



## CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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### Press Release

#### **Countdown begins for entry into force of Biosafety Protocol Republic of Palau becomes the 50th country to ratify**

Montreal, June 13 2003 –Ratification today by Palau triggers the countdown to the entry into force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the first legally binding international agreement governing the movement of living modified organisms across national borders. It will take effect on 11 September 2003, ninety days from today.

The Protocol, adopted by the member governments of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 29 January 2000 after more than five years of negotiation, aims at ensuring adequate safety in the transboundary movement and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the biological diversity and human health.

Welcoming the imminent entry into force of the Protocol, CBD Executive Secretary Hamdallah Zedan said that it is a vital tool for sustainable development and the safeguarding of biodiversity. “This treaty will enable countries to derive maximum benefit from biotechnology while ensuring adequate safety measures for the environment, also taking into account human health”, he said.

The Cartagena Protocol will ensure that the development and use of biotechnology are subject to adequate and transparent safety measures, known collectively as biosafety

At the date of entry into force, certain provisions will take effect immediately:

- Countries shipping LMOs for intentional introduction into the environment will have to give prior notification of the first shipment to an importing country that is a party to the Protocol under what is referred to as the “Advance Informed Agreement” procedure. Sufficient information will have to be provided to enable importing countries make informed decisions.
- Member countries of the Protocol will also be required to use the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) to fulfill a number of specific obligations. The BCH is a largely Internet-

based facility established under the Protocol to ease communications and exchange of information between the Parties.

- All shipments containing LMOs for intentional introduction into the environment will be clearly identified as such in the accompanying documentation which must specify the identity and characteristics of the specific LMOs contained in each shipment.

Following the agreement's entry into force, the decision-making body of all the member countries of the Protocol, - the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties -, will convene to address topics related to the operation and implementation of the Protocol. The first meeting is scheduled for the first quarter of 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"The first meeting of Parties will be a historic event that will provide a foundation for the future of the Protocol", said Mr. Zedan. "I urge all countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Protocol as soon as possible in order to participate as full partners in the decision making at the first meeting of Parties which will shape the future of the Protocol".

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#### **Additional information for Journalists**

- (1) The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was negotiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity with the objective to promote "the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health, and specifically focusing on transboundary movements".
- (2) 103 countries signed the Protocol by the closing date for signature on 4 June 2001. Today's ratification by Palau was the fiftieth instrument of ratification, accession, approval or acceptance required for Protocol to enter into force, which will happen after ninety days. For the purpose of entry into force of the Protocol, any instrument deposited by a regional economic integration organization, such as the European Community, does not count as additional to those deposited by member States of such organization.
- (3) At entry into force, a number of provisions of the Protocol will take effect immediately including the following:
  - a. Countries shipping LMOs for intentional introduction into the environment will have to give prior notification to the importing country that is a Party to the Protocol under the Advance Informed Agreement procedure and provide sufficient information to enable them to make informed decisions. Those shipments will have to be identified in accompanying documentation as LMOs with specification of the identity and characteristics and with a declaration that "the movement is in conformity with the requirements of the Protocol".
  - b. Likewise, shipments of bulk LMO commodities intended for direct use for food, feed or processing will, in the interim, have to be identified in accompanying documentation as "may contain" LMOs and as "not intended for intentional introduction into the environment".
  - c. Countries will be required to use the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) to fulfill a number of obligations. The BCH is established under the Protocol to facilitate the exchange between countries of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experiences with, LMOs. Specific information that must be made available through the BCH includes: national biosafety laws; risk

assessment summaries; and final decisions by importing countries with supporting reasons. The pilot phase of the BCH, which is largely Internet-based, has been developed by the Secretariat of the Convention and is available at <http://bch.biodiv.org/Pilot/Home.aspx>.

- d. Any Party that approves for domestic use and marketing LMOs intended for direct use as food, feed or processing that may be exported will be required to communicate this decision and details about the LMO to the world community via the Biosafety Clearing-House.

(4) Additional information about the Protocol is available at the following Web sites:

<http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety> and  
the Biosafety Clearing-House: <http://bch.biodiv.org/Pilot/Home.aspx>.

Frequently asked questions are also available at: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/faqs.asp>

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