

Informal session in preparation for the 24th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. February 2021

Statement of Portugal on the Agenda Item 4 - **Synthetic Biology**

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished Delegates,

Portugal wishes to thank the Secretariat for the preparation of all the background documents and reports. Likewise, we wish to *recognize* and thank the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on synthetic biology for its expertise and valuable outputs.

In line with the other EU Member States, Portugal supports a process for broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology and considers that the provided working document is a good starting point for discussions under agenda item 4 at SBSTTA-24.

Portugal proposes to *recall* paragraphs 9 to 11 of Decision 14/9 and *reinforce* the precautionary approach with respect to engineered gene drives.

With respect to evaluating synthetic biology against the criteria of new and emerging issues, Portugal does not see the necessity to do further work beyond the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group and SBSTTA-22 and is not in favour of reopening the discussion.

We *support* an efficient horizon scanning process that should be able to identify the potential positive and negative impacts of synthetic biology and *agree* on the proposed steps of this process.

We are *flexible* with respect to the implementation of these steps in the horizon scanning process, especially the assessment step, and believe that multidisciplinary expertise is needed for this process and a multidisciplinary Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group can be an adequate option.

Portugal is, *however*, ready to evaluate other options and can be flexible on the exact format and procedures for the assessment as long as the collected information is duly assessed concerning the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Therefore, Portugal is *open* to views and suggestions of other Parties on how the necessary expertise can be guaranteed.

Whatever the agreed-upon option, Portugal *suggests* to clearly describe the role of the actors involved and the procedures of the process to ensure an efficient horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology regarding the potential impacts and always considering the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Cartagena Protocol and the Nagoya Protocol.

Portugal *considers* that a good way forward is to start with two rounds of horizon scanning during two consecutive intersessional periods where the expert group meets once per intersessional period. Portugal proposes that SBSTTA *reviews* the process at its 28th meeting and provides a

recommendation in this regard to COP-17. Portugal also suggests an interim report on the effectiveness of the process to SBSTTA on its 26th meeting by the Executive Secretary and is open for the adoption of the process at COP 16, if recommended by SBSTTA.

Thank you, Mr Chair.