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TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL
CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISMS
Bucharest, 23-25 February 2005

**REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL
CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISMS****INTRODUCTION*****A. Background***

1. In paragraph 5 of decision VII/23, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity invited Parties to develop regional clearing-house mechanisms to further promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation and the exchange of information on technology transfer at the regional and national levels.

2. In addition, in paragraph 4 of decision VII/23, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity also invited developed country Parties to assist developing countries Parties, through the clearing-house mechanism, in their efforts to implement and use new information technologies, including the establishment of websites.

3. Accordingly, and following the generous financial contribution by the Government of The Netherlands, and technical assistance from the European Environment Agency, the Executive Secretary organized with the European Community clearing-house mechanism and the technical developer of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit, Finsiel Romania, a technical workshop to introduce developing Parties to new information technologies, and web-based technologies used in the establishment of the European Community clearing-house mechanism regional portal.

4. The organization of the meeting also assisted with the implementation of paragraph 7 (d) of decision VII/23 which requested the Executive Secretary to examine ways to develop regional portals to visualize and exchange national and regional cartographic information (geographic information systems and remote-sensing) from all thematic areas (including maps, satellite images and datasets).

5. Specific objectives for the meeting included:

- (a) Discussion on the information content of regional clearing-house mechanism websites;
- (b) Introduction of available technologies in the development of regional clearing-house mechanism websites;

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(c) Use of the clearing-house mechanism toolkit of the Convention, the European Community clearing-house mechanism portal toolkit, the Belgian clearing-house mechanism toolkit, and other toolkits to assist in the establishment of regional clearing-house mechanism websites.

B. Attendance

6. The meeting was attended by:

(a) Technical experts: Bahamas, Bulgaria, Colombia, Indonesia, Romania, Russian Federation, Thailand.

(b) *Bilateral donor*: The Government of Belgium;

(c) *Intergovernmental organizations active in information-exchange and scientific cooperation issues*: European Environment Agency, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility;

(d) *Regional Clearing-House Mechanisms*: European Community Clearing-House Mechanism;

(e) *Technical developers of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit*: Finsiel Romania and Finsiel S.a.P.

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

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

8. The meeting was opened at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 23 February 2005 by Mr. Marcos Silva, Programme Officer, Clearing-House Mechanism on behalf of Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. He invited Professor Francesco Servida, of the Italian Cultural Institute of Bucharest to address the meeting. Professor Servida stressed the importance of new information technologies and the need for effective information exchange capacity-building activities. He also discussed the need for collaboration among countries and regions to share expertise and technical knowledge. He concluded by welcoming the participants and wishing them a successful meeting.

9. Mr. Silva then spoke on the work of the clearing-house mechanism and its focus on technical and scientific cooperation. After an introduction to the new phase of the clearing-house mechanism, he presented a brief summary on new initiatives to facilitate technical and scientific cooperation with regard to the programme areas and cross-cutting areas of the Convention, including invasive alien species, the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI), the ecosystem approach, coastal and marine biodiversity and Article 8(j), traditional knowledge, innovations and practices. He then invited countries to use the meeting to identify issues related to the development of regional websites. He also discussed issues related to the 2010 target, and the role of national clearing-house mechanisms. Mr. Silva concluded by expressing his gratitude to the Government of The Netherlands for providing financial support for the meeting, the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism and Finsiel Romania for assisting with the organization of the meeting.

10. Mr. Corrado Iannucci of Finsiel S.a.P welcomed participants to the meeting and offered a brief presentation of Finsiel's work in support of the European Community portal toolkit. He then introduced the technical staff assisting with the workshop and concluded by wishing everyone a successful meeting.

ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2.1. Election of officers

11. At the 1st session of the workshop, on 23 February 2005, Mr. Deon Stewart from the Bahamas was elected to serve as Chair and Ms. Pilar Galindo from Colombia, to serve as Rapporteur.

2.2. Adoption of agenda

12. The technical workshop adopted the following agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda circulated in advance of the meeting (UNEP/CBD/WS-Reg.CHM/1/1):

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Organizational matters:
 - 2.1. Election of officers;
 - 2.2. Adoption of agenda;
 - 2.3. Organization of work.
3. Discussion on the information content of a regional website
4. Technical session on using the European Community clearing-house mechanism toolkit and other toolkits to establish regional websites.
5. Conclusions and recommendations.
6. Adoption of the report.
7. Closure of the meeting.

2.3. Organization of work

13. At its 1st session, on 23 February 2005, the Regional Meeting approved the proposed programme of work as contained in annex II to the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/WS-Reg.CHM/1/1)

ITEM 3. DISCUSSION ON THE INFORMATION CONTENT OF A REGIONAL WEBSITE

14. Agenda item 3 was considered at the 1st session of the meeting, on 23 February 2005. The Chair first invited participants to introduce themselves and discuss the issues relating to the clearing-house mechanism in their countries.

15. Following the above introduction and discussion, the Chair invited Mr. Marcos Silva to give a brief presentation on the recommendations arising from the Asia and Pacific regional meeting on the clearing-house mechanism, which was held from 3 to 5 February 2005 and the meeting of the informal advisory committee held on 6 February 2005, both held in Bangkok, Thailand. Mr. Silva discussed the

strong recommendations pertaining to the building of national capacities in relation to new information and web-based technologies and the unanimous agreement to share technical expertise through the region in support of such workshops.

16. On conclusion of the above the Chair invited participants to discuss the technical development of national clearing-house mechanism, issues pertaining to sustainability, technology exchange, the Bulgarian clearing-house mechanism metadata registry, issues related to different network and information technologies, need to adhere to common formats, protocols and standards and the requisite structure to a national clearing-house mechanism website to accommodate data and information.

17. Participants commenting on the above included Bahamas, Bulgaria, Colombia, Belgium, Indonesia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Thailand, the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism and Finsiel Romania.

18. The Chair then invited Ms Ulla Pinborg from the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism, to speak on the development and mandate of the European Community clearing-house mechanism. She discussed the services of European Community clearing-house mechanism and stressed its role as a mechanism linking different countries and resources together. She also described the information content of its website, emphasizing that it does not replicate information found on national clearing-house mechanisms. She also described the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism's new projects and resources, and collaboration with other organizations such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Finally, she described the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and discussed the possibility of capacity-building projects in support of regional and national clearing-house mechanisms. She concluded by presenting the European Community clearing-house mechanism website, its structure, information content and administration as a possible model in the development of regional websites.

19. Comments on the above were made by Belgium, Colombia, the Russian Federation and Finsiel Romania.

20. At the 2nd session of the meeting, the Chair invited Mr. Presentation by Arnaud Reveillon of the Belgian clearing-house mechanism to speak on the Belgian partnership initiative.

21. Mr. Reveillon discussed the ongoing Belgian clearing-house mechanism technical capacity-building initiatives and partnership, currently established in 21 African and Asian countries. He also presented the history of the partnership where they received requests from national clearing-house mechanisms for training courses. He described the activities under the partnership such as the hosting and mirroring of clearing-house mechanism websites, training for clearing-house mechanism webmasters and Biosafety Clearing-House focal points and the provision of technical advice. The information content of websites developed under the partnership were demonstrated and discussed. He concluded by explaining how developing countries are able to join the partnership.

22. On conclusion of the above presentation, the Chair invited participants to discuss the Belgian clearing-house mechanism partnership.

23. Participants from Bulgaria, Colombia, the European Community clearing-house mechanism and Finsiel Romania discussed the need to expand on such initiatives.

24. Following conclusion of discussions, the Chair invited Mr. Iannucci of Finsiel S.p.A. to give a presentation on the European Community portal toolkit, particularly its structure, use and adherence to open systems and source.

25. In his presentation, Mr. Iannucci emphasized the need for the user community to contribute to its development and invited participants to test the toolkit for their use. He also discussed the provision of technical support through the establishment of a help-desk and the further development of the portal toolkit where little technical knowledge would be required for installation, updating and administration of a clearing-house mechanism website. Finsiel Romania then gave a presentation of the web-based help-desk established to assist users with questions related to the European Community clearing-house mechanism. The need for dedicated support was discussed, and the categories of requests and questions described. Finally, websites using the portal toolkit such as that of the Czech Republic, Germany and Denmark were demonstrated and described.

26. On conclusion of Mr. Iannucci's presentation, the Chair invited participants to comment on the presentation..

27. Participants from Belgium, Bulgaria, Finsiel Romania, Colombia, the Russian Federation and the European Community clearing-house mechanism commented on the issues related to the use and further development of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit.

28. After discussion, the Chair invited Ms. Adrian Baciú from Finsiel Romania to give a presentation on the technical components of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit, including its technical infrastructure, the use of the software system ZOPE and other technical components. She explained its features and installation. She also explained that ZOPE is platform independent and functions under all widely used operating systems. The open source programming language Python was demonstrated and explained.

29. Comments on the above were made by Colombia, Romania, the Russian Federation and the European Clearing-House Mechanism.

30. Following discussions, the Chair invited Ms. Baciú to organize a hands-on session on the installation and use of the portal toolkit. Participants downloaded the ZOPE server system and installed it on local networked workstations. The European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit was also downloaded and installed to introduce participants to its technical requirements and possible uses. On completion of the above installation, participants were able to develop a website tailored to regional or national information content needs.

ITEM 4. TECHNICAL SESSION ON USING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM TOOLKIT AND OTHER TOOLKITS TO ESTABLISH REGIONAL WEBSITES

31. Agenda item 4 was considered at the 3rd session of the meeting, on 24 February 2005. The Chair invited Mr. Giorgos Ksouris to discuss the Global Biodiversity Information Facility and issues related to becoming a national data provider through its services and network. He discussed the protocols and services provided by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, demonstrated the technical steps in becoming a data provider and discussed the use of metadata, namely the Darwin Core.

32. The Chair invited participants to comment on the above presentation. Participants from Romania, the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism and Finsiel Romania discussed issues presented by Mr. Ksouris.

33. Following the above discussion, the Chair invited Ms. Adriana Baciú, from Finsiel Romania, to offer a hands-on technical session on the use of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit.

34. Ms Baciú assisted participants to use the portal toolkit, and to test and familiarize themselves with its services, structure and technical requirements. Participants also had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the technical steps required to modify the web pages created by the portal and to use html (hypertext markup language) to better format web pages and add information content.

35. At the 4th session of the meeting, the Chair invited Ms Miruna Bădescu from Finsiel Romania to discuss and present the new version (version 2) of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit that is currently under development.

36. Ms Bădescu spoke on the principles behind version 2 of the portal, including its use of XML (eXtensible Markup Language) and RDF (Resource Description Framework). She also described its central registry and harvesting capabilities. Efforts to make the portal toolkit easier to use, and require less technical support was discussed and explained. The value of using XML, RDF and the Dublin core within the context of sharing information content between and among national and regional clearing-house mechanisms demonstrated. Other issues such as web page authoring, and its associated standards, and the usability of the new portal toolkit were presented. Finally, Ms Bădescu discussed solutions in the new portal toolkit to deal with multiple languages, different alphabets and translation.

37. Comments on issues raised during the hands-on session were made by Belgium, Bulgaria, Colombia, and the European Clearing-House Mechanism.

38. At the 5th session of the meeting on 25 February 2005, the Chair invited Ms. Pilar Galindo, Colombia to give a presentation on technical and scientific cooperation and the activities of the Colombian clearing-house mechanism.

39. Ms Galindo spoke on the mandate of the Colombian clearing-house mechanism, stressing its activities to synergize scientific collaboration with other Parties. She also discussed its electronic resources such as its databases on researchers and research institutions. A demonstration of the website was given, and its services and electronic resources shown.

40. On conclusion of the above presentation, comments were made by Belgium, the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism and Finsiel Romania.

41. The Chair then invited Ms. Bădescu to continue her presentation on version 2 of the portal toolkit. She demonstrated the new functionalities of the portal toolkit, including its new interface to update and modify its content and structure. She invited participants to familiarize themselves with the system and test its many services.

42. Ms. Mădălena Sauca of Finsiel Romania also spoke on the new standards and concepts pertaining to accessibility of websites and improving use by target audiences, including issues related to more effective search engines, the needs of persons with disabilities, and other issues associated with the digital divide.

43. Following the above presentations, the Chair invited Mr. Pavel Gospodinov, from Bulgaria, to speak on the development of the Bulgarian Clearing-House Mechanism metadata management tool.

44. Mr. Pavel discussed how the metadata management tool improves accessibility to biodiversity related information. He also presented the structure supporting the metadata management tool, its searching facilities, and general administration. He explained how the metadata management tool allows national or regional clearing-house mechanisms can upload their metadata to a central registry. Other issues such as the use of RDF, remote indexing of html files and web services were also discussed. He described how the metadata management tool may be used to manage national clearing-house mechanism metadata, manage multi-national clearing-house mechanism metadata and enhance the clearing-house

mechanism network through the help of remote indexing and searching of metadata. On completion of his presentation, Mr. Pavel invited participants to use the metadata management tool.

45. After the presentation, the Chair invited comments from participants. Comments were made by Colombia and Finsiel Romania.

ITEM 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

46. Agenda item 5 was considered at the 5th session of the meeting, on 25 February 2005. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited the Rapporteur to present the recommendations. Following discussion, the Meeting adopted the recommendations, which are attached to the present report as annex I.

ITEM 6. OTHER RELEVANT ITEMS

47. Participants took up agenda item 6 at the 5th session of the meeting, on 25 February 2005. Experts were also invited to raise and discuss other matters related to the subject-matter of the meeting.

48. There were no other relevant items raised under the item.

ITEM 7. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

49. The present report was adopted at the 5th session of the meeting, on 25 February 2005, on the basis of the draft report of the meeting (UNEP/CBD/WS-Reg.CHM/1/2), and taking into account amendments made by participants, on the understanding that the finalization of the report would be completed by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

ITEM 8. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

50. The Chair declared the Technical workshop on the development of regional clearing-house mechanisms closed at 1 p.m. on Friday, 25 February 2005.

Annex I

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
REGIONAL CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISMS**

1. Organize additional technical workshops to promote sustainability of technical capacities and to introduce new information and web-based technologies;
2. Include cartographic information from all thematic areas of the Convention and metadata for geo-referenced information when possible in regional websites;
3. Use of the Bulgarian clearing-house mechanism metadata management tool should be promoted and synergies encouraged with the registry of the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit;
4. Compile a list of technological solutions and resources developed by national clearing-house mechanisms through the Convention clearing-house mechanism to assist Parties to share expertise, synergize collaboration and eliminate duplication of efforts;
5. Establish a collaborative web-based help-desk through the Convention clearing-house mechanism supported by expertise available in national and regional clearing-house mechanisms to assist Parties with technical issues and problems;
6. Use technical expertise available in developing regions to assist Parties in those regions with technical questions and use of new technologies and in the organization of technical workshops;
7. Further develop the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism portal toolkit to allow for the use by non-European Community national clearing-house mechanism websites and regional websites;
8. Better link the information systems developed by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility with the services provided by the European Community portal toolkit, particularly information provided through the European Nature Information System (EUNIS) database, among others;
9. Promote the digitization of biodiversity related data;
10. Encourage new and synergize with existing partnership initiatives, similar to the Belgian partnership initiative, to encourage the enhancing of national capacities in relation to the use of new information and web-based technologies;
11. Use the metadata registry developed by the Bulgarian clearing-house mechanism and the European Community Clearing-House mechanism to assist the searching and locating of information on researchers and experts and research institutions.

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