



February 2021

Statement by Switzerland for the informal session in preparation of CBD SBSTTA-24 on agenda item 4 (synthetic biology)

- Switzerland recognizes that synthetic biology is a rapidly evolving and crosscutting issue that concerns the three objectives of the Convention.
- Switzerland pleads for the application of the precautionary approach at any stages from research, development and release of organisms, products and components engineered through synthetic biology in accordance with the objectives of the Convention.
- In particular for the development and release of organisms which containing engineered gene drive, Switzerland is of the opinion that it is necessary to rigorously implement the precautionary approach to avoid potentially significant and irreversible effects to the biodiversity, and when necessary, and on a case by case basis, to refrain releasing those into the environment as long as risks and benefits cannot be correctly assessed.
- The organisms engineered through synthetic biology, and/or those that contain engineered gene drive, which are considered as living modified organisms (LMO), shall fall under the Cartagena Protocol. Switzerland is of the opinion that as long as risks and benefits cannot be correctly assessed, as long as risk management measures cannot be correctly set into force, it is necessary to refrain releasing LMO containing gene drive to avoid irreversible effects to the biodiversity and unintended transboundary movements.
- By its nature, its speed of development and in view of potential benefits and potential adverse effects of organisms, components and products of synthetic biology on biodiversity, synthetic biology is a topic to be monitored over the long term. Therefore, Switzerland supports the establishment of a horizon scanning process as well as a Multidisciplinary Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology (MTEG) and the proposed activities and processes to follow this issue over the long term.

