



United Nations Environment Programme

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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

STATEMENT OF
DR KLAUS TOPFER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNEP AT THE OPENING OF
THE FIRST MEETING OF THE PARTIES OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY
KUALA LUMPUR, 23 FEBRUARY 2004

Mr. Klaus Töpfer, the Executive Director of UNEP, wanted very much to be with you this morning, but unfortunately, owing to other prior commitments this was not possible. He asked me to transmit to you his deep regrets and to read on his behalf the following statement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Initiated officially in the neighboring country of Indonesia, at the second meeting of the COP held in December 1995, we are again back to this region and gathered in Kuala Lumpur at the occasion of the first MOP of the Cartagena protocol on biosafety. Our meeting today, is yet another testimony of the commitments of the countries of the region, to ensure that a vibrant economic growth is synonymous with a green society respectful of Mother Nature.

Let me therefore, congratulate the government and people of Malaysia for the hospitality and generosity in hosting this meeting and for the excellent facilities and arrangements provided. Such facilities have greatly contributed to the success of last week's COP 7 and will, without any doubt contribute to the expected success of this first meeting of its kind.

Mr. President in your closing remarks during the adjournment ceremony of COP7 held in the early hours of last Saturday, you reminded us that this is the first time that Malaysia has hosted an international environment event of this kind and requested the understanding of the 2000 participants for any mistakes that may have occurred.

I can assure you Mr. President that from UNEP's 32 years of global environment diplomacy, the facilities, services and arrangements offered by the Malaysian authorities have been outstanding and are yet another demonstration of what is now known as the Malaysian miracle. Honorable Datu Seri Law, thank you very much for this lesson of humility reflective of the traditions and culture of the people of this great nation. I would like to kindly ask you to convey to the people and the government of Malaysia our deep gratitude for their tireless efforts to ensure the success of this historical event.

Our meeting today is indeed an historical one and constitutes the culmination of a long journey which started in Rio de Janeiro with the signature of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Let me therefore pay tribute to the 87 Parties that have ratified the Protocol and made this event possible. I would like also to take this opportunity to call on those that have not yet done so, to urgently expedite their internal process of accession to what has been considered by the Executive Director of UNEP as the new legal environmental instrument of the twenty-first century. I would also like to recognize the unique contribution of my friend Mr. Veit Koster, the Chairman of the negotiating committee whose name will always be associated with the CBD processes.

I would like also to pay tribute to the Chair of the ICCP, His Excellency Ambassador Philemon Yang, a son of Africa for his leadership in steering, during the last four years, the preparation of today's historical event. Ambassador Yang, thank you very much and I am sure that you will join me in thanking the chairs of the regional negotiating groups for assisting you in this difficult task. In this regard, a special recognition needs to be paid to another son of Africa, Dr. Tewolde Egziabher.

Such successful preparation which augurs well for today's meeting would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our Executive Secretary, Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, and his small but efficient biosafety team. Hamdallah, thank you very much for your efforts.

Ladies and gentleman

At the occasion of the entry into force of the protocol on 11 September 2002, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Koffi Annan stated that "the Protocol establishes a framework that will facilitate environmentally sound application and management of the products of modern biotechnology. It will enable us to derive maximum benefits from biotechnology while at the same time protecting biodiversity and human health from potential risks posed by living modified organisms".

To this end, capacity building is one of the most critical requirements for ensuring the successful implementation of the protocol. Article 22 of the Protocol requires parties to cooperate in the development and strengthening of human resources and institutional capacity in biosafety, including biotechnology for the effective implementation of the protocol. It is for this reason that this item is high on the agenda of your meeting today. It is for this same reason that this issue was also

high on the agenda of the ICCP. At its second meeting held in Nairobi in October 2001, the ICCP recommended an Action Plan on capacity building prepared with the inputs of the Open ended experts group held in Havana in July 2001 with financial support from the Global Environment Facility and UNEP.

In his opening remarks on Access and Benefit Sharing at the ministerial segment of the COP7 held last week here in Kuala Lumpur with the participation of more than 80 ministers, Professor A H Zakri, from Malaysia stated, and I quote “Here the Biosafety Protocol provides a clear example of what is possible when there is commitment and political will. Shortly after the negotiations were concluded, UNEP and the GEF developed a global capacity building programme to help countries develop their national biosafety frameworks. The programme was launched in June 2001 only 18 months after the negotiation concluded. The programme now provides support to over 120 developing countries and has led to the Protocol entering into force in record time. But perhaps most importantly, it has meant that many developing countries are now carefully considering how they can participate in the bio-economy. As a result, perceptions amongst many developing countries about biotechnology and its place in their development plans have significantly changed in recent years. Whereas during the Protocol’s negotiations, some developing countries were of the view that biotechnology and genetically modified organisms, technology and products, were of little relevance to them or the developing world, now many of them see this technology as a means to develop important, lucrative and sustainable export markets. In other words many can see that there are benefits to be created from new technology. Or that they can capture more of the benefits of biodiversity. The price tag for this programme US\$ 38 million.”

This statement by Professor Zakri, a former SBSTTA Chair and a member of the Malaysian delegation who was among the first to raise concerns on GMOs during the negotiation of the CBD, is of a significant importance. Professor Zakri, thank you for this living testimony.

In his address to the High level Dialogue on Biotechnology and Sustainable Development organized on Saturday by Prof Zakri’s Institute, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato SERI Najib stated that “ Like many nations around the world, Malaysia has recognized the potential of biotechnology. We are committed in realizing this potential in safe and sustainable ways and ...”the cornerstone of our strategy is in the creation of Bio-valley Malaysia which has been conceived as a clarion call to the local and international community to help Malaysia unlock the potential of our rich biodiversity. It is our plan to create the region’s healthiest environment for biotechnology”. The GEF has already responded to this call. The cabinet of Malaysia has endorsed the biosafety bill to be submitted next month to the parliament and is expected to enter into force before the end of this year.

The GEF has already adopted a project to assist Malaysia to implement its national biosafety framework as another demonstration project.

Indeed, the financial mechanism of our convention needs to be congratulated for a job well done. Less than six months after the signature of the Protocol, the GEF council adopted in November 2000 an initial strategy to assist countries to prepare for the entry into force of the Protocol, as well as an innovative programme of US\$ 38 million to assist eligible countries to prepare their national biosafety frameworks, to promote regional and sub-regional cooperation and facilitate the exchanges of experiences.

This programme benefited from the experience gained in the implementation of another GEF biosafety pilot project of US\$ 2.5 million implemented in 1997-1999 during the negotiation of the protocol. The GEF pilot project with the participation of 18 countries benefited from the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for safety in biotechnology prepared and finalized in Cairo in 1995 with the support of the government of Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Mr. Hamdallah Zedan was at that time instrumental in spearheading this pioneering role played by UNEP.

The UNEP/GEF biosafety capacity building programme is now assisting 123 countries. So far 13 regional workshops have been convened with the participation of more than 1200 experts from 128 countries. Three additional workshops will be held in the coming weeks in Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Trinidad and Tobago. More than 400 additional experts will benefit from these workshops. As a result we expect that around 50 national biosafety frameworks will be completed before the end of this year. Through GEF resources, UNEP is also piloting 8 demonstration projects. Last month 39 participants took part in a three weeks field training mission.

In addition, the GEF Council at its last meeting and in response to an urgent request submitted by the Bureau of ICCP, approved a project for US\$ 5 million to assist 58 eligible parties to build their capacity to make full use of the Biosafety Clearing House mechanism, a key instrument in the implementation of the Protocol. In reviewing its triennial business plan, the GEF council, in anticipation of the expected guidance on capacity building from your meeting today, decided also to include biosafety among the 22 strategic priorities of the current GEF phase in anticipation of the expected guidance at the end of this meeting

I am sure that you will all join me in paying tribute to our financial mechanism for this timely responsiveness and substantial financial support to the Protocol. I will kindly request Ms. Patricia Blissguest to convey to the Chief Executive Officer of the GEF Secretariat, Mr. Len Good our deep

appreciation. A number of honorable GEF Council members are attending this meeting, and I would like also to kindly request them to convey to their other colleagues our heartfelt thanks for their support.

Ladies and gentleman

This first meeting of the MOP is the culmination of a long journey but it is also the beginning of another one, may be more challenging. The challenge ahead of us is to translate the objectives of the protocol into reality. Addressing these challenges will require systematic concerted efforts. It will require the establishment of a new form of strategic partnership and networks between countries and their partners, including the private sector, the representatives of the civil society and the scientific community. This meeting provides an opportunity to establish the necessary frameworks and mechanisms for capacity building, information sharing, compliance with the Protocol and for monitoring and reporting. To this end, clear targets as well as indicators and benchmarks for measuring progress and for monitoring the successes and shortcomings will need to be established. In this regard the revised preliminary set of indicators prepared by the Executive Secretary on the basis of submission from countries is a welcomed step in the right direction.

Ladies and gentleman

Meeting here in Kuala Lumpur and inspired by the Putrajaya spirit, the new administrative capital of Malaysia, let us commit ourselves, through our deliberations and decisions, to spare no efforts to build together a new partnership which will make a responsible Bio Valley vision a reality not only for Malaysia but also for the rest of the world. In this endeavor, you can and you should always rely on the United Nations Environment Programme.

TERIMA KASIH and thank you for your kind attention.