

Your Excellency the [President] [Prime Minister] of the French Republic
Madam Minister of Regional Planning and the Environment of France
Mr. Chairman of the ICCP
Mr. Executive Director of UNEP
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates

First of all, I wish to welcome you all very warmly to the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. We are here in Montpellier thanks to the generous offer of the Government of France to host this meeting. I am sure I speak for all of us when I thank them most sincerely for making these magnificent facilities available to us for our deliberations.

I would also like to thank the Governments that contributed financially in order to ensure a large participation in this meeting and to its successful organization: Denmark, Finland, Norway, France, New Zealand, Spain, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of the Biosafety Protocol in January 2000 was an historic achievement. It demonstrated that the process launched by the Convention on Biological Diversity is capable of addressing emerging issues and of arriving at agreed responses to those challenges.

Since being opened for signature during the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Nairobi in May 2000, the Protocol now boasts 78 signatures [[check # on December 11](#)]. In addition, in October, Bulgaria and Trinidad and Tobago became the first countries to ratify the Protocol—less than six months after signature. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate those Governments for setting such an example for others to follow. I believe these signals provide a clear demonstration of the commitment of our global community to implementing this important agreement as soon as possible.

The level of representation of the host Government at this meeting is a further testimony to this commitment. Indeed, since the negotiations for the Protocol began in earnest in 1996, the issue of safety in biotechnology has leapt from one of marginal interest within the scientific and environmental community to one that commands a place in the forefront of public policy, not to mention moral and ethical, debate in all regions.

Mr. Chairman,

The purpose of this body, as defined by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, is to prepare for the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. That is no mean task, given, first, the expectations that the conclusion of the Protocol has raised, and, second, the vast amount of groundwork that needs to be completed before the Protocol can become fully operational. At this point, I think it is worth recalling that, by

the time of that first meeting of the Parties, at least fifty countries will have expressed their consent to be bound by the provisions of the Protocol. As the Conference of the Parties emphasized at its fifth meeting, for those countries to be able to fulfil that commitment by that time, it is a matter of priority that the Biosafety Clearing-House should be launched no later than the entry into force of the Protocol and capacity-building must be undertaken as soon as possible.

It is therefore no accident that your Bureau should have placed the issues of information-sharing, with particular reference to the Biosafety Clearing-House, and capacity-building at the top of the agenda for this meeting. On the first issue, which is of a highly technical nature, you will be able to draw on the recommendations of the meeting of technical experts on the Biosafety Clearing-House, which I had the pleasure of convening last September at the request of the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. In doing so, I was struck by the continued spirit of cooperation that prevailed during the final days of negotiating the Protocol. Many excellent experts were nominated from all geographic regions and, under the guidance of the Bureau, we were able to achieve balanced Government representation and a successful and productive outcome, which I believe will serve as a solid basis for your discussion.

It was also encouraging that, in addition to the government-nominated experts, that meeting was also attended by representatives of industry, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations active in biosafety information-sharing issues at the meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House. Involvement of a range of groups and individuals in the preparations for the first meeting of the Parties is an important step towards creating a better informed public, and a global community able to take environmental costs and benefits fully into account when making decisions that may affect the biological diversity of our planet.

On the topic of public awareness and education, I am pleased to announce that published copies of the Protocol text are now available in English, French and Spanish, and the other languages will soon follow. A brochure on the Protocol has also been prepared by the Secretariat and is currently available in all UN languages. The section of the Convention's website devoted to the Biosafety Protocol is also proving very popular, and I believe these tools are helping us to widely disseminate information about biosafety and biological diversity to non-expert but interested audiences.

My report on the other inter-sessional work requested by the Conference of the Parties is before you as document ICCP/1/2 and will be taken up under item 3 of your agenda. I will therefore not go into any further details at this point, except to draw your attention one significant recent development – the approval by the GEF Council of an Initial Strategy for Assisting Countries to Prepare for the Entry into Force of the Protocol, together with GEF financing of \$26 million for a programme of capacity-building consistent with the Strategy. The Strategy has been circulated by the Secretariat and is available here as document UNEP/CBD/ICCP/1/INF/2. I would draw your attention to the fact that the Strategy was approved on the understanding that it would be kept under review so as to incorporate the relevant outcomes of the discussion in this forum.

The GEF programme of capacity-building builds on the highly successful UNEP/GEF pilot biosafety enabling activity project, which provided support to 18 countries for the preparation of national biosafety frameworks. This coverage will now be extended to up to 100 eligible countries. This initiative is a welcome and timely one and has the full support of the CBD Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the other items on the agenda before you, namely, capacity-building, decision-making processes, handling, transport, packaging and identification, and compliance, the Secretariat has prepared background papers in close consultation with the Bureau. A common purpose of all these papers is to provide this Committee with as many examples as possible of related precedents and ongoing activities in other forums. We took this approach in recognition of the fact that, as we embark upon the road toward entry into force and implementation of the Protocol, we are moving into, for us, uncharted territory. The idea is not blindly to copy or borrow from other international processes – indeed many of the examples indicated will not be applicable to the Biosafety Protocol- but rather to see how situations similar to those that we now face have been addressed elsewhere and to gain from the experience of other bodies. We hope they will be useful in your deliberations and look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

May I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, the staff members of the Secretariat, for their hard work in ensuring that all the pre-session documents for this meeting were prepared on time in all languages, despite the rather short period between COP-5 and the convening of the present meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

The conclusion of the Protocol was the result of the efforts and willingness to compromise on the part of all concerned, and it is gratifying when these efforts are acknowledged in other forums. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Tewolde Gebre Egzhiaber of Ethiopia, who has just been to the Swedish Parliament to receive the 2000 Right Livelihood Award for, and I quote, “his role in representing the Like-Minded Group at the Biosafety negotiations in Cartagena and Montreal, and in achieving an outcome that stressed the importance of the conservation of biodiversity and the traditional rights of farmers and communities in developing countries to their genetic resources”.

All of those involved in the negotiations for the Protocol are well aware of Dr. Tewolde’s vast knowledge, intellect and commitment to the cause of biosafety. I am sure that we can all take pleasure in the richly deserved wider recognition that his contribution has achieved. Congratulations, Dr. Tewolde.

Finally, I wish to assure delegates, as always, of the full support of the Secretariat staff members during this meeting. We welcome your feedback on the organization and

conduct of the meeting as it progresses and I assure you that no effort will be spared to ensure its full success.

I wish you all a most successful and productive meeting and I thank you for your kind attention.