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**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY**

Third meeting

The Hague, 22-26 April 2002

Item 4.1.3 of the provisional agenda\*

**INFORMATION-SHARING (ARTICLE 20)**

***Report of the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House***

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the third meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety the report of the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House, which was held in Beijing, on 4 and 7-8 March 2002.
2. The report was previously circulated as document UNEP/CBD/BCH/AP.Reg/1/2.

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\* UNEP/CBD/ICCP/3/1.

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## **REPORT OF THE ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGIONAL MEETING ON THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### ***A. Background***

1. At its first meeting, held in Montpellier from 11 to 15 December 2000, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP), recommended the development and implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing House and urged Governments to submit to the Executive Secretary their priority needs regarding capacities to participate in the pilot phase. ICCP requested the Executive Secretary to analyse the identified capacity-building and financial requirements of the developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition, as well as countries that are centres of origin and centres of genetic diversity, to enable their active participation in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

2. In response to above request, the Executive Secretary, initially, organized regional meetings on the Biosafety Clearing-House for Africa from 26 to 28 February 2001 in Nairobi and for Latin America and Caribbean, from 4 to 7 September 2001 in Lima. At its second meeting, held in Nairobi from 1 to 5 October 2001, the ICCP noted with appreciation the outcomes of those meetings and encouraged Governments to support the implementation of the recommendations made at those meetings. The Intergovernmental Committee further noted the regional meetings planned for Central and Eastern Europe and Asia and the Pacific and recommended that such regional capacity-building meetings be made an ongoing activity, subject to availability of the necessary financial resources.

3. The Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House was held in Beijing on 4 and 7-8 March 2002 to provide countries of the region with an opportunity to articulate their needs and expectations with regard to the implementation of this pilot phase.

4. This meeting also provided hands-on training on the operation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing House to familiarize participants with its operation.

#### ***B. Attendance***

5. The meeting was held in conjunction with the UNEP/GEF regional workshop on the development of national biosafety frameworks.

6. Each country Party to the Convention in the Asia and Pacific region was invited to nominate one participant, preferably qualified in the fields of management of biosafety-related issues, such as notifications for decision-making; information-sharing systems and database-management; and/or experience with the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, to be supported by the Secretariat. In addition, governments were also invited to nominate one participant, preferably the national project coordinator of the UNEP-GEF project on the development of national biosafety frameworks to be supported by UNEP-GEF.

7. In response to that invitation, participants from the following countries were nominated by their respective focal points and attended the meeting: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Niue, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea,

Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

8. Representatives from the following regions: Africa (Togo), Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria) and Latin America and Caribbean (Peru) attended the meeting to present the outcomes from their respective regional meetings.

9. Representatives of the following bilateral donors, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and industry participated in the meeting as observers and/or resource persons:

(a) *Bilateral donors:* New Zealand;

(b) *Intergovernmental organizations active in biosafety and/or information-exchange issues:* United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-Global Environment Facility (UNEP/GEF Geneva), UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Commonwealth Secretariat, South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP);

(c) *Non governmental organizations:* Third World Network and IUCN-The World Conservation Union;

(d) *Industry:* Global Industry Coalition.

10. The full list of participants is contained in annex II to the present report.

## ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

11. The meeting was officially opened at 6.30 p.m. on 3 March 2002. An opening statement was made by Ms. Kirsty Galloway McLean, Scientific and Technical Information Officer in the Biosafety Programme of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and also by Mr. Zhu Guangyao, Vice Minister, State Environmental Protection Agency, People's Republic of China.

12. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ms. Galloway McLean welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction to the Protocol, then focused particularly on information sharing and the progress of the Biosafety Clearing-House. She noted that the meeting was being held to enable the region identify its priority needs regarding capacities to participate in the Biosafety Clearing-House.

13. In conclusion, Ms. Galloway-McLean thanked the Government of China for hosting the meeting and the Governments of Japan and the United States for providing financial support.

14. In his opening speech, Mr. Zhu welcomed participants to the two meetings. He emphasized the importance of biotechnological innovations, while on the other hand he noted its potential adverse effects on the environment and human health. In this context, he thanked UNEP/GEF, the Convention Secretariat, as well as regional and international organizations for providing support to developing countries to promote biosafety.

15. Mr. Zhu informed the meeting that China was committed to promoting biosafety. The Government had signed the Protocol and had developed a national biosafety framework. He expressed the hope that the Biosafety Clearing-House and the UNEP-GEF biosafety project would further help China to promote biosafety in the country.

## **ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS**

### ***2.1. Election of officers***

16. At the second session of the meeting, on 7 March, Mr. Asghar Mohammadi Fazel from the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected to serve as Chair and Mr. Xu Haigen of the People's Republic of China was elected as co-chair. Mr. Jainend Kumar of Fiji was elected to serve as Rapporteur.

### ***2.2. Adoption of agenda***

17. The Regional Meeting adopted the following agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda proposed in document UNEP/CBD/BCH/AP.Reg/1/1:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Organizational matters:
  - 2.1. Election of officers;
  - 2.2. Adoption of the agenda;
  - 2.3. Organization of work.
3. Issues for in-depth consideration:
  - 3.1. Information exchange under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the progress of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
  - 3.2. Evaluation of existing biodiversity and biosafety information-exchange mechanisms in Asia Pacific, and opportunities for building capacity for information exchange under the Protocol;
  - 3.3. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House: overview and training session.
4. Preparation of regional needs assessments and priorities for action.
5. Other matters.
6. Conclusions and recommendations.
7. Adoption of the report.
8. Closure of the meeting.

### ***2.3. Organization of work***

18. At its second session, on 7 March, participants approved the revised programme of work as contained in annex II to the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/BCH/AP.Reg/1/1/Add.1/Corr.1).

## **ITEM 3. ISSUES FOR IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION**

### ***3.1. Information exchange under the Biosafety Protocol***

19. Agenda item 3.1 was considered at the first session of the meeting on 4 March and also at the second session on 7 March. Introducing the item, Ms. Galloway-McLean highlighted the key relevant issues to be discussed and proposed that the meeting should consider the following elements:

(a) Information exchange requirements under the Biosafety Protocol, outcomes of the first and second meetings of the ICCP, and the progress with the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(b) Outcomes of the regional meetings on the Biosafety Clearing-House for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe, and possible implications for the Asia Pacific region.

20. At the first session on 4 March, Mr. Marcos Silva, Programme Officer, Clearing-House Mechanism, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity gave a presentation on the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Biosafety Clearing-House of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

21. Mr. Koffi Dantsey, a representative of the African region and Ms. Kristina Georgieva, a representative of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, gave presentations on the outcomes of the African and CEE regional meetings, which were held from 26 to 28 February 2001 in Nairobi, and from 4 to 9 February 2002 in Nitra, Slovakia, respectively. At the second session on 7 March, Ms. Antonietta Gutierrez-Rosati, a representative of the Latin American and the Caribbean (GRULAC) region, outlined the main outcomes of the GRULAC regional meeting that was held from 4 to 6 September 2001 in Lima.

22. At the second session, on 7 March, Ms. Galloway-McLean gave a presentation on information exchange requirements under the Biosafety Protocol, the outcomes of the first and second meetings of the ICCP, and the progress with implementing the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

23. Mr. Marcos Silva also gave a presentation on the synergies and differences between the Biosafety Clearing-House and the clearing-house mechanism.

#### *Discussion*

24. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Indonesia and Philippines.

### ***3.2. Evaluation of existing biodiversity and biosafety information-exchange mechanisms in Asia and the Pacific, and opportunities for facilitating information exchange under the Protocol***

25. Agenda item 3.2 was considered at the second session of the meeting on 7 March. Presentations were made by the Global Industry Coalition on a proposal for an Asia and the Pacific regional website and also by Ms. Kristina Georgieva from Bulgaria on development and implementation of the Bulgarian national biosafety clearing-house. The independent consultant undertaking the review of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House for the ICCP also addressed the meeting.

#### *Discussion*

26. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Cambodia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Maldives, Niue, Peru, Philippines, Vanuatu, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

27. There was general agreement regarding the importance of establishing subregional information systems and databases interoperable with the Biosafety Clearing-House. Participants also emphasized the

need to build national capacities to manage data and also to share existing information with relevant stakeholders. The need for templates to facilitate the development of national and subregional biosafety clearing-houses was also raised by some participants. In response, a representative of the Secretariat informed the meeting that the ICCP had requested the Secretariat to develop such templates on a CD-ROM, and this project was currently being undertaken. The Secretariat had also prepared common formats and controlled vocabularies in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, which countries could use while developing their national systems.

### ***3.3. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House: overview and training session***

28. Agenda item 3.3 was considered at the 2nd and 3rd sessions of the meeting, on 7 March. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity gave an interactive demonstration on the elements of the central portal of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House. They described the search and information retrieval mechanisms and invited participants to use the system and familiarize themselves with its operation.

29. Ms Galloway-McLean then described the operation of the management centre of pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, the mechanism that allows for remote registration of information. Special attention was paid to the authentication and validation of registered information. Participants were invited to register information on a demonstration database that had been created for training purposes.

#### *Discussion*

30. During the training session, comments were made by participants from China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

31. One participant wondered whether it was possible for countries to submit information on their technical needs directly on the Biosafety Clearing-House, while another enquired whether there was a mechanism on the Biosafety Clearing-House that allowed Governments to be notified when changes had been made on the system. The Secretariat noted that the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House was designed so that notifications could be provided whenever new information was registered and changes made.

## **ITEM 4. PREPARATION OF REGIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

32. Agenda item 4 was considered at the third session of the meeting, on 7 March. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited participants to consider regional issues relevant to building capacity for information-exchange under the Cartagena Protocol. After a short discussion, participants agreed to hold small subregional group discussions.

33. Comments were made by participants from China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, Maldives (on behalf of the South Asia subregion), Oman (on behalf of West Asia subregion), Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Vanuatu (on behalf of Pacific island countries) and ESCAP.

34. Several issues were highlighted during the discussion, including: the importance of recognizing that countries within the region were at different levels of development; the necessity for the Biosafety Clearing-House to continue to be developed with a focus on ensuring user-friendliness; the importance of ensuring that BCH and biosafety capacity-building initiatives go hand-in-hand; the need to coordinate activities at the national, subregional and regional level; the need for inter-department/agency coordination at the national level; the need to encourage national Governments to undertake national

surveys to identify existing sources of information/data and to establish a mechanism to ensure a continuous flow of information/data; the possibility of developing nodes/points at subregional level to facilitate exchange of information to assist in understanding the terminology and the establishment and maintenance of national biosafety frameworks; and the need to improve subregional and regional cooperation on the Biosafety Clearing-House and issues related to it.

35. A representative from ESCAP noted that ESCAP was already implementing a number of capacity-building activities related to various multilateral agreements. He expressed ESCAP's interest in assisting in the coordination of any subregional and regional capacity-building activities that would be developed by the meeting.

36. Following the discussion, an open-ended contact group, chaired by Mr. Russel Nari of Vanuatu, was established to further develop the points raised during the meeting.

37. At the fourth session of the meeting, Mr. Nari presented the results of the work undertaken to further develop the needs and priorities identified by the Asia and the Pacific region and a draft Action Plan to implement them. The Chair opened the floor for discussion on finalizing the revised draft.

38. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan (on behalf of South-east Asian countries), Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kiribati, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal (on behalf of South Asia countries), Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

## **ITEM 5. OTHER MATTERS**

39. Agenda item 5 was considered at the fifth session of the meeting, on 8 March. Presentations were made by China, Sri Lanka and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

40. Dr. Xu Haigen from China made an illustrative presentation of the China national clearing-house mechanism and the proposed prototype of the national biosafety clearing-house, which is being developed under the national clearing-house mechanism. He outlined steps being undertaken to promote information sharing under both the Convention and the Protocol, including measures to enhance inter-departmental coordination, establishment of data standards and improvement of communication and exchange of information with the Convention Secretariat.

41. Mr. Gamini Gamage from Sri Lanka outlined some of the biosafety initiatives undertaken by his Government, including a biosafety workshop that was organized in 1999 with participants from six countries; the establishment of a subcommittee on biosafety, under the National Biodiversity Committee, which had developed draft national biosafety guidelines; and the establishment of a website on biodiversity, under which a page on biosafety would be developed in the near future. Mr. Gamage also noted the difficulties that Sri Lanka had experienced regarding the relationship between the World Trade Organization rules and the national biosafety guidelines and requested for advice on the issue.

42. Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati from the IUCN Asia regional biodiversity programme outlined the initiative being undertaken by programme to build capacities of countries in the Asian region to implement the Cartagena Protocol. He said that the initiative included a number of activities, including: the development of a regional website on biosafety; the publication of a biosafety resource kit; and the organization of training seminars and awareness workshops. He invited countries to participate in the initiative and expressed an interest in linking the regional biosafety website with the Biosafety Clearing-House and in collaborating with the Convention Secretariat.

## **ITEM 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

43. Agenda item 6 was considered at the 5th session of the meeting, on 8 March. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited the Rapporteur to present the revised draft of the action plan.

44. Following a short discussion, the meeting adopted the action plan to implement needs and priorities for the Biosafety Clearing-House and associated general recommendations, which is attached as annex I to the present report.

## **ITEM 7. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

45. The present report was adopted at the 5th session of the meeting, on 8 March, on the basis of the draft report prepared by the Rapporteur (UNEP/CBD/BCH/AP.Reg/1/L.1).

## **ITEM 8. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

46. The Chair declared the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House closed at 1.10 p.m. on Friday, 8 March 2002.



*Annex 1*

**ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE  
IDENTIFIED BY THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION**

***I. Human resources***

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Capacity needs</b>	<b>Activities/actions</b>	<b>Time-frames</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Responsible agency (national/ regional level)</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
To develop sufficient technical expertise to establish, operationalize and maintain the Biosafety Clearing-House.	Adequate human technical resources at the various levels – national, subregional and regional  Sustainability of expertise and maintenance of a pool of trained personnel	Training for technical people working on BCH and/or CHM (e.g. database management, ICT, risk assessment, management and monitoring, Advance Informed Agreement, <i>etc.</i> )  Develop appropriate training and publicity materials  Training of trainers	Immediate and ongoing	Increased national technical expertise  Functional national biosafety clearing-houses    At least one regional/subregional workshop	National with international financial support	Proficient skills in data and ICT management, use of traditional and non-traditional tools of communication      A pool of trained technical staff  Increased skills
To familiarize National Focal Points (NFPs) and Competent National Authorities (CNAs) with the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House.	Adequate technical knowledge about the use and update of the Biosafety Clearing-House.	Train focal points / national competent authorities on procedures and requirements	Immediate	At least one regional workshop for NFPs/CNAs	Regional with international financial support	Effective and functional NFPs and CNAs

Objectives	Capacity needs	Activities/actions	Time-frames	Indicators	Responsible agency (national/ regional level)	Outputs
To increase public awareness.	Involvement of stakeholders	Conduct national workshops for all stakeholders e.g. govt. officials, NGOs, industries, academics, etc.  Develop appropriate training and publicity materials	On-going	At least one national workshop per year	National with international financial support	Public participation

## II. INFRASTRUCTURE

Objectives	Capacity needs	Activities/actions	Time-frames	Indicators	Responsible agency (national/ regional level)	Outputs
To promote and facilitate information exchange among national, regional and international stakeholders.	Effective information exchange mechanisms	Exchanging and sharing of information related to biosafety	On-going	Better flow and access of information to BCH	National, subregional and regional	Information exchange at local level to stakeholders at national, regional and international levels
To promote and strengthen regional and subregional information-exchange.	Standard formats for info exchange	Development of standard formats for information exchange	Immediate	Standard formats for information exchange developed	Regional	Adoption of standard format for increased inter-operability
To acquire and maintain adequate hardware, software and internet connectivity.	Facilities to implement the BCH	Provision of hardware, software and internet access	Immediate	Availability of appropriate facilities	National	Infrastructure and equipment important and necessary to make BCH functional

Objectives	Capacity needs	Activities/actions	Time-frames	Indicators	Responsible agency (national/ regional level)	Outputs
To promote and facilitate information exchange among national, regional and international stakeholders.	Effective information exchange mechanisms  Standard formats for info exchange.	Exchanging and sharing of information related to biosafety  Development of standard formats for information exchange.	Ongoing Immediate	Better flow and access of information to the Biosafety Clearing-House  Standard formats for information exchange developed.	National, subregional and regional	Information exchange at local level to stakeholders at national, regional and international levels  Adoption of standard format for increased inter-operability
To acquire and maintain adequate hardware, software and internet connectivity.	Facilities to implement the Biosafety Clearing-House	Provision of hardware, software and internet access	Immediate	Availability of appropriate facilities	National	Infrastructure and equipment important and necessary to make Biosafety Clearing-House functional
To support and strengthen subregional and regional nodes for Biosafety Clearing-House.	Easy and cost-effective access to Internet-based biosafety information	To establish and support subregional and regional nodes	Immediate and ongoing	Functional subregional and regional nodes with effective networking	Existing subregional and regional organizations	Cost-effective and up-to-date access to biosafety information

### *III. Technical and financial support*

Objective	Capacity needs	Activities/actions	Time-frames	Indicators	Responsible agency (national/ regional level)	Outputs
To establish and/or maintain a functional national BCH.	Provision of adequate technical and financial assistance	Develop national/regional proposals for technical and financial assistance	Immediate to long term	Projects completed	National, regional and subregional	- Sustainable national biosafety clearing-houses  - Financial and technical assistance

## **General Recommendations**

- Build on existing national, subregional and regional capacity building initiatives as appropriate
- Real-time information on the development of biotechnology related to biosafety to be made accessible to national biosafety clearing-houses
- The development and maintenance of national biosafety clearing-houses needs separate funding from national biosafety frameworks
- To update the tool kit to assist parties to develop and maintain national biosafety databases for the Biosafety Clearing-House
- Provision of non web, non electronic information exchange mechanisms to ensure equitable participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House
- To develop and support regional and subregional nodes to facilitate information-exchange on the Biosafety Clearing-House and national biosafety frameworks

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