

Opening Statement
By
The President of COP7/MOP1

**First Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on
Biological Diversity serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the
Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 23rd February 2004, Putra
World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur**

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome all of you to the First Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

I hope those who have been here for the last two weeks attending the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) had the opportunity to experience the warm hospitality of the people of Malaysia, its natural beauty and cultural diversity.

I hope the delegates who have just arrived here for this meeting will have the opportunity to enjoy the same Malaysian experience.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to assure you that the Government and the people of Malaysia are honored and happy to host this First Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The importance of this meeting cannot be over-emphasized. The Protocol deals with an issue that is attracting much attention worldwide. Concern has been raised about the safety of living modified organisms or LMOs – also known as genetically modified organisms or GMOs. These are products from modern biotechnology. It is known that biotechnology has the potential to bring significant changes to our lives in addressing food and health problems. Biotechnology may also have direct impacts on ecosystems and the environment in general. The debate about GMOs in the public arena often tends to be polarized between those who are in support for, and those who are against the technology. Although GMOs are neither inherently risky nor safe, it is generally recognized that the potential to create new genetic combinations and the relatively limited experience of such organisms warrant national and international regulation. In this context, the Cartagena

Protocol should therefore be viewed as an important international agreement that attempts to establish a harmonized framework of rules and procedures governing the movement of LMOs across national borders. It also allows countries, especially those that do not have in place a regulatory regime for biosafety, to make informed decisions on the import of LMOs into their countries.

The Protocol entered into force on 11th September 2003. Its requirements have therefore; become legally binding for those States which have become Parties to it. Malaysia ratified the Protocol on 3rd September 2003. Implementation of the requirements of the Protocol is a challenge, in particular to developing countries, given that the Protocol deals with issues that are new to many of them. The clarification and operation of those requirements are therefore the main tasks which the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol has to address. This meeting is to give guidance on the implementation of the Protocol, especially those provisions stipulated in the text of the Protocol to be considered at this inaugural Meeting of the Parties.

We are fortunate that our task this week is facilitated by the comprehensive and excellent preparatory work done by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP), over the last four years. As you may recall, the Intergovernmental Committee was established by the Conference of Parties to the CBD to undertake the necessary preparations to facilitate decision-making by the First Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. The recommendations tabled for the consideration of this meeting by the Intergovernmental Committee shows that it has successfully fulfilled its mandate. I would like to take this opportunity, to congratulate Ambassador Philemon Yang of Cameroon, who chaired the Intergovernmental Committee during those four years, which resulted in this excellent outcome.

I wish also to congratulate the other members of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee, who, together with Ambassador Yang, steered the interim process so productively and successfully.

Distinguished Delegates,

As I mentioned earlier, the tasks at hand for the First Meeting of the Parties is to give operational guidance and direction to its provisions of the Biosafety Protocol.

I wish to remind delegates that we are not here to negotiate the Protocol. I expect that this First Meeting of the Parties will build on the considerable preparatory work already done by the Intergovernmental Committee. I would appeal to delegates not to spend too much time, negotiating draft decisions which enjoyed consensus during the meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee. Even for issues that were not completely resolved by the ICCP, the excellent and comprehensive documentation prepared by the CBD Secretariat has set out all the options that were proposed. This should therefore, make it possible for the meeting to move on and make progress.

With the amount of preparation carried out and coupled with the positive spirit of co-operation that prevailed throughout the ICCP process, I am confident that we shall accomplish our tasks successfully. You have my assurance that

Malaysia, as the host country, and myself as President of this meeting, will do our best to ensure that a conducive atmosphere prevails during our deliberations.

This meeting would not have been possible, without the thorough preparation carried out by various teams of dedicated people. I congratulate and commend them for their excellent work and thank them for their commitment.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

With those remarks, I now, declare open the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.