

## OPENING STATEMENT

### FOURTH JOINT AARHUS CONVENTION AND CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ROUND TABLE ON PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION, ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE REGARDING LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS/GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

11-12 December 2023, 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 Mr. David Cooper, the Acting Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this fourth joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity Round Table on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms (LMOs)/Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), here in Geneva.

- I would like begin by extending our heartfelt appreciation Government of Austria and in particular Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch under who's able leadership and support the preparations for this roundtable have been undertaken. We look forward to constructive deliberations under your guidance over the coming days.
- I would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Netherlands for the support provided for the participation of eligible parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety that enabled them to also benefit from this important platform.
- Finally, our sincere thanks go to our counterparts from the Aarhus convention Secretariat for their efforts and positive spirit of collaboration in the preparation of this roundtable.
- 

The longstanding collaboration between our two secretariats has seen us convening three previous round table meetings that produced key outcomes such as the contribution to the previous programme of work on Article 23 (2011-2020) and the development of joint materials such as the Pocket Guide For Promoting Effective Access To Information and Public Participation Regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms .

The joint pocket guide on access to information and public participation regarding GMOs/LMO has enhanced national guidance and helped strengthening national capacities for effective access to information and public participation in decision-making processes regarding LMOs/GMOs.

The scope, extent, and methodologies for public participation are subject to national laws and regulations governing public participation in each Party. In this regard the pocket guide is an important supporting tool in highlighting benefits, overcoming challenges and setting priorities for national implementation of access to information and public participation.

With the Aarhus Convention's collaboration, the CBD Secretariat was also able to develop two e-learning modules on access to information and public participation, to further augment the national guidance on implementing Article 23.

I thank all of you for your previous hard work and collaboration!

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Under Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol Parties are required to “promote and facilitate” public awareness, education and awareness regarding LMOs, and are to “endeavour” to ensure public awareness and education on LMOs that may be imported.

The same article provides that Parties should ensure that public awareness and education encompass access to information on LMOs and requires Parties to consult the public in decision-making, in accordance with domestic legislation.

Article 23(3) of the Protocol requires Parties to take steps to inform the public about the means of access to information contained in the Biosafety Clearing-House (Article 20).

The BCH is an information repository and a central vehicle for implementing the Protocol. It currently has approximately 16 008 records that are available to the public and is therefore an important instrument for access to information.

Now we have new guidance on implementing Article 23 and Article 20.

This round table takes place a few weeks before we celebrate the one-year anniversary of the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This landmark agreement includes a specific Target 17 on biosafety and biotechnology as well as a Target related to access to justice. In addition, the adoption of the Implementation Plan for the Cartagena Protocol and the Capacity-building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol, including goals to promote and facilitate public awareness, education and participation on the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs as well as to improve the availability and exchange of relevant information through the BCH put further impetus on the discussions under this roundtable.

In this regard, I invite all participants to participate actively in the discussions, share information and exchange experiences with the aim of identifying further ways to enhance synergies and collaboration to ensure effective public awareness, access to information, public participation for informed decision-making as well as access to justice.

I invite Parties, non-Parties and other stakeholders to identify how you can incorporate this round table into national and regional guidance, strategies and capacity-building including identifying standards to measure success on public awareness, education, participation, including access to information and access to justice.

As the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, we reiterate our commitment to work jointly with our counterparts in the Aarhus Convention to continue to jointly develop further tools and collaboration for the mutual benefit of our stakeholders.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Twenty years ago, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety entered into force.

Let us continue building on years of success also from the Aarhus Convention process.

With new technology, we have an obligation to enhance collaboration to ensure the safe use of biotechnology for sustainable development.

In this new era, we need your leadership, guidance and sharing of information.

We need your work towards building capacity.

We need your support in proactively collaborate with more stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities as well as with other ministries and among focal points of the two instruments.

I take this opportunity, wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you very much.