



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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PRESS RELEASE

Biosafety Protocol now operational as governments agree documentation rules for GMO trade

Kuala Lumpur, 27 February 2004 – The 87 member states of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which entered into force in September 2003, have adopted documentation requirements and other procedures for promoting the safety of international trade in living (or genetically) modified organisms (known as LMOs, or GMOs).

Under the new system, all bulk shipments of genetically engineered crops intended for food, feed or processing (such as soybeans and maize) are to be identified as “may contain LMOs”. The accompanying documentation should also indicate the contact details of the importer, exporter or other appropriate authority.

Over the next year an expert group will further elaborate the documentation and handling requirements for these bulk agricultural shipments. Key issues still to be resolved include the percentage of modified material that these shipments may contain and still be considered GMO-free and the inclusion of any additional detailed information. A decision on these matters will be considered at the next meeting, to be held in 2005.

Agreement has also been reached on more detailed documentation requirements for those GMOs (such as genetically engineered seeds and fish) that are meant to be introduced directly into the environment. The documentation accompanying such GMOs should specify the common, scientific and commercial names of the modified organism, the transformation event code or unique identifier code, any handling and storage requirements, contact details in the case of emergency, and how the GMO is to be used.

“Now that a system for identifying and labeling GMO exports has become operational, countries can enjoy the benefits of biotechnology with greater confidence

while avoiding the potential risks,” said Hamdallah Zedan, the Protocol’s Executive Secretary.

“This rigorous system for handling, transporting, packaging and identifying GMOs is in the best interests of everyone – developed and developing countries, consumers and industry, and all those who care deeply about our natural environment,” he said.

The meeting also adopted procedures and mechanisms for promoting compliance with the Protocol and assisting countries in cases of non-compliance. It established a 15-member compliance committee that will submit regular reports and recommendations to the governing body of the Protocol.

A negotiating group of legal and technical experts on liability and redress for damages resulting from transboundary movements of GMOs was also launched and asked to develop a regime by 2008. The group must consider issues such as insurance and the definition and valuation of damage to biodiversity.

Other decisions adopted this week focus on making the Biosafety Clearing House fully functional (the Clearing House will enable governments to share information on GMOs, national legislation, and other critical matters), implementing a comprehensive action plan to promote capacity building, providing guidance to the Protocol’s financial mechanism on priorities and establishing a medium-term work programme for the Protocol.

The world’s governments adopted the Biosafety Protocol in January 2000 to ensure the safe transfer, handling and use of GMOs that may adversely effect the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health. The Protocol forms a part of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme and signed by over 150 governments at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

This week’s meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the first meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP1) attracted some 1,000 delegates and observers. The next meeting will take place in the second quarter of 2005.

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