



## CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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### Press Release

#### **The Gambia Becomes the 100<sup>th</sup> State to Ratify the Biosafety Protocol**

Montreal, 10 June 2004 – The Gambia yesterday became the 100<sup>th</sup> State to ratify the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The 100th ratification comes exactly one year after the Republic of Palau became the 50<sup>th</sup> State to ratify the Protocol on 13 June 2003, which triggered the countdown to the entry into force 90 days later, on 11 September 2003.

The Cartagena Protocol is the first legally binding international agreement governing the transboundary movement of living modified organisms, (LMOs, also more popularly known as GMOs – genetically modified organisms) resulting from modern biotechnology. Its objective is to ensure an adequate level of safety in the transfer, handling and use of LMOs.

The Protocol establishes a harmonized set of international rules and procedures designed to ensure that countries are provided with the relevant information to enable them to make informed decisions before agreeing to the import of LMOs. The treaty, under what is known as the advance informed agreement (AIA) procedure, requires countries exporting LMOs to gain consent from the importing country, prior to export, and to ensure that exports are accompanied with appropriate documentation.

Within the last year, 50 States have ratified or acceded to the Protocol. “This rapid pace of ratification of the Protocol is a clear indication of the broad international support and commitment to safeguarding biological diversity and human health from potential adverse effects of LMOs”, said Hamdallah Zedan, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

“I commend all the countries that have ratified the Protocol and strongly urge those that have not yet done so to hasten their national ratification processes and join as soon as possible. We should work towards achieving universal ratification of the Protocol in the near future”, he said.

The governing body of the Protocol, known as the Conference of the Parties to the Convention serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP), held its first meeting in February this year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Among the essential foundations for implementation laid down by the meeting were the approval of compliance procedures and mechanisms, the adoption of specific sets of measures to implement the documentation requirements of the Protocol to identify LMO shipments, and an agreement on procedures to facilitate decision-taking by Parties importing these organisms.

COP-MOP also approved the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, a mechanism established by the Protocol to facilitate the exchange of information on LMOs and to assist Parties to implement the Protocol. It also adopted an action plan for building capacities for the effective implementation of the Protocol and guidelines for using the roster of experts.

An Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group of Legal and Technical Experts was also established to elaborate international rules and procedures for liability and redress for damage resulting from transboundary movements of LMOs. The Working Group is expected to complete its work by 2007.

Following the entry into force and the initial guidance by the COP-MOP, member States have embarked on a number of activities to implement the Protocol. Many are now developing national biosafety frameworks to facilitate implementation at the country level.

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

(1) The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was negotiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity in order 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) The Protocol was adopted in January 2000 by member countries to the Convention on Biological Diversity and entered into force on 11 September 2003.

(3) Out of the 100 countries that have already ratified the Protocol, 23 are from Africa, 25 from Asia-Pacific, 15 from Central and Eastern Europe, 20 from Latin America and the Caribbean and 17 from Western Europe and Others Group. The full list of ratifications is available at: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/signinglist.aspx?sts=rtf&ord=dt>

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

CBD Web site: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety> and

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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