

# *Public Research & Regulation*

Foundation with the objective to involve the public research sector in regulations and international agreements relevant to modern biotechnology

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## **MOP3 – opening statement PRRI**

Thank you Madam Chair,

I speak on behalf of the Foundation for Public Research and Regulation.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Government and the kind people of Brazil for their fabulous hospitality, to the Secretariat for the efficient organisation of this meeting, and congratulate Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, for his nomination as Executive Secretary.

Madam Chairman, a main aim of our participation in this meeting is to make the delegates aware that a substantial part of the research on modern biotechnology is conducted for the public good in public research institutes worldwide. We also hope to make the negotiators aware of the concerns of public researchers that certain proposals on the table may have serious implications for public research and its applications.

One of our concerns, Mr. Chairman, is related to the ongoing debate on liability and redress, about which we have just heard a report. We participated in the expert group on liability under the Convention, which appropriately concluded that some fundamental issues have to be addressed before embarking on developing an international regime or even decide to do so. For example defining what constitutes ‘damage to biodiversity’.

The discussion on liability in the expert group under the Protocol, in which we also participated, on the other hand, seems to move ahead without much consideration of these fundamental questions. We urge the Protocol expert group to take a stepwise approach by giving due attention to the debate under the CBD and to the fundamental questions. In addition, Mr. Chairman, we urge that the liability expert group identify means to ensure it is well informed of the science behind the applications they are discussing. We offer our help in identifying public researchers who can address the group at its next meeting to provide scientific explanations about issues under discussion.

Madam Chairman, over 40 public researchers from all of the world attend this meeting under the umbrella of our Foundation, and we take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the governments of Canada, Spain and the United States, as well as to the Rockefeller Foundation and private sector organizations for their financial contributions, without which the participation of these scientists would not have been possible. PRRI extends its gratitude to the Brazilian Biosafety Association ANBio, for its invaluable help with logistics and with getting media coverage. PRRI also thanks the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) for their support.

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We are pleased, Madam Chairman, to make the expertise of the many scientists of our group available to you and to all delegations participating in this meeting, and we hope that delegates will not hesitate to approach us with any scientific questions they may have. To facilitate that, we have held a side event today on biotechnology research in Africa and will hold one later this week, in which we will present overviews of the ongoing public research in Latin America, and give one in depth presentation on the production of animal vaccines in plants. This side event will be held in Spanish.

Madam Chairman, the opening session this morning showed how important it is for the credibility of this process, that this august gathering avails itself of the best technical knowledge available. Comparing LMOs with rotten meat, for example, is not only inappropriate in a forum like this, but also reflects the serious misperception that LMOs are inherently dangerous, which they are not. Madam Chairman, as you know, tens of thousands public scientists world wide conduct research on LMOs, aimed at helping to address some of the very pressing problems in food supply, health care and protection of biodiversity. During the last decades, over a billion acres have been planted with genetically modified crops by millions of farmers and many thousands of field trials have been carried out, without one single verifiable report of adverse effects to either human health or biodiversity. This does not mean that LMOs are inherently safe, but it does show that the methodology of risk assessment, which is based on the precautionary approach, is effective.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to end my introduction by assuring you and the delegations of our full and enthusiastic support for the difficult task ahead this week.

I thank you very much for your attention.