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3 February 2003

## NOTIFICATION

### **Version 2.0 of the Pilot Phase of the Biosafety Clearing -House Launched 1 February 2003**

As you may be aware, Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity establishes a Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) 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 its first meeting, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP) recommended the development of a pilot phase of the BCH. The pilot phase was initially launched on 5 April 2001, and further developed based on the recommendations made by the Committee at its first and second meetings. The central portal of the BCH website was designed with an interactive site map and explanatory text to assist in the use and navigation of the BCH. Information is available in the following categories: national contacts (including national focal points; competent national authorities; national databases); laws and regulations (including national laws, regulations and guidelines; regional and international agreements); decision information (including decisions under the advance informed agreement procedure; decisions on under Article 11; other decisions; risk assessment summaries; unique identification); capacity-building activities; roster of experts in biosafety; and other resources.

In accordance with ICCP Recommendation 3/3 paragraph 5, the pilot phase has been further developed in accordance with the third note developed by the ICCP Bureau on technical issues associated with the implementation of the pilot phase. I am pleased announce the launch of the next version of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, which took place on 1 February 2003. Based on the ICCP recommendations and feedback received so far from Governments and organizations that have participated in the development of the pilot phase, new developments include:

- Improved searching facilities and faster download times for the website.
- Expansion of the capacity-building project and initiatives databases to include information on other available capacity-building opportunities, such as funding and training opportunities, as well as a facility for countries needing support to register their capacity-building needs and priorities.
- Further development of the tool kit and other help functions of the BCH to include more in-depth training materials, targeted for different audiences.

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- Improvements to the BCH Management Centre, the web-based mechanism by which Governments and capacity-building organizations can register information.
- Inclusion of a registry for unique identification of LMOs (which will be linked to the system being developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).
- Access to (and interoperability with) more external databases, including the bibliographic database of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology.
- Documents, such as common formats for reporting information, provided in multiple formats (e.g. HTML, Word documents, PDF files).

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of ICCP Recommendation 3/3 paragraph 1, which urged Governments to further participate in the development of the pilot phase by registering and retrieving information, and to submit their views on the transition between the pilot phase and the fully operational and functional Biosafety Clearing-House no later than five months prior to the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

I encourage you to send any feedback and suggestions for improvement to the Secretariat. The pilot phase of the BCH is accessible on-line at <http://bch.biodiv.org>.

Yours sincerely,

Hamdallah Zedan  
Executive Secretary

cc: Cartagena Protocol National Focal Points  
ICCP National Focal Points  
BCH National Focal Points  
CBD National Focal Points (where biosafety focal points have not yet been designated)