



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

For use of the media only;
Not an official document

PRESS RELEASE

Biosafety Protocol Conference ends without agreement on shipping documentation rules for genetically modified commodities

Montreal, 3 June 2005. The 118 countries and the European Community, who are members to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, have ended their second meeting without agreement on the shipping documentation requirements for bulk shipments of living modified organisms (LMOs), (also known as genetically modified organisms (GMOs)), intended for food, feed and for processing.

According to the Protocol, (Article 18.2 (a)) delegates were required to take a decision on the detailed requirements for such documentation within two years of the entry into force of the Protocol. This timeframe expires on 11 September 2005. Because no decision was adopted, discussions on this will continue at the third meeting of the Parties, scheduled to take place in Curitiba, Brazil from 13 to 17 March 2006.

In the absence of a decision, Parties will in the meantime use the provisions outlined in Article 18.2 (a) of the Protocol, which requires member Governments to take measures to ensure that documentation accompanying GMOs intended for direct use as food, or feed or for processing, clearly identifies that the shipment “may contain living modified organisms (LMOs) that are intended for use as food, or feed, or for processing and states that they are not intended for intentional introduction into the environment.”

Parties will also apply the decision they adopted at their first meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2004. In that decision, it was agreed that the documentation will also provide details of a contact point for further information. This contact point could be the exporter, the importer, or any appropriate authority designated by a Government.

“The disappointment at not achieving consensus on some issues should not be allowed to overshadow the many positive achievements of this meeting,” said Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary to the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

“Indeed, the other decisions taken at this meeting will go a long way toward improving the operational effectiveness of the Protocol, especially in such areas as capacity-building, information-sharing and risk assessment and management,” he said.

Parties took a decisions on a number of such operational issues: They adopted the multi-year programme of work for the biosafety clearing-house; agreed on measures to address the capacity-building needs and priorities of developing countries; established an expert group to review and provide guidance on approaches to risk assessment and risk management; and approved the rules that will guide the workings of the committee that was established to promote compliance and to address cases of non-compliance.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted in January 2000 in Montreal, Canada. It 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.

Information for journalists:

1. The Protocol (Article 18.2) provides that Parties to its shall take a decision on the detailed documentation requirements for shipments of LMOs that are intended for direct use as food or feed, or for processing, no later than two years after the date of entry into force of the Protocol.
2. The Protocol entered into force on 11 September 2003 and so far 118 countries as well as the European Community have ratified it.
3. The first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, which was held in Malaysian city of Kuala Lumpur in February 2004, adopted detailed information requirements for GMOs (such as genetically engineered seeds and fish) that are destined for direct placement into the environment.
4. The Biosafety Clearing-House is an information exchange mechanism established in Article 20 of the Protocol to assist Parties to implement its provisions and to facilitate sharing of information on, and experience with, living modified organisms (LMOs).

For more information contact: David Ainsworth +1 514 287 7025 david.ainsworth@biodiv.org or Erie Tamale +1 514 287 7050 erie.tamale@biodiv.org