



# 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

Tenth meeting – Part II  
Montreal, Canada, 7-19 December 2022  
Agenda item 12

## COOPERATION WITH OTHER CONVENTIONS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Secretary continues to ensure cooperation with other relevant organizations, conventions and initiatives that contribute to work under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The present document provides a summary of activities and initiatives undertaken during the present intersessional period for the information of the Conference of the Parties serving as a meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.
2. The Subsidiary Body on Implementation, in its recommendation 3/2 on the fourth assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Protocol and the final evaluation of the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety for the period 2011-2020, noted the importance of cooperation among Parties in addition to cooperation among intergovernmental organizations to support the implementation of the Protocol. Furthermore, cooperation has been reflected in the draft post-2020 implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety as a cross-cutting goal that enables the implementation of the Protocol.
3. The present note provides an overview of the actions taken by the Executive Secretary, within the context of the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol and in response to previous decisions, 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. The note also addresses cooperation on issues under the Convention that are closely related to biosafety.

### II. OVERVIEW OF ONGOING COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

#### A. Cooperation with the World Trade Organization

4. The Secretariat continued to liaise and cooperate with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and to follow discussions and negotiations in relevant WTO committees, including by liaising with the WTO Secretariat. Since the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, two briefings on relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, as well as on those of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, were provided to the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment, most recently on 2 June 2022. Relevant

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\* Reissued on 31 October 2022 for technical reasons (addition of section F, paragraphs 14 and 15).

WTO documents were also updated, with inputs from the Secretariat of the Convention. The Secretariat of the Convention holds observer status only in the regular sessions of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment. In the past, it has also been invited to meetings of the Committee in special (negotiating) sessions, as well as to the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, as an ad hoc observer. Several requests for full observer status in these and other committees of WTO are pending.

## **B. United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Bioethics**

5. The United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Bioethics (UNIACB) was established in March 2003 to provide a forum for exchange of information in the field of bioethics and related issues, with special attention to human rights. UNIACB intends to promote coordination and cooperation in the activities carried out by its members. The Secretariat has participated in three meetings of UNIACB, which is led by UNESCO. During the meetings the member organizations present their work on areas related to bioethics. In this context, the Secretariat presented the work on synthetic biology: during the last meeting, held in May 2022, the Secretariat shared information on the development of the technical series publication on synthetic biology, as well as on the webinar that it hosted in November 2021.

## **C. Cooperation with the World Health Organization**

6. The Secretariat continued its cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) on specific issues of mutual interest regarding risk assessment and risk management.

### *1. United Nations Biorisk Working Group*

7. The United Nations Biorisk Working Group was established by the Secretary-General to bring together policy/normative and technical expertise to harmonize and further develop a clear understanding of capacities, mechanisms, roles and responsibilities within the United Nations system. This will strengthen the international community's preparedness and response to natural, accidental or deliberate biological events. The Working Group is co-chaired by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. The Secretariat was invited to join the United Nations Biorisk Working Group and has so far participated in three meetings of the group and in a short pilot staff exchange in support of Activity 3 of the group's workplan, which attempts to map skills and experience related to biorisk across United Nations agencies.

### *2. Additional activities*

8. The interactions through the United Nations Biorisk Working Group have also facilitated an extended cooperation between WHO and the Secretariat on issues related to cross-cutting issues of work such as synthetic biology, where information has been shared about horizon scanning processes, and the role of new technologies and the life sciences in addressing global challenges. In particular, Secretariat staff participated in a staff exchange programme with WHO that facilitated sharing of biorisk-related knowledge and provided an opportunity to identify potential synergies and cross-cutting areas of work between the organizations with a view to improving biorisk coordination and collaboration between the Secretariat and WHO. Many of these issues are also related to other work under the Convention and the Nagoya Protocol.<sup>1</sup>

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

9. The Secretariat continued to collaborate with the Secretariat of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

10. A third joint round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms (LMOs/GMOs) was held in Geneva from 16 to 18 December 2019. As a result of the joint round table discussions, the secretariats have jointly finalized the pocket guide describing benefits, systemic challenges, priority areas and good practices in

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<sup>1</sup> For work related to the Convention, please refer to CBD/SBI/3/10. For work related to the Nagoya Protocol, please refer to CBD/NP/MOP/4/8.

relation to promoting transparency and public participation in GMO/LMO matters. The outcomes of the round table, based on the Chair's summary, include calls for several actions at the national level on access to information, public awareness and public participation in decision-making regarding LMOs/GMOs. The report and the pocket guide are available online.<sup>2</sup>

11. The Secretariat participated in the seventh meeting of the Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Information, held on 16 and 17 November 2020, the twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, held on 7 and 8 June 2021, and the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, held from 18 to 22 October 2021, where it provided information on joint activities held.

12. The collaboration between the two secretariats is ongoing.

#### **E. Cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme on public awareness and outreach activities**

13. The Secretariat collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme's Nature for Life Hub to organize a webinar on biosafety in the context of the Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People. The webinar, held on 27 September 2021, was organized to (a) provide initial discussions on the importance and features of the Action Agenda to mobilize biosafety commitments from non-State actors and (b) strengthen familiarity with the importance of, and provide guidance on, making a commitment to the Action Agenda. Following the webinar, online discussions on biosafety commitments from non-State actors for the Action Agenda took place from 27 September to 24 October 2021. The outcomes of the webinar and discussions will contribute to the implementation of the draft post-2020 implementation plan and capacity-building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol. The webinar recording is available on the website,<sup>3</sup> and the moderators' summary of the online discussions is being made available in an information document.<sup>4</sup>

#### **F. Green Customs Initiative**

14. In the context of operational objectives 2.3 and 5.2 of the Strategic Plan, the Secretariat continued to collaborate as a partner in the Green Customs Initiative. The objective of the Green Customs Initiative is to enhance the capacity of customs and other relevant border control officers to monitor and facilitate the legal trade and to detect and prevent illegal trade in environmentally sensitive goods and commodities covered by trade related conventions and multilateral environmental agreements.

15. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat participated in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth coordination meetings of the partners of the Green Customs Initiative. At each meeting, partners of the Green Customs Initiative shared an overview of relevant activities undertaken since the previous meeting and of those planned for the year to come. In addition, at their fourteenth meeting, partners discussed, among other issues, the need for an update of the IT infrastructure that supports the Green Customs Initiative e-learning modules, including the e-learning module on Article 18 of the Cartagena Protocol. At the fifteenth meeting, the following issues were discussed: the update of the Green Customs Guide to Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including a new section on the Minamata Convention; the development of a national "green customs" curriculum through a pilot project in Kenya and in the Dominican Republic, with the direct involvement of the United Nations Environment Programme Green Customs Initiative Secretariat and in collaboration with national partners; the update of e-learning materials on the World Customs Organization's CLiCK! e-learning platform. At the sixteenth meeting, a progress report was provided on the implementation of the pilot projects in Kenya and the Dominican Republic and an update was given on the progress in updating the e-learning courses by Green Customs Partners, including on the successful conclusion of the update of the Cartagena Protocol's e-learning module on Article 18.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art23/resources.shtml#tab=2](https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/resources.shtml#tab=2).

<sup>3</sup> [https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art23/actionagendaforum/](https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/actionagendaforum/).

<sup>4</sup> CBD/CP/MOP/10/INF/6.

### G. Other cooperation on technical and scientific issues

16. The Secretariat has continued to collaborate with relevant organizations in its efforts to facilitate capacity-building and technical cooperation among Parties within the context of various areas of work. This is the case, for instance, of activities related to risk assessment and risk management, detection and identification of LMOs, and synthetic biology. In the case of synthetic biology, the activities respond to the request made by the Conference of the Parties in decision 14/19, paragraph 17 (d) and (e). Cooperation activities on biosafety were conducted with a view to making progress towards the relevant outcomes of the Strategic Plan for the Protocol as well as sharing experiences and building networks within regions. These activities are summarized in the following paragraphs.

17. *Collaboration on the harmonization and use of standardized vocabulary* – The Secretariat collaborated with the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety and the Wageningen Food Safety Research of Wageningen University and Research regarding the harmonization and use of standardized vocabulary for introduced or modified genetic elements between the Biosafety Clearing-House and the European GMO Initiative for a Unified Database System.<sup>5</sup> A structured and controlled vocabulary for genetic elements (termed genetic elements thesaurus) can facilitate greater information exchange between data systems and increase interoperability. A publication on the GMO genetic elements thesaurus was recently published.<sup>6</sup>

18. *Global conference on green development of seed industries* – The Secretariat collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through its participation in the global conference on green development of seed industries organized by FAO, which took place in November 2021. The Secretariat offered a presentation on policy and governance issues in synthetic biology and was part of a panel.

19. *Webinar on synthetic biology governance and cooperation opportunities* – The Secretariat organized a webinar on synthetic biology governance and cooperation opportunities, held on 2 November 2021. This brought together the Secretariat, the World Health Organization, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Biological Weapons Convention,<sup>7</sup> the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. A recording of the webinar is available online.<sup>8</sup> The webinar offered an opportunity to bring together organizations with differing mandates to offer their varying perspectives on the cross-cutting nature of the potential impacts of synthetic biology and promote a collaborative and holistic approach to its governance.

20. *Science-Policy-Society Interface: Synthetic Biology webinars* – The United Nations Environment Programme, in collaboration with industry, academia and policymakers, organized two webinars, focusing on science and industry perspectives in synthetic biology (8 February 2022) and policy and regulatory perspectives (8 March 2022). The Secretariat attended both webinars, and participated as a speaker at the webinar on 8 March.

21. *Risk assessment workshops* – With support from the Government of the Republic of Korea, through the Korea Biosafety Capacity-Building Initiative, and in collaboration with the African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE), the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), the Secretariat organized three training workshops on risk assessment of living modified organisms. The workshops are being held in Dakar for Francophone Africa, Antalya, Türkiye, for Western, Central and Eastern Asia, and Manila for South, Southeast and Pacific Asia.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://euginius.eu/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12859-020-03880-0>.

<sup>7</sup> Formally the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction.

<sup>8</sup> <https://youtu.be/eQu4hVv0DAI>.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

22. Cooperation with other relevant organizations, conventions and initiatives, including relevant entities at the national and regional levels, and with indigenous peoples and local communities, continues to be a key element in the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol and the work of the biosafety unit and the Secretariat as a whole. The Secretariat's continued participation in some cooperative activities will depend on the availability of resources.

23. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the proposed post-2020 implementation plan and capacity-building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety bring an opportunity to enhance cooperation at various levels to facilitate implementation of the Protocol. Therefore, a proactive approach from the Secretariat, Parties and other stakeholders will be key to enabling them to take opportunities to share lessons, information and or facilitate technology transfer, among others.

24. A coordinated and non-duplicative approach to cooperation between the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing and the Convention on Biological Diversity will enhance internal and external coordination with stakeholders and will also be important to ensure the achievement of outputs and outcomes derived from the programmes of work that cascade from decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meetings of the Parties to the Protocols.

25. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, at its tenth meeting, may wish to take note of the present report.

26. While a specific decision on cooperation may not be necessary at this meeting, the draft post-2020 implementation plan and capacity-building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol include specific cooperation objectives and outcomes; therefore, it will be necessary to ensure that continued financial support is provided to enable the Secretariat to carry out cooperation activities as appropriate.

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