

Statement by Third World Network

Informal Session in Preparation for the Third Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation 8–14 March 2021

Agenda item 4: Assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Cartagena Protocol

Thank you, Chair.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted more than 20 years ago. It was a momentous occasion, but the track record shows that there is still much more to be done. The threats of LMOs to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, taking into account risks to human health, have not decreased.

In fact, with new genetic engineering technologies including genome editing, synthetic biology and engineered gene drives, the threats are increasing. There is urgent need for robust international governance and oversight for these new technologies, which need to be translated to national implementation that is unreservedly based on the precautionary principle, to ensure that adverse effects are avoided or minimized. The Cartagena Protocol clearly covers these new technologies, but work has to be done to make the Protocol fit for the challenge of governing them stringently, and to coordinate with its parent treaty, the CBD, which maintains overall oversight.

Parties need to urgently implement their obligations under the Cartagena Protocol, as well as under the Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress. To do so, developing country Parties especially need financial resources, capacity building, training, and technical capabilities. It is critical that core obligations, including on risk assessment and risk management, detection and identification especially in cases of unintentional transboundary movement, liability and redress, and public awareness, education and participation are implemented without delay.

The right of Parties to take socioeconomic considerations into account is also key, especially in the context of the broad social, cultural and ethical implications of LMOs and new genetic technologies. The right of citizens – particularly IPLCs, small holder farmers, women and youth – to participate in decision-making has to be translated into full, meaningful and effective mechanisms for participation, both at national and international levels.

LMO-exporting Parties have obligations that they have to comply with under the Protocol. The biotechnology industry and LMO-exporting countries have to step up to accepting responsibility and liability for when there is harm caused by LMOs. They have to respect countries' and peoples' right to say no, in accordance with the rights afforded under the Protocol.

It is clear that biosafety is essential to meeting the objectives of the CBD and to protecting biodiversity from the adverse impacts of LMOs and new genetic technologies. There has to be a coordinated approach between the Cartagena Protocol and the CBD, including on new genetic technologies. The principles of precaution and prior informed consent are core threads that link the two treaties.

Implementation of the Protocol must also be firmly anchored in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. This means that there must be clear links made between the GBF and the post-2020 Implementation Plan and Capacity-Building Action Plan of the Cartagena Protocol.

Thank you.