

**CONVENTION ON
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MEETING OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE
INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Montreal, 9-10 November 2004

**SUMMARY OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE
INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE****I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-IAC) met in Montreal on 9 and 10 November 2004.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives selected from the following countries: Burkina Faso, Cuba, Czech Republic, Egypt, European Community, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States of America. Representatives of the following organizations also participated: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/GEF); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and Nuclear Safety; Monsanto; and the Sunshine Project.
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.
4. The meeting elected Darja Stanic Racman (Slovenia) to serve as its Chairperson, and Mayra Ramos Lima (Cuba) to serve as Rapporteur.
5. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda provided in document UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/1/1. The following main items were discussed by the Liaison Group:
 - (a) Operational procedures for the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
 - (b) Preliminary results of the review of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
 - (c) Partnership arrangements and methods to promote collaboration;
 - (d) Capacity-building and options for non-internet participation; and
 - (e) Programme of work.

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6. The meeting benefited from several presentations to assist the participants in their deliberation of the agenda, including presentations from the Secretariat on the status of implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, the preliminary outcomes of the Biosafety Clearing-House review and capacity-building activities, presentations on partnership experiences with the Biosafety Clearing-House from Switzerland, the United States and OECD, and a presentation on capacity-building activities being undertaken by UNEP/GEF and the United States.

II. OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR THE BCH-IAC

7. The meeting adopted operational procedures for the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House as contained in document UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/1/2.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

8. The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House discussed the items outlined in the annotated agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/1/1/Add.1). This section summarizes the main comments and recommendations made to the Executive Secretary, which apply to both short-term activities as well as the longer-term programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House, which is currently under development:

Recalling the need for capacity-building to enable developing countries to effectively use the Biosafety Clearing-House, including managing their information reporting obligations:

A. Structure and function of the central portal

(a) Make the Biosafety Clearing-House more easily accessible to novice users, for example by making the information more intuitively easy to find, clustering search results, improving support functions such as an interactive Biosafety Clearing-House user guide, thereby expanding the general user base;

(b) Differentiate between null responses where information is not available because it does not exist, versus information that has not been reported on, e.g. by allowing the user to identify what types of information are being reported by a particular Government, by listing on the search screens the number of Governments that have posted records, by including additional text to clarify the nature of the search results, etc;

(c) Continue to review the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, including through the use of targeted follow-up surveys and usability studies, and by providing user feedback mechanisms directly on the Biosafety Clearing-House, subject to available resources.

B. Information content and management

(a) Improve user documentation to assist focal points and other authorized users by providing clear examples and descriptions of data required in each field within the common formats;

(b) Ensure that common formats are flexible enough to accommodate data produced prior to entry into force of the Protocol where appropriate (such as risk assessments conducted outside the annex III format);

(c) Ensure that the underlying architecture of the central portal is more easily able to accommodate data reported through product-based regulatory models.

(d) Encourage Governments to share their experiences with the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House, particularly by providing case-studies of their experiences with national management and clearance of information (“validation”);

(e) Continue to encourage Governments to provide information to the Biosafety Clearing-House through, for example, reminders of information-exchange requirements and provision of tools to allow Governments to assess their performance in meeting their reporting requirements to the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(f) Clearly indicate the source of records available through the Biosafety Clearing-House, to distinguish between information provided by Governments in accordance with Protocol obligations, and other more general resources;

(g) Ensure flexibility in the development of the central portal to enable it to support implementation of the broader programme of work for the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

C. Capacity-building and non-Internet accessibility

(a) In developing the Biosafety Clearing-House, continue to take into account the identified capacity-building constraints and financial limitations of developing countries to enable their effective participation;

(b) Recognizing the low speed and high cost of Internet access in some countries, continue to explore low-bandwidth options for making information available through the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(c) Take advantage of opportunities for providing training in the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House, such as meetings of the Parties to the Protocol, taking into account the need for the Biosafety Clearing-House to be used in the broader context of Protocol implementation;

(d) Where capacity-building tools are being developed to assist Governments to provide information to the Biosafety Clearing-House from national databases, explore options for incorporating the facility to also download and regularly update information from the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House into a local database;

(e) Improve facilities for users to guide themselves in the access to and use of the information available through the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(f) Explore options for facilitating provision of courtesy translations, by Governments, of information in the Biosafety Clearing-House into one or more languages commonly used internationally.
