



**STATEMENT BY
MS. ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

**on the occasion of the
TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PARTIES
TO**

THE AARHUS CONVENTION

THEMATIC SESSION ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS *major benefits of cooperation between the secretariats of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Aarhus Convention aims at promoting synergies in implementation of the two instruments, including the draft Implementation Plan and the Capacity-building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety*

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND (HYBRID), 8 JUNE 2021

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Ms. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), I welcome you to the thematic session on genetically modified organisms.

It is my great pleasure to address the twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. I would like to thank Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch, Austria, for chairing this important event.

The Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the supplementary Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity, have many core issues in common. These include, in particular, access to information and public participation in decision-making regarding living modified organisms (LMOs) and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Our good cooperation between the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol goes back many years. We have cooperated in the convening of a range of mutually beneficial activities, including the organization of online fora, workshops and round tables, as well as the development of a pocket guide, e-learning modules and other tools. We currently have 46 Parties in common, and through this cooperation our Parties have benefited from capacity building and opportunities to effectively implement both instruments.

The latest fruit of our cooperation is the pocket guide describing benefits, systemic challenges, priority areas and good practices in relation to promoting transparency and public participation in GMO/LMO matters. Released in May 2021, the pocket guide was developed based on the Chair's summary recommendation from the joint CBD/Aarhus Convention round table on access to information and public participation regarding LMOs, held in December 2019.

Currently, Parties have had some experience in setting in place procedures and mechanisms for access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs, but further guidance is needed. In this regard, the pocket guide is a useful capacity-building tool to enhance the number of national procedures and



mechanisms in this field. I encourage all Parties to make use of the pocket guide and other tools to support the implementation of the two instruments and contribute to the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I would also like to congratulate Albania, which has accepted the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention. This takes the journey towards entry into force of the GMO amendment a step further. The entry into force of the GMO Amendment can greatly support Parties from both instruments to address important public participation provisions.

While the working group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention is meeting to make recommendations for the governing body meeting of the Aarhus Convention, we are also holding meetings of the Subsidiary Body of Implementation and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. These meetings will make recommendations to the governing body meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Parties are in the process of discussing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework with an element related to biosafety: the Implementation Plan and the Capacity-building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol. These two plans have components related to the Protocol's Article 23, and are key to continuing to provide guidance to countries, much like the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation regarding LMOs (2011-2020) and the previous capacity-building action plan have done for 10 years. This is therefore an opportune moment for us to enhance progress made thus far and make further recommendations on strengthening public participation, awareness and education in issues related to genetically modified organisms.

From the perspective of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the 10th conference of the parties serving as a meeting ,(COP-MOP 10) that is scheduled for October 2021 will be the key meeting to enhance the work on biosafety for the coming 10 years. For you, it will be the next Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. We know in order to make a difference we need the support of many stakeholders as well as better sharing of information.

The seventh meeting of the Aarhus Convention's Task Force on Access to Information on 16 November 2020 noted the importance of the Biosafety clearing-house mechanism for sharing information and the Aarhus Centres for engaging many stakeholders in awareness-raising and educational activities. We also suggest the Action Agenda for Nature and People as a global platform to inspire, connect and mobilize actions for biodiversity and biosafety in line with the the post-2020 framework aim to galvanize urgent and transformative action by governments and all of society.

I would also like to welcome further cooperation between the two secretariats, in particular a round table as recommended by the Chair of the third CBD/Aarhus Convention round table on access to information and public participation regarding LMOs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, the world community agreed to Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Principle 10, among other things, seeks to ensure that everyone has access to information and can participate in the decision-making process.

In that spirit, let us continue to cooperate with the shared mindset of linking our work with broader national agendas, including the SDGs, to further support implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Thank you.
