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7 April 2004

NOTIFICATION

**Launch of the Operational Phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House
3 April 2004**

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.

The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention serving as the meeting of the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, held from 23 to 27 February 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, approved the transition of the Biosafety Clearing-House from the pilot phase to the fully operational phase and adopted modalities for its operation (decision BS-I/3).

In accordance with this decision, the Biosafety Clearing-House website has been revised and enhanced, and I am pleased to announce the launch of the new version of the Biosafety Clearing-House website, which took place on 3 April 2004.

Based on the requirements outlined in decision BS-I/3, and feedback received so far from Governments and organizations that participated in the development of the pilot phase, some of the new features include:

- Improved search facilities (such as a living modified organism “quick search” that can retrieve information using the common name of an organism, the unique identification, and/or the modified trait).
- A search engine that indexes the thousands of pages of biosafety websites and allows users to carry out a keyword search across them.
- Redesigned presentation of content and improved “help” facilities to assist users in finding information (such as national contacts, laws and regulations, decision information, capacity-building activities, biosafety experts, and other resources), including “quick help” and glossary links through the site.

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



- Dynamic links to the Biosafety Clearing-House news, the list of Parties to the Protocol, and new information on the Biosafety Protocol website.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that in paragraph 3 of decision BS-I/3, COP/MOP-1 urged Parties, governments and other users to provide relevant information to the Biosafety Clearing-House as soon as possible, including information pertaining to decisions on the release or import of living modified organisms taken prior to entry into force of the Protocol.

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

Yours sincerely,

Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary