

Please note our new address below

REFERENCE: BSP/HZ/KGM

26 May 2000

Dear Madam/Sir,

Re: Meeting of technical experts on the Biosafety Clearing-House established under Decision EM-I/3

Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety establishes a Biosafety Clearing-House as part of the clearing-house mechanism under Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention, in order to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms; and to assist Parties to implement the Protocol.

At the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Executive Secretary was requested to convene, prior to the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP), the meeting of technical experts on the Biosafety Clearing-House referred to in the table at the end of decision EM-I/3 (Decision V/ 1, paragraph 3).

These experts will be drawn from a roster of Government-nominated experts, qualified in the fields of management of biosafety-related issues (such as notifications for decision-making), information-sharing systems and database-management, establishment of clearing houses and/or the Clearing-House Mechanism of the CBD. Therefore, I would like to invite Parties and Governments to submit up to five names of experts in the above fields. On the basis of nominations received from Governments, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the ICCP, will select 30 experts to participate in the meeting, which we propose to hold during the week of 11 to 15 September 2000 (final dates to be confirmed later), in Montreal, Canada.

Please provide the required information on the enclosed form (Attachment 1) and forward it along with a CV for each nominated expert to the Secretariat by **1 July 2000**.

The expert meeting will consider issues relevant to information-sharing and the biosafety clearing-house as reflected in the work plan of the ICCP (Attachments 2 and 3). The selection of experts will be based on the following criteria:

1. Demonstrated expertise and experience in the fields of management of biosafety-related issues, information-sharing systems and database-management, establishment of clearing-houses and/or the Clearing-House Mechanism of the CBD;
2. Balanced geographical distribution between and within regions; and
3. Fair representation of relevant stakeholders: public and private sector, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.



In order to further assist the deliberations of this expert meeting, Parties, Governments and relevant organisations are also invited to submit their views and needs with regard to the establishment of the Biosafety Clearing-House, as well as any other relevant information they may wish to convey to the Secretariat (Attachment 4).

In keeping with paragraph 18 of decision EM-I/3 and paragraph 3 of decision V/1, I take this opportunity to urge Parties and States to make contributions for the supplementary budget for biosafety to the Special Voluntary Trust Fund (BE) for Additional Voluntary Contributions in Support of Approved Activities for the biennium 1999-2000, as presented in the table at the end of decision EM-I/3, to allow the Secretariat to convene this meeting in a timely manner.

Yours sincerely

Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary

To: All National Focal Points for the CBD

Encl.: Attachment 1: Nomination form

Attachment 2: Extract from the ICCP Work Plan (information-sharing)

Attachment 3: Extract from the Biosafety Protocol (Articles 19 and 20)

Attachment 4: Sample questions to consider in determining needs

Attachment 1: Nomination form for the meeting of technical experts on the Biosafety Clearing-House

Family Name:	First name:
Date of Birth:	Sex:
Nationality:	Nominated by the Government of:
Address:	
Telephone number (business hours):	Telephone number (after hours):
Facsimile number:	Email address:
Current occupation:	Name of current employer:
Address of employer:	
Position held:	Since when:
Education and qualifications:	
Representative of (please indicate): Government institution / Private sector / Academic institution / Non-government organisation	
Areas of expertise (please indicate any that apply): Information-sharing / Clearing-house mechanism / Biosafety regulation / Biosafety documentation / Other (please specify):	
Relevant experience regarding information-sharing and/or biosafety (national and international):	
Relevant publications and/or software developed:	
Languages:	Awards/honours:
Any other relevant information (please also attach a short curriculum vitae):	

Attachment 2: Issues to be considered at the meeting of technical experts on the Biosafety Clearing-House (taken from the work plan for the first meeting of the open-ended ad hoc Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, adopted by the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties)

Agenda Item: Information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House (Article 20, Article 19)

Issues:

- Determination of needs of Parties
- Overview of existing activities/systems and possibilities for cooperation
- Design of data input systems
- Development of common formats for reporting, e.g: decisions, national legislations, points of contact, focal points, summaries of risk assessments etc.
- Development of operational systems, information management policies and procedures for receiving and making information available, including quality-insurance procedures
- Means to ensure confidentiality of information.
- Financial and technological resources requirements
- Other issues (such as Article 5)

Attachment 3: Extracts from the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (full text available from the Convention on Biological Diversity website <http://www.biodiv.org>).

Article 19

COMPETENT NATIONAL AUTHORITIES AND NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

1. Each Party shall designate one national focal point to be responsible on its behalf for liaison with the Secretariat. Each Party shall also designate one or more competent national authorities, which shall be responsible for performing the administrative functions required by this Protocol and which shall be authorized to act on its behalf with respect to those functions. A Party may designate a single entity to fulfil the functions of both focal point and competent national authority.
2. Each Party shall, no later than the date of entry into force of this Protocol for it, notify the Secretariat of the names and addresses of its focal point and its competent national authority or authorities. Where a Party designates more than one competent national authority, it shall convey to the Secretariat, with its notification thereof, relevant information on the respective responsibilities of those authorities. Where applicable, such information shall, at a minimum, specify which competent authority is responsible for which type of living modified organism. Each Party shall forthwith notify the Secretariat of any changes in the designation of its national focal point or in the name and address or responsibilities of its competent national authority or authorities.
3. The Secretariat shall forthwith inform the Parties of the notifications it receives under paragraph 2 above, and shall also make such information available through the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Article 20

INFORMATION SHARING AND THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

1. A Biosafety Clearing-House is hereby established as part of the clearing-house mechanism under Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention, in order to:
 - (a) Facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms; and
 - (b) Assist Parties to implement the Protocol, taking into account the special needs of developing country Parties, 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.

2. The Biosafety Clearing-House shall serve as a means through which information is made available for the purposes of paragraph 1 above. It shall provide access to information made available by the Parties relevant to the implementation of the Protocol. It shall also provide access, where possible, to other international biosafety information exchange mechanisms.
3. Without prejudice to the protection of confidential information, each Party shall make available to the Biosafety Clearing-House any information required to be made available to the Biosafety Clearing-House under this Protocol, and:
 - (a) Any existing laws, regulations and guidelines for implementation of the Protocol, as well as information required by the Parties for the advance informed agreement procedure;
 - (b) Any bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements and arrangements;
 - (c) Summaries of its risk assessments or environmental reviews of living modified organisms generated by its regulatory process, and carried out in accordance with Article 15, including, where appropriate, relevant information regarding products thereof, namely, processed materials that are of living modified organism origin, containing detectable novel combinations of replicable genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology;
 - (d) Its final decisions regarding the importation or release of living modified organisms; and
 - (e) Reports submitted by it pursuant to Article 33, including those on implementation of the advance informed agreement procedure.
4. The modalities of the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, including reports on its activities, shall be considered and decided upon by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Protocol at its first meeting, and kept under review thereafter.

Attachment 4: Sample questions to aid in determining Parties' needs for establishment of the Biosafety Clearing-House

MEETING YOUR NEEDS

- What do you consider will be the three most valuable services provided by the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)?
- How often do you think you will need to access the BCH to search for information?

HELPING OTHERS TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

- What types of biosafety-related information are available from your office (e.g. results of biosafety assessments, technical advice, legislation and policies, referrals to other institutions, etc.)
- What types of biosafety-related information are commonly requested from your office?
- Generally, who requests the information (e.g. industry, non-Government organisations, research/educational institutions, students, Governments within your country, other Governments, etc.)?
- Generally, how does your office receive most requests for biosafety-related information (e.g. phone, fax, postal mail, electronic mail, website query, in person)?
- Estimate how often your office receives requests for information?
- If you have a website, approximately how many visits does it receive per week?

PARTNERSHIPS

- Estimate the number of groups within your country that your organisation is likely to work with to implement the BCH.
- Estimate the number of groups from other countries that your organisation will work with to implement the BCH.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- In terms of building capacity to implement the BCH in your country, what are the three most important areas at the local level (i.e. within your country)?
- What are the three most important areas at the regional level?

RESOURCES

- From what sources does your Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) node receive financial support (e.g. GEF, national Government, other Governments, local partners, international partners)?
- From what sources does your CHM node receive technical support?