



Fourth Joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity Roundtable on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms¹

11-12 December 2023, Geneva, Switzerland
(Palais des Nations, Salle V, starting at 10.00)

Welcome Remarks

Marco Keiner

Director, UNECE Environment Division

Talking points

Dear Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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

This fourth joint round table seeks to build on the important conclusions reached by the previous meeting held four 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. With the input and recommendations from the third round table, the two secretariats have been closely cooperating to finalize the Pocket Guide on access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs. The Guide includes a host of practical material highlighting the benefits, systemic challenges and priority areas to assist Governments in developing and implementing legislation and procedures in the field of LMOs/GMOs. The successful cooperation between the two secretariats exemplifies the great potential offered by such synergies. In this context, I also would like to highlight the usefulness of close cooperation at national level between the focal points to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol.

I am thus satisfied to see that this meeting is attended by government representatives, academia, private sector, NGOs and other experts engaged in implementation of both instruments and from (almost) every region of the world – in-person or remotely. This promises to offer a unique opportunity to combine various regional perspectives into shared vision. I expect the following 2 days to mark the continuation 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.

The previous joint round table included a training on public participation in decision-making on GMO/LMO related matters. A key conclusion from that training was that public

participation should not be regarded as a tool to veto decisions, but rather as a tool to improve them.

This fourth joint roundtable we are focusing on access to justice – an area that has not yet received a lot of attention in the field of GMO/LMO. We have prepared a training session on this topic tomorrow morning.

I would like to underline that in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals, the transparency and effective public participation have acquired increased significance for the work on GMO/LMO matter. Your work, in particular, relevant for:

- SDG 2 (zero hunger), especially, targets related to food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture (targets 2.2 and 2.4) – access to information and public participation in the development and implementation of agriculture-related policies, plans, programmes and projects.
- SDG 15 (life on land), access to information and public participation in decisions on LMOs/GMOs is crucial for raising public awareness and better decisions regarding the use of genetic resources, sustainable use of ecosystems and biodiversity.
- SDG 16 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making) – the principles of accountability, transparency, inclusivity and the rule of law contained within SDG 16 are key for the implementation of all SDGs, whether directly referred to or otherwise.

Also, today's gathering is highly relevant for tackling the triple planetary crisis, namely: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

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 32 countries. Since the third roundtable in 2019, Albania accepted the GMO amendment in 2020. One more ratification is necessary for the amendment to enter into force. I call upon Parties to achieve the entry into force of the GMO Amendment as soon as possible. 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.

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!

With this, I am pleased to invite Ms. Wadzanayi Mandivenyi, Head of the Biosafety Unit, secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to deliver her statement.