



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN THE USE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED

Bonn, 11 May 2008. A training workshop on the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) ended last evening with a call to mobilize additional resources to further build the capacities of developing countries in this area. More than 60 participants, including over 50 national focal points for the BCH and other senior government officials, attended the two-day workshop, which was held just prior to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The aim of the workshop was to offer comprehensive training in the general navigation of the BCH with special emphasis on the creation and management of national information.

The workshop, organized jointly by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) and the BCH project of the Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-GEF), was the fourth workshop held back-to-back with the meetings of the Parties to the Protocol. To date, more than 1,500 experts have been trained.

The BCH was established under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms (LMOs), as well as to assist Parties to implement the Protocol. To date, the central portal of the BCH has over 3,800 national records ranging from national decisions on living modified organisms (LMOs) to capacity-building opportunities. Last year, the BCH was re-designed to make its interface more user-friendly. This year, the entire BCH was translated into all the six United Nations languages and a brand new “Help” section, also translated into the six United Nations languages was launched with the collaboration of UNEP-GEF BCH project.

At the closure of the workshop, Ahmed Djoghlaif, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Biosafety Protocol, emphasized the role of the Cartagena Protocol in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and in the effective implementation of chapter 16 of Agenda 21, a blueprint of action adopted by the United Nations in 1992 to advance sustainable development. The BCH, he said, is a crucial mechanism for assisting Parties to implement the Protocol. He invited all Governments to make available through it key information, including national laws and regulations on biosafety, relevant agreements, final decisions taken regarding the importation or release of LMOs and summaries of risk assessments or environmental reviews of LMOs. He commended the UNEP-GEF BCH project for assisting with building the capacities of the Parties to access and use the BCH.

At the same closing event, Ms. Maryam Niamir-Fuller, UNEP-GEF Director, also stated that in the current world-wide food crisis, issues related to LMOs and biosafety are taking the centre stage. She concluded her address by stating that countries, in particular developing countries, need timely access to the best information and advice available in order to minimize potential negative impacts that LMOs may have on biodiversity and human health.



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Background information

1. The Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) is a mechanism established by the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms (LMOs) as well as to assist Parties to implement the Protocol. It is accessible at: <http://bch.cbd.int/>.
2. Through the BCH, Parties provide information required under the Protocol, including: (i) their laws, regulations and guidelines for implementation of the Protocol, (ii) relevant agreements and arrangements; (iii) their final decisions regarding the importation or release of LMOs and (iv) summaries of their risk assessments or environmental reviews of LMOs generated by their regulatory processes. The BCH also contains: (i) registries for LMOs, genes and organisms exchanged by Parties under the Protocol, (ii) a roster of biosafety experts, (iii) databases containing information on capacity-building activities, (iv) a list of international organizations active in biosafety, (v) the “Biosafety Information Resource Centre” or BIRC (a virtual library on biosafety), and (vi) a scientific bibliographic database.
3. Most of the information is registered by designated government representatives and the Secretariat. However, data and information in some of the databases, such as those on capacity-building and the Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC) are registered by relevant BCH users.
4. The UNEP-GEF project entitled “Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) of the Cartagena Protocol” was established to assist Parties of the CPB, and 139 countries are eligible for funding under this project.