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Submission of View on Digital Sequence Information

Dear Ms Paşca Palmer,

On behalf of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, I would like to take this opportunity to submit our view (with regards to decision XIII/16, paragraph 2) on potential implications of the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources for the three objectives of the Convention and the Nagoya Protocol.

In our view:

1. The CBD should adopt a decision clarifying that sequence data should be considered the equivalent of biological material. This is necessary because technological developments in sequencing and synthetic biology will otherwise undermine the Convention, its third objective in particular, and synthetic biology will continue to facilitate biopiracy.
2. Repositories of sequences, such as the databases Genbank and the European Nucleotide Archive (ENA), need to require their users to agree to benefit sharing as a precondition of access to sequence information. The Convention should develop rules to be applied in user agreements for such databases, and those databases should be required to implement them.
3. With so-called “digital-to-biological converters” that are portable and easy to operate, there is a possibility of a person or entity using sequence data to recreate organisms anywhere. These pose growing challenges to the first and third objectives of the convention.
4. In our view, it is apparent that the (mis)use of sequence data may also impact the conservation of biodiversity, and this impact can be negative. The ability to synthesize organisms, or modify organisms with synthesized genes presents a serious and novel challenge that could possibly result in introduction of an invasive species from within a country rather than outside its borders.
5. There are also clear biodiversity risks involved, since invasive and harmful-to-biodiversity organisms may be a result of synthesizing.

We urge you to take these concerns and views into consideration and thank you for your attention.

Warm regards,



Lili Fuhr