

OPENING STATEMENT

JOINT AARHUS CONVENTION/CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY ROUND TABLE ON PUBLIC AWARENESS, ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REGARDING LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS/GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

16-18 December 2019, Geneva, Switzerland

Statement on behalf of the Acting Executive Secretary
of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of Ms. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the Acting Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this joint Round Table on Public Awareness, Access to Information and Public Participation regarding Living Modified Organisms and Genetically Modified Organisms, here in Geneva.

The cooperation between the Aarhus convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety goes back a long time. Parties to both instruments have been very committed to the collaboration and the roundtable meeting is the tangible fruit of our joint efforts.

The most recent output from the joint work between the two Secretariats is the draft pocket guide on access to information and participation in decision-making. The draft pocket guide has been developed by the Secretariats with the valuable input from the Chair of the joint Round Table, Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch. The joint Round Table provides an excellent opportunity to discuss the draft pocket guide and to receive your critical inputs, which will enable us to finalize the document.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol requires Parties to promote and facilitate public awareness, education and participation in matters concerning living modified organisms. The same article provides that Parties should ensure that public awareness and education encompass access to information on living modified organisms and requires Parties to consult the public in decision-making, in accordance with domestic legislation. As you may all be aware, Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development has found its place in several international and regional treaties as well as national legislation and emphasized by courts of law.

In order to facilitate the implementation of Article 23, the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol adopted a Programme of Work in 2010, which was extended to cover the period up to 2020. The Programme of Work has been instrumental in advancing on public awareness, education and participation over the past nine years.

The importance of the work on public awareness, education and participation is further reflected and strengthened in the revised draft of the post-2020 Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol and its post-2020 capacity-building action plan. These instruments will further facilitate implementation of the Protocol. The revised draft of the post-2020 Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol contains a specific goal related to Article 23 under the goals related to creating an enabling environment for

implementation, together with other cross-cutting goals on capacity building, cooperation and access to resources.

The post-2020 Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol and the capacity-building action plan are being reviewed at the moment and Parties and observers have been invited to provide their input.

The Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol will be anchored in and complementary to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework is currently being developed by an Open-Ended Working Group established for this purpose. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the post-2020 plans under the Cartagena Protocol are expected to be adopted in Kunming, China, in October 2020, by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, respectively. As you may know, there was previously no explicit reference to biosafety in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework is expected to address biosafety in general, while goals and objectives for the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol will be provided in the post-2020 Implementation Plan, supported by the capacity-building action plan.

The tenth meeting of the Parties, to be held in Kunming, also marks the conclusion of the process for the fourth assessment and review of the Protocol and the final evaluation of the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol. As part of this process, an assessment of the implementation of Article 23 will be carried out. This assessment will be based on information provided in the fourth national reports of the Protocol and will be supplemented by information obtained through a survey on key indicators of the Programme of Work that was conducted earlier this year.

The initial results from the fourth national reports and the survey outcomes seem to indicate that a number of Parties to the Protocol have not yet fully put in place the necessary measures to implement Article 23. Further efforts are therefore needed to ensure effective implementation of the revised Plans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to have a critical discussion on the draft pocket guide, as this will enable the two Secretariats to finalize the document which you would have ensured it is useful to support your and others efforts to promote public awareness, access to information and participation in decision-making.

I also invite Parties and observers to the Cartagena Protocol to reflect on the outcomes of this meeting and take these into consideration when providing input on the revised draft post-2020 Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol and the post-2020 capacity-building action plan, in the ongoing review process.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you very much.