

**STATEMENT BY STATEMENT BY
HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE OPEN-ENDED AD HOC
WORKING GROUP ON BIOSAFETY
14 FEBRUARY 1999, CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA**

Check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Minister,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a pleasure for me to address the final meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety. This occasion fills me with a sense of honor and pride due the importance of this occasion in the life of the Convention.

Before continuing, however, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of Convention and all those associated with it to extend our sympathies to the Government and people of Colombia and in particular to the families and friends who were directly and indirectly affected by the earthquake. I would like to particularly acknowledge the remarkable effort made in preparing for this meeting. This effort is even more remarkable given the

devastating earthquakes. I trust that we will repay their effort and commitment in hosting this meeting in such difficult circumstances by successfully concluding our work.

Mr. Chairman,

It is not for me to remind you - the experts - of the actual and potential benefits and risks of modern biotechnology and consequently the importance of providing an international regime for the regulation of the transboundary movements of LMOs.

I would, however, like to take this opportunity to remind you of the importance that these negotiations have beyond the immediate scope of providing a sound international framework for the regulation of transboundary movement of LMOs.

Your achievements here in Cartagena will not only be relevant to fulfilling the promise of paragraph 3 of Article 19 but will have a direct bearing on the development of the Convention as a whole. For example, this Protocol will be a substantial practical manifestation of the precautionary approach within the context of the Convention. As such it will provide a significant precedent for this underlying principle of the Convention. Moreover, if the Convention is to achieve its overall objectives of conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of the benefits of biodiversity it is critical that many of its provisions are elaborated through further protocols, decisions of the Conference of the Parties and actions of Parties as appropriate. The

success of the Convention's first endeavor in this regard will provide an important platform for future efforts of this nature.

The importance of concluding the first protocol to the Convention has, however, an even wider significance. The world is undergoing a period of profound change. Globalisation, regionalisation and the emergence of the information era are manifestations of this basic realignment in the way we live. A fundamental paradigm which must be the basis of this changing world is sustainable development. The Convention on Biological Diversity as one of the key products of UNCED is a corner stone in the effectiveness of this paradigm. If this Convention does not develop to meet emerging challenges and changing circumstances then this will have a serious impact on the viability of this paradigm of sustainable development.

Moreover, time is of the essence in this rapidly evolving environment. For example, developments related to the regulation of transboundary movements of LMOs are rapidly proceeding in other fora. Aspects of this issue are beginning to receive attention with the World Trade Organisation. These negotiations represent an important opportunity for the sustainable development sector to establish priorities and guidelines which reflect the aims of this sector. If this opportunity is missed then the initiative will move to other fora where crucial issues related to the management of LMOs in line with the principals of the Convention and the philosophy of sustainable development, such as the precautionary approach, will be much harder to achieve.

Mr. Chairman,

I emphasize the wider significance of our work over the next week for a purpose. As we know there remain significant unresolved issues in the draft text before us. As was noted in the Secretary General's message for International Biodiversity Day last year to conclude these negotiations and adopt a protocol will require understanding, compromise and flexibility on behalf of us all. In the final moments of negotiations we sometimes lose sight of the wider issues. As a consequence our individual basis for compromise diminishes. I hope that by reminding us of the significance of our work in the wider context that we will not lose sight of these objectives when we will need them most: in the final moments of this negotiation.

The Government and people of Colombia, through their unwavering support for this meeting have provided us with potent example of how despite enormous immediate difficulties we need not and indeed, should not, lose sight of our fundamental aims and goals. An appropriate way to recognize this example might be to acknowledge the commitment of the people of Cartagena and Colombia in the name of the protocol.

Mr. Chairman,

As you are well aware the success of these negotiations are due to many. Therefore before I conclude I would like to acknowledge the support of those governments which have so generously provided assistance, Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

I would also extend my personal gratitude to those members of the extended Bureau of the BSWG who have worked so tirelessly to bring us to where we are today in the negotiation process.

Finally, I would like to make a special mention of the your work as Chairman of the BSWG. It is hard to imagine how we would have progressed as far as we have without your wisdom, humor, diplomacy and skill as a chairman. Undoubtedly we will need all of those skills to conclude our negotiations .

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity and let me wish you and the Working Group a successful and productive week's work.