



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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STATEMENT BY

**HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

TO

**RESUMED SESSION OF THE FIRST EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

Montreal, Canada, 24 – 28 January 2000

Mr. President,
Honorable Ministers,
Mr. Executive Director,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to welcome you in Montreal, the seat of the Secretariat of the Convention, and to the resumed session of the First Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and to extend to you my best wishes for the New Year and the third Millennium.

This is possibly the most important meeting to be held on biosafety. As I emphasized in Cartagena, during the first part of this meeting, we have reached a crucial stage in the evolution of the Convention. Much is at stake here.

Eight years after the signing of the Convention in Rio, and more than six years after its entry into force, the negotiations for a Protocol on Biosafety may be interpreted as test of the will of Parties to give a practical meaning to the provisions of the Convention and its underlying principles. The timely and successful conclusion of these negotiations has a bearing on the credibility of the Convention as a whole. And, as a result, it will have an impact on other areas of work as well. In short, a failure to reach consensus on a Protocol on Biosafety might have incalculable consequences for the

Convention as a whole. It is the first Convention that addresses sustainable development issues.

Modern biotechnology is very promising. But, as you know, like other technologies, it is not without risks for the environment. It is at the juncture of science, trade and the environment. By addressing the environmental aspects of the equation, the Protocol on Biosafety would ensure that humankind enjoys the benefits of science and trade while preserving against environmental harm. It would demonstrate that it is indeed possible to harmonize diverse interests that otherwise might appear contradictory and would, thus, make a significant contribution not only to the development of international law but also to forging the link between trade and environment. Furthermore, your work could have a bearing on a wide range of efforts to address the pressing environmental and developmental problems facing the international community today.

Mr. President,

As we reflect on the significance of this meeting, let us not forget how far we have come. From Cartagena last year to Montreal today, we have invested much time and effort in these negotiations. While the failure to reach consensus in Cartagena cast a doubt on the future of this endeavor in the minds of many, progress has been made in recent months. Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the adoption of a Protocol. More recently, in Vienna, progress was made on some of the outstanding issues, and the remaining core issues were clearly circumscribed and explored. Finally, you have put forward ideas and suggestions that might help in bridging the

outstanding differences. This is a clear manifestation that, despite differences, agreement is within reach.

These developments give reason for optimism. Optimism that, with some creativity and good will, solutions can be found. Solutions that would meet the concerns of the various groups while achieving our common objective: a legal instrument for the safe transfer, handling and use of any living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

It is fair to say that an atmosphere of cautious optimism pervaded the informal consultations over the last few days. However, with related complex trade, health, ecological, regulatory and public concerns we must not underestimate the obstacles that remain. These will only be overcome by compromise on the part of all concerned.

Mr. President,

Reports in the media and other events world-wide are reflective of the high degree of interest and expectations that exists in the international community with respect to the conclusion of a Protocol on Biosafety. As you attempt to reach consensus in the coming days, I invite the meeting not to lose sight of the broader picture and of the stakes involved, so as to deliver the Protocol that the international community expects and deserves. Let us rise to the occasion and start the new century in a fitting way.

Mr. President,

I wish to seize the opportunity to acknowledge, and express my sincere appreciation, to the Parties to the Convention that have provided financial assistance for the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the informal consultations held in Vienna and at the present meetings in Montreal. They are: Australia, Austria, Canada, the Central African Republic, Denmark, the European Community, Finland, France, Kenya, Namibia, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec and the City of Montreal for the support that they continue to provide to the Secretariat and to the work of the Convention.

Finally, I wish to reiterate to you, Mr. President, and to all delegates the full and unreserved support of the Secretariat. You can rest assured that we will spare no effort in the next few days to assist you in your discussions.

I wish you the best of luck for a successful meeting.

Thank you