



CBD

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Achieving the
2010
Biodiversity
Target

STATEMENT

BY

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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

AT THE OPENING OF THE

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
IMPLICATIONS OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON
BIOSAFETY**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namaste.

In this great megabiodiverse country, home to more than 89,000 animal species and some 47,000 plant species, including some 15,000 medicinal plants, it is pertinent to be addressing you on one of the key and most challenging issues facing the world community today—biosafety, which encompasses measures and procedures for minimizing the potential risks of the products of modern biotechnology on biodiversity and human health.

As you are aware, modern biotechnology is one of the new knowledge-intensive technologies that have the potential to make a significant contribution to the improvement of the socio-economic welfare of mankind and its prosperity, particularly in the fields of agriculture and food security, medicine, industrial development and environmental protection. Indeed, some countries, including this great nation, have rapidly embraced this technology. According to the 2005 report on the Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM crops, prepared by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications, the total agricultural area coverage of approved GM crops grew to 222 million acres in 2005, up from 200 million acres in 2004, marking an annual growth rate of 11%. In the coming years, biotechnology is likely to become one of the key driving forces of our daily lives—from the food we eat, the medicine we use, to the fuels that power our cars.

While modern biotechnology holds great promise, it could also have potential adverse effects on biodiversity and human health if not properly regulated, managed and controlled. For that reason, the negotiators of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agreed to include a requirement in Article 8(g) for Parties to “establish or maintain means to regulate, manage or control the risks associated with the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology which are likely to have adverse environmental impacts”. They also agreed to consider the need for and modalities of a protocol to the Convention setting out appropriate procedures for the safe transfer, handling and use of any living modified organism resulting from biotechnology.

Consequently, the Parties to the Convention negotiated and adopted the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in January 2000. As stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, upon the entry into force of the Protocol on 11 September 2003, the Protocol establishes a framework that will facilitate environmentally sound application and management of the products of modern biotechnology and enable us to derive maximum benefits from them while at the same time protecting biodiversity and human health from any potential risks they may pose.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Since its adoption, the Protocol has received remarkable support and steady progress is being made in its implementation. The number of Parties to the Protocol continues to grow, and currently stands at 135, with the most recent ratification being that of the Philippines. This is a clear sign of the confidence the global community places in

the Protocol and a recognition of the need for international cooperation in ensuring the safe transfer, handling and use of biotechnology products.

A number of important steps have been taken to facilitate the practical implementation of the Protocol. As you are aware, the governing body of the Protocol – the Conference of the Parties to the Convention serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP) – has so far held three meetings and adopted several decisions, which elaborate operational modalities, tools, mechanisms and work programmes, including the Biosafety Clearing-House, an action plan on capacity-building, the Coordination Mechanism for capacity-building activities, the roster of experts, the Compliance Committee and others. The paper prepared by the CBD Secretariat for this Conference outlines some of the main achievements made and the role that the CBD Secretariat has played. However, the biggest challenge facing many developing countries in implementing this and other COP-MOP decisions is the lack of human resource, institutional and technological capacities in biosafety.

This international conference, therefore, is very important and timely. It will, without doubt, contribute to enhanced sharing of knowledge and experiences. Participants have a lot to learn from this country, which has a large pool of expertise and firsthand experience in the area of research and regulation of biotech crops, including Bt cotton hybrids, which were approved for commercial cultivation in 2002, and the expected approval of its first biotech food crop, the eggplant. India also has one of the most robust regulatory systems, including the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) hosted by the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry and the rules for the manufacture, import, use, research and release of GMOs established in 1989 under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Despite the fact that many countries, especially developing countries, still lack the human and institutional capacities for implementing the Protocol, progress has been in some areas, particularly with respect to the development of national biosafety frameworks (NBF), thanks to the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Through GEF support:

- More than 130 countries have completed or are about to complete developing their National Biosafety Frameworks;
- At least 12 countries, including India, are in the process of implementing their NBFs with support provided through UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank; and
- More than 139 countries are being assisted, through UNEP-GEF, to build their capacities in order to effectively participate in the Biosafety Clearing-House.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the Global Environment Facility and its implementing agencies for their support. As you may be aware, the GEF is currently the single largest donor for biosafety capacity-building activities. According to the recent survey carried out by the Institute of Advanced Studies of the United Nations University, the GEF has, over the last 5 years, invested close to US\$ 60 million in biosafety capacity-building projects, including the India-World

Bank/GEF Project on Capacity-Building in Biosafety. This accounts for more than 40% of the total bilateral and multilateral funding assistance for biosafety. It is also gratifying to note that of the US\$ 3.13 billion for the fourth GEF replenishment over the next 4 years, more than US\$ 80 million will be spent on biosafety projects. I welcome this renewed support and commitment from the GEF, which will go a long way in assisting Parties to build the capacities necessary to enable them to fulfill their obligations under the Protocol.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At its last meeting, which was held in March 2006 in the historic city of Curitiba in Brazil, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol adopted a number of decisions that are crucial to ensuring the successful implementation of the Protocol and urged governments and relevant organizations to take appropriate action. For example, the decision on capacity-building, which includes an updated action plan for building capacities for the effective implementation of the Protocol, among other things, encourages Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations to enhance synergies and coordination among their capacity-building initiatives; strengthen bilateral or regional cooperation, including South-South cooperation, and promote direct bilateral exchanges of technical experts between countries in order to build capacities in biosafety.

The Parties to the Protocol also adopted a historic decision on the detailed requirements for documentation accompanying shipments of LMOs intended for direct use as food or feed, or for processing. The decision will help to foster transparency and predictability in the international trade of genetically modified commodities and boost public confidence in the international biosafety system. In that decision, Governments and relevant organizations are urged to take urgent measures to strengthen capacity-building efforts in developing countries, in order to assist them in the implementation of and benefit from documentation and identification requirements for LMOs and to cooperate in exchanging experiences and building capacities in the use and development of easy-to-use, rapid, reliable and cost-effective sampling and detection techniques for LMOs.

The present conference provides a unique opportunity for discussing possible options on how to respond to the above-mentioned decisions and for promoting the exchange of information and experience, fostering global networking and strengthening South-South cooperation on capacity-building in biosafety. As you may be aware, a brainstorming session on South-South cooperation on biodiversity was held from 6 to 8 November 2006 at the CBD Secretariat in Montreal, following a recommendation made by the President of the Group of 77 at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. Participants discussed draft elements for a multi-year plan of action on South-South cooperation on the implementation of the Convention and the Millennium Development Goals, which will be developed by open-ended expert meeting in the latter half of 2007 for consideration by the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2008. I wish to take this opportunity to invite you during the course of this meeting to identify possible elements with respect to biosafety that could be included in the above-mentioned plan of action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the words of Mahatma Ghandi, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” We are all here to learn, share ideas and be a positive tool that will carry out a positive change for biodiversity. The time has come for all of us to focus our attention on how to effectively implement the Biosafety Protocol and at the same time consider developing concrete recommendations to address the challenges ahead of us. The diversity of life on Earth is, after all, not only for us but also for us to leave to future generations. I wish you all productive deliberations and excellent outcomes.

Thank you very much.