



Secretariat of the  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**



**STATEMENT**

by

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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

at the

**OPENING SESSION**

of the

**FOURTH 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**

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Madam Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over sixty years ago, the German-born physicist, Albert Einstein, noted that, “We still do not know one thousandth of one per cent of what nature has revealed to us.” Despite the enormous scientific discoveries and technological advances that the world has seen in the intervening years, much of the workings of the natural world remain intricate, unknown and unpredictable. We cannot fully predict the impacts of our own technological advances on nature, and it is for this reason that you are meeting this week as the governing body of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

September this year will mark the fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Biosafety Protocol. In those five years, we have seen the Protocol develop and evolve as an instrument of international law and as a tool for the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. Important decisions have been taken, extensive efforts at implementation have been initiated, and support for the Protocol has continued to grow.

Since your last meeting in Curitiba, 17 new Parties have deposited their instrument of accession, thus bringing the number of Parties to 147. These new Parties include Myanmar, for whom the Protocol enters into force tomorrow. While welcoming Myanmar as Party, I would like to convey my deepest condolences to its people for the humanitarian and ecological disaster caused by last week’s cyclone Nargis. The devastation caused by this event not only brings back memories of the horror of the 2004 tsunami but also serves as a stern reminder that, now, every year, 250 million people are affected by natural disasters—a third more than a decade ago. It is also a reminder and wake-up call for all of us that business-as-usual is no longer an option when it comes to the protection of our natural wealth. This also applies to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Five years after its entry into force, here we are assembled in Bonn—the United Nations city for sustainable development—for the first meeting of the Parties since the decision to move to a two-year cycle of meetings. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Marina Silva, Minister of the Environment of Brazil and your President for the past two years, for her outstanding leadership in guiding the adoption of 18 decisions in Curitiba, including the crucial decision on Article 18, paragraph 2 (a), a decision that enabled the Parties to fulfil their legal commitments under that provision of the Protocol. I would like also to congratulate Brazil for the leadership provided since Curitiba and in guiding the organizational arrangements for the 17 intersessional meetings that have been held since that time. I ask Ambassador Raymundo Magno to convey our congratulations to Ms. Marina Silva.

Five years after the entry into force of what was hailed as the new legal instrument of the twenty-first century, we are assembled here as the largest gathering under the Protocol both in terms of attendance, with more than 3,000 registered delegates, and in terms of Parties. I would therefore like to pay tribute to our host, Germany, represented here by Ms. Ursula Heinen, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of Germany, and request her to convey to the German people and Government, our deep gratitude for hosting this meeting. I would like also to request Mr. Jochen Flasbarth to convey to Mr. Sigmar Gabriel, Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, our admiration and appreciation for the fantastic job done in making the arrangements for our meetings here in Bonn. This is a sign of a nation determined to make its distinct contribution to advancing the biodiversity agenda, an agenda that cannot be dissociated from biosafety. I would also like to thank Dr. Alexander Schink, Minister of State of North Rhine-Westphalia, for his presence here today.

Two years ago, in Curitiba, under the able leadership of Minister Fatimah Raya Nasron of Malaysia, a legally binding commitment on Article 18.2 (a) was fulfilled. Here we are in Bonn today to fulfil another legally binding commitment—that on liability and redress, as contained in Article 27 of the Protocol. The implementation of this key article of the Protocol has been ongoing for the past four years. You have before you the report of the three meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group convened for this purpose, including the outcomes of the meeting of the Friends of the Co-Chairs, which finalized its work here in Bonn over the weekend.

The results are before you: significant progress has been achieved on the most critical sections of the negotiating draft—those on scope, damage and primary compensation scheme. The number of pages in these three sections has been lowered from 17 to only 9. I would like to pay tribute to Ms Jimena Nieto and Mr. Rene Lefeber, the Co-Chairs of the Working Group, for their outstanding leadership, and I would also congratulate all who took part in last week's meeting of the Friends of the Co-Chairs for the success of their work.

During this meeting, a coalition of six major agricultural biotechnology companies—BASF, Bayer CropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont/Pioneer, Monsanto and Syngenta—indicated their voluntary commitment to remediate or pay a claim for proven damage to biological diversity that may be caused by their products. I invite other business leaders to join force in engaging the business community in the implementation of the Protocol, as green business is indeed the business of tomorrow.

I would like also to pay tribute to the Government of Colombia for hosting the last meeting of the Working Group, and to the Government of the Netherlands and other partners for providing the extra-budgetary resources for convening it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the negotiations for the Protocol were concluded in 2000, Article 27 represented a compromise. A compromise whereby liability and redress would be included in the Protocol, but its substance would be considered at a later time. That time is now. You have less than five working days to fulfil this legal commitment. You have less than 30 working hours to rise to the challenge of agreeing on the over 150 square brackets in the text of these three sections alone of the draft negotiating document. In other words, as of now, while dealing with other important issues on the agenda, you have, on average, less than one hour to agree on every five sets of bracketed text in these three key sections.

I sincerely hope that by doing so you will be guided by the wisdom of the German physicist and Nobel Prize winner, Max Planck who once said, "Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery that we are trying to solve." Thus, with every step we take, every discovery we make, every project we undertake, we must consider not only our well-being but that of the rest of the natural world as well.

Indeed, the theme for our meeting this week—"One Nature, One World: Our Future"—echoes this crucial principle, and the future, ladies and gentlemen, is now. I urge you to seize the moment, since postponing action on Article 27 is no longer an option. As Germany's own Wolfgang Johan von Goethe once said, "What is not started today is never finished tomorrow." You started the implementation of Article 27 four years ago. I know it will not finish tomorrow. I also know that under the leadership of Ursula Heinen, and with your cooperation, you will have finished your work by Friday, at the closure of our meeting.

I thank you all for your kind attention.