuala Lumpur, from 23-27 February 2004, for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, or COP-MOP 1.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted in January 2000 as a supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Its objective is to protect biological diversity from the potential risks that may be posed by living modified organisms (LMOs), or what are commonly referred to as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), resulting from modern biotechnology.

The five-day meeting will consider a number of issues that are central to the implementation of the Protocol. These include, among others: information sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House; capacity-building; liability and redress; compliance; and handling, transport, packaging and identification of living modified organisms. It is also expected that the meeting will adopt a medium term programme of work for the Protocol over the next 4 to 5 years.

Preparations for the first meeting of COP-MOP were spearheaded by an open-ended Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP), which held three meetings since the adoption of the Protocol and prepared a number of recommendations which will provide the basis for the discussions in Kuala Lumpur.

Underscoring the importance of the meeting, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, noted that the first meeting of COP-MOP marks another major landmark in the history of the Protocol. “It is expected to make important decisions that will shape the future implementation of the Protocol”, he said.

The Protocol’s text specifically requires the first meeting of COP-MOP to address a number of issues. For example, COP-MOP.1 is required to decide upon the modalities of the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH), a mechanism established under the Protocol to facilitate exchange of information on LMOs. On the recommendation of the ICCP, a pilot phase of the BCH was developed by the Secretariat during the interim period to build experience with the operation of this mechanism, and it is expected that the decision of COP-MOP 1 will take into account the lessons learned in the pilot phase.

The first meeting of COP-MOP is also required to consider and decide upon appropriate procedures and mechanisms to facilitate decision-making by Parties of import, as well as procedures and institutional mechanisms to promote compliance with the provisions of the Protocol and address cases of non-compliance.

Another important issue to be considered by the meeting concerns the identification requirements to be specified in documentation accompanying shipments of LMOs. This is especially urgent for the private sector and other operators dealing in agricultural commodities that may contain LMOs as the transboundary movements of such commodities are expected to be in conformity with the requirements of the Protocol following its entry into force on 11 September of last year.

Implementation of the Protocol presents a big challenge to many countries, especially developing countries and those with economies in transition, which lack the necessary capacities to deal with LMOs. "If the Protocol is to be effectively implemented, we have to invest in building the required human resources and institutional capacities to do so. Countries need to be empowered to make informed decisions", said Mr. Klaus Toepfer, the Executive Director of UNEP.

COP-MOP.1 will consider a framework for capacity building developed by the ICCP, which includes an Action Plan, a Coordination Mechanism designed to promote synergies and partnerships between different capacity-building initiatives and a set of indicators for monitoring progress in the implementation of the Action Plan. A roster of experts in biosafety has also been established to provide assistance upon request to developing countries particularly with respect to issues related to risk assessment of LMOs.

Effective implementation of the Protocol will require full support and cooperation of all Parties, other governments and relevant international organizations. This is crucial in fostering a concerted global action, building partnerships and leveraging resources for implementing the Protocol.

"I invite all governments to use the occasion of this first meeting of COP-MOP to renew their commitment to safeguarding biological diversity from all threats, including potential adverse effects that may result from the transboundary transfer, handling and use of LMOs", said Mr. Zedan. "I also call upon all governments that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Protocol as soon as possible".

Notes for Journalists

1. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP) is the governing body of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Its primary role is to keep under regular review the implementation of the Protocol and to make the necessary decisions to promote its effective implementation.
2. The Biosafety Protocol entered into force on September 11 2003, three months after the 50th country, the Republic of Palau, acceded to the Protocol. As of February 13, 2004, 86 countries and the European Community have ratified the Protocol, with the latest countries to do so being: Belize and Tajikistan on 12 February, and Latvia on 13 February.
3. Additional information about the Protocol is available at the following Web sites:

CBD Web site: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety> and

Biosafety Clearing-House: <http://bch.biodiv.org/Pilot/Home.aspx>.

Frequently asked questions are also available at: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/faqs.asp>

Background sheet on COP-MOP 1: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/ref/mop-01/mop-01-bk-01-en.doc>

Web site for the first meeting of COP-MOP: <http://www.biodiv.org/meetings/mop-01>

Electronic Press room for the first meeting of COP-MOP: <http://www.biodiv.org/meetings/mio-01/press/>

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