

STATEMENT BY
MS. WADZANAYI MANDIVENYI
HEAD OF BIOSAFETY UNIT
SECRETARIAT TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
on the occasion of the
SEVENTH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO
THE AARHUS CONVENTION
SEGMENT ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND (HYBRID), 19 OCTOBER 2021

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is appreciative of the opportunity to address the seventh session of the meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and would like to thank Ms. Maia Bitadze for chairing this important segment.

I would like to begin by extending our congratulations to the Aarhus Convention on the occasion of its 20th anniversary since coming into force. The Aarhus Convention provides an important platform for Parties, signatories, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders to advance complementary actions on access to information, public participation and access to justice in relation to GMOs.

The Secretariat to the Convention on Biological diversity has continued to work closely with the Aarhus Convention during the intersessional period. The Secretariat contributed to the deliberations on access to information on genetically modified organisms during the seventh meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information (16 and 17 November 2020).

Despite the challenges of working virtually during this current COVID 19 global Pandemic the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity was actively involved in the organization of two thematic sessions at the twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group in May, and June 2021. During these sessions that addressed important themes of mutual interest on promoting public participation principles in international forums with a thematic focus on biosafety and geoengineering; as well as access to information, public participation and access to justice in relation to GMOs.

The joint development of the “Pocket Guide promoting effective access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms” was a key activity completed. The Pocket Guide aims to strengthen capacities of Governments and stakeholders in providing effective access to information and public participation in decision-making processes. It is available in English and had been translated into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish. It is planned to also translate it into French and Russian. The Pocket guide is available on the Biosafety Clearing house mechanism and has to date received numerous downloads from a range of stakeholders. We therefore encourage all Parties and other stakeholders to make use of the pocket guide and other tools to support the mutual implementation of the two instruments.

Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety are currently engaged in the development and negotiation of a Post 2020 Implementation Plan and Capacity Building Action Plan. The post-2020 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, including its target on biosafety, provide additional opportunities to advance access to information, public participation in decision-making on Living Modified Organisms.

The Implementation Plan is intended to facilitate the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol and is addressed to Parties to the Cartagena Protocol. Specifically, the Implementation Plan includes objectives to ensure that Parties have access to resource materials for promoting and facilitating public awareness, education and participation in biosafety. Objectives for public consultation in making decisions on LMOs, as well as informing the public about the means of public access to the BCH are also included.

The 46 Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety are therefore encouraged to continue to advance the areas of public participation and could facilitate this through their proactive involvement in the post-2020 processes under the Convention.

The Secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on biological Diversity have successfully cooperated for many years and will continue to do so through a range of activities in support of the Post 2020 agenda for biosafety and biodiversity. We have the opportune moment during the upcoming 10th Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties (COP-MOP 10) in 2022. It will be the key meeting to adopt the biodiversity and biosafety plans for the coming 10 years. This platform also have an opportune moment to make key decisions related to genetically modified organisms in this meeting that is key for the next intersessional period.

I would like to welcome further cooperation between the two secretariats, in particular a fourth joint round table as recommended by the Chair of the third CBD/Aarhus Convention round table and cooperation on promoting the ratification of one additional Party for the GMO Amendment to enter into force, which many governments are also working towards.

The continued sharing of experience, good practices and lessons learned will be even more important in the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework era. In this regard, the Action Agenda for Nature and People provides as a global platform to inspire, connect and mobilize actions for biodiversity and biosafety. The Action Agenda platform is an important resource for advancing public participation and education and aims to galvanize urgent and transformative action by governments and all of society.

In conclusion, the 20th anniversary for the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention is an important milestone for acknowledging and commending the important work that is being done to advance Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Thank you