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INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

Third meeting
Montreal, 4-5 October 2007

SUMMARY OUTCOMES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-IAC) met in Montreal on 4 and 5 October 2007.
2. The meeting was attended by experts selected from: Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, European Community, India, Mexico, Namibia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the following organizations also participated in the meeting as observers: the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Project on the Biosafety Clearing-House, the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Third World Network (TWN) and the Global Industry Coalition (GIC).
3. The meeting was convened by the Executive Secretary, in accordance with the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (decision BS-I/3, annex, section E), to seek guidance with respect to technical issues associated with the ongoing development of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH).
4. Ms. Darja Stanic Racman from Slovenia served as Chairperson of the meeting and Ms. Francisca Acevedo from Mexico served as Rapporteur.
5. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda provided in document UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/3/1. The following principal items were discussed by the Committee:
 - (a) Introduction and overview;
 - (b) National implementation, and case-studies of national experiences;
 - (c) Overview of information-sharing partnership arrangements;
 - (d) Progress in the multi-year programme of work;
 - (e) Capacity-building activities;
 - (f) The 2007 review of the Biosafety Clearing-House.
6. The meeting benefited from several presentations designed to assist the participants in their deliberation of the agenda. These included presentations from the Secretariat on the status of the implementation of the revamped Biosafety Clearing-House, the progress of the Multi-Year Programme of Work and technical issues. Mrs. Emma Lucia Rivera made a presentation on the analysis of the

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information registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House by the GRULAC countries. Mrs. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp and Prof. Ernesto Ocampo made presentations on capacity-building activities being undertaken by UNEP-GEF. Mr. Masatoshi Kobayashi from the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Mr. Dario Palmisano from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) also offered short presentations on the status of the interoperability with the Biosafety Clearing-House of the databases hosted by their respective organizations.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

7. The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House, having discussed the items outlined in the annotated agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/3/1/Add.1), made the attached conclusions and recommendations to the Executive Secretary for consideration in the implementation of the programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Annex

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE
INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House,

A. Management of information at the national level

1. *Requests* that, in the spirit of implementing Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol, the Secretariat highlights those data-entry fields that are critical to the relevance and usefulness of information registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House and invites users to ensure the completeness of all their data in the Central Portal;
2. *Requests* the Secretariat to liaise with Biosafety Clearing-House users who submit decisions on LMOs without unique identification in order to encourage them to designate unique identifiers;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat to regularly undertake an analysis of the quality and completeness of the information made available through the Central Portal and present this information to the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP) for appropriate action. Specifically, in terms of instances when information is incomplete, inadequate or not available in the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Secretariat is requested to ascertain if missing information does not exist or has not been reported. Furthermore, the Secretariat is requested to liaise with Parties in order to ensure that the information registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House is accurate, complete and in conformity with the appropriate common formats.
4. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to monitor regularly the information registered by countries, so as to ensure its usefulness and further recommends that the Secretariat continue in its efforts to identify missing data from countries that are non-compliant with regard to meeting their obligations to the Biosafety Clearing-House.
5. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to bring to the attention of the Compliance Committee information on the general status of the Biosafety Clearing-House, especially with respect to the potential consequences of registering incomplete information;
6. *Requests* the Secretariat to look for solutions to better balance the use of controlled vocabularies and free text, in order to simplify the common formats and thereby facilitate the entry of information by Biosafety Clearing-House account holders;
7. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to work with Biosafety Clearing-House National Focal Points and biosafety practitioners, in order to revise the Biosafety Clearing-House's common formats and forms, in terms of the comprehension and usefulness of each field, and provide user-friendly references and examples;
8. *Requests* the Secretariat, through (i) its privacy policy and (ii) a security audit, to assure that nobody can access the saved drafts of Biosafety Clearing-House authorized users which are pending validation and publication;
9. *Requests* the Secretariat to keep countries regularly informed of the national authorized users they have registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House;
10. *Recommends* to Parties to clearly specify and define the responsibilities of the Competent National Authorities that are registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House;
11. *Recommends* that the Secretariat liaise with industry regarding the publication of technical information on LMO products on industry websites;

B. Design of the Central Portal

12. *Welcomes* the proposed revamped version of the Biosafety Clearing-House, especially the significant improvements that are under development with regard to user-friendliness, quality control and increased support for multiple languages and, accordingly, recommends to the Secretariat to proceed with the launch of the new version of the Central Portal;

13. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to implement dropdown menus for the primary horizontal navigation bar;

14. *Requests* the Secretariat to consider renaming the category “Country’s communications” in the “Finding information” section as follows: “Decisions and other country’s communications”;

15. *Recommends* that the Secretariat add a paragraph to the disclaimer available on the BCH Central Portal stating that “the opinions expressed in records registered in the BIRC are not those of the Secretariat or its staff”;

16. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to add “LMO usage” in the available filters on the ‘Decisions and other Country’s Communications’ search screens;

17. *Requests* the Secretariat to develop an online help feature in the Biosafety Clearing-House, including user guides;

18. *Requests* the Secretariat to make more intuitive the relationship among nested tables when registering data in the Central Portal or using the common formats;

19. *Requests* the Secretariat to explore the feasibility of making searchable the full text of documents attached to records registered in the Biosafety Clearing-House;

20. *Requests* the Secretariat to explore ways to make the validation process clearer and more transparent to Biosafety Clearing-House users;

21. *Requests* the Secretariat to ensure that the architecture of the Biosafety Clearing-House, with respect to its information-technology processes, are fully documented in accordance with the highest standards in software development;

22. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to assess the need for making the Biosafety Clearing-House available for all different screen resolutions and act accordingly;

23. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to find and act upon a technical solution to the problem of e-mail addresses being easily accessed and utilized by a crawler;

C. Capacity-building

24. *Welcomes* the development by the Secretariat of Hermes and the Biosafety Clearing-House Ajax Plug-In as appropriate tools which have helped more than 60 countries establish a national Biosafety Clearing-House with full interoperability with the Central Portal;

25. *Recommends* that the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety ensures the integration of support for the development of national Biosafety Clearing-House (e.g. through the ongoing development of Hermes and the Biosafety Clearing-House Ajax Plug-In) in the multi-year programme of work;

26. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to explore the feasibility of making the functions in the Management Centre of the Biosafety Clearing-House available through the Biosafety Clearing-House Ajax Plug-In;

27. *Welcomes* the ongoing capacity-building activities of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House Project and congratulates UNEP-GEF for its continuing successful outputs, including the training materials on Hermes and the Biosafety Clearing-House Ajax Plug-In;

28. *Requests* that the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety ensures the sustainability of Biosafety Clearing-House capacity-building support to countries. Noting particularly that (i) the UNEP-GEF BCH Project will end in 2008; (ii) the Biosafety Clearing-House development process is ongoing; (iii) the turnover rate of Biosafety Clearing-House users at the national level is high; and (iv) the rate of registrations of Biosafety Clearing-House records as decisions, risk assessments, LMOs, is constantly increasing.

29. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to build on the experiences of the UNEP-GEF BCH project and establish processes for the capacity-building activities under the Biosafety Clearing-House (e.g. training workshops);

30. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to take into consideration the demand and ongoing needs for capacity-building with regards to the Biosafety Clearing-House and invites it to submit to Parties a proposal to:

(a) Extend the roster of experts to include “BCH experts” like, for example, the regional advisors serving under the UNEP-GEF BCH Project;

(b) Nominate to the roster of experts those regional advisors who have met country expectations; and

(c) Assume financial responsibility for: (i) the periodic training of Biosafety Clearing-House users and trainers; and (ii) the updating of outreach and training materials;

31. *Requests* the Secretariat to remind Parties that the Biosafety Clearing-House also represents a central capacity-building tool through which Parties can share their experiences and knowledge;

32. *Requests* the Secretariat to improve and make available documentation on the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House (e.g. on the different roles of national focal points, etc.)

33. *Requests* the Secretariat to explore ways to make the national focal points for the Biosafety Clearing-House more aware regarding their responsibilities and capabilities, including their ability to create national authorized users;

34. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to focus its efforts on promoting online conferences (i.e. on a specific topic for a limited period) rather than on open-ended discussion forums;

D. Biosafety Clearing-House questionnaire

35. *Requests* the Secretariat, taking into account the experience gained from drafting and distributing the previous questionnaire, to design a new questionnaire that targets the following three groups: (i) general users; (ii) users who access the Management Centre; and (iii) IT experts (e.g. IT Regional Advisors);

36. *Requests* the Secretariat to release the questionnaire within one month from the launch of the revamped version of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

37. *Requests* the Secretariat to implement the Biosafety Clearing-House questionnaire in a way such that users can save draft answers and continue working on the questionnaire at a later time;

38. *Requests* the Secretariat, subject to availability of funding, to translate the Biosafety Clearing-House questionnaire into the six official United Nations languages;

39. *Invites* the Secretariat to take into consideration all outputs from the review strategy of the Biosafety Clearing-House when addressing the document on the Biosafety Clearing-House for the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety as well as the Cartagena Protocol revision that will be undertaken in accordance with Article 35 of the Protocol;

40. *Requests* the Secretariat to take into consideration all of the specific comments that emerged at the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House from the discussion on the questionnaire (e.g. common formats to be evaluated individually, etc.);

41. *Recommends* to the Secretariat to use the questionnaire to extend the call of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to identify the constraints upon making information available in the Central Portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House (as per decision BS-III/2, para. 4).
