

Joint Aarhus Convention/Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety Round Table on awareness raising, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms
(15 November 2016, Salle V)

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Talking points

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this round table which is organised jointly by the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. I warmly welcome our colleague from the Protocol's secretariat, who made a long trip from Montreal to service this important event.

This second round table seeks to build on the important conclusions reached by the previous meeting held three years ago in Geneva. The last meeting was instrumental for assisting countries to ratify the GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention and implement the Aarhus Convention's Lucca Guidelines and the Programme of Work of the Cartagena Protocol.

In this spirit, the two secretariats have been closely cooperating to develop a number of tools for exchanging information and sharing knowledge. The successful cooperation between the two secretariats exemplifies the great potential offered by such synergies.

I am delighted to see that this meeting is attended by government representatives, experts and NGO representatives from almost every region of the world. This promises to offer a unique opportunity to combine various regional perspectives into shared vision. I expect the following three days to mark the beginning of a fruitful dialogue on exploring new patterns for joining resources, for sharing best practices, for exchanging knowledge and for learning from each other's experience and expertise.

As we are getting closer to the entry into force of the GMO amendment of the Aarhus Convention, we should aim to communicate broadly the benefits of transparency and public engagement in GMO/LMO issues. If we wish to build societies based on trust, if we wish to ensure health and food safety, then transparency and participatory decision-making are key.

As of today, the GMO amendment has been ratified by 30 countries. Three more ratifications are necessary for the amendment to enter into force. In view of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to take place in Montenegro next September, I call upon Parties to achieve the entry into force of the GMO Amendment by that date. By ratifying the Amendment and by implementing the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety countries will send a clear message on the centrality of transparency, accountability and good governance in environmental decision-making.

I would like to underline that in the light of the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals, the transparency and effective public engagement have acquired increased significance for the work on GMO/LMO matter. In this regard, I wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Austria for its solid and continuous leadership for this challenging work.

Let me conclude by warmly welcoming you to Geneva and wishing you a very successful meeting!