

Public Research & Regulation

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

Second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Montreal, Canada, 30 May - 3 June 2005).

Closing Statement – Plenary 3 June 2005

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

As MOP2 is concluding and looking forward to MOP3, the Foundation for Public Research and Regulation appreciates the opportunity to present our general views on the process.

Mr. Chairman, we note with satisfaction a growing understanding in this meeting that a very substantial part of the research on modern biotechnology is conducted for the public good in public research institutes worldwide.

However, we have also come to appreciate that the debate often seems to have lost sight of the original context of the Biosafety Protocol. That context is Article 19 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is titled “The handling of biotechnology and the distribution of its benefits”. Article 19 of the CBD calls upon all Parties to provide for the effective participation in biotechnological research activities and to take measures to promote access to the results and benefits arising from biotechnologies. The background for that article can be found in Agenda 21, which explains that modern biotechnology has great potential for human well-being. This is repeated in the Preamble of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and has also been reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which was held in Johannesburg 2002.

Since the adoption of the CBD in 1992, up to 400 million hectares of LMO crops have been planted by millions of farmers in developing and developed countries, consumed in billions of meals, and there have been no verifiable reports of adverse effects to human health or biodiversity.

Mr. Chairman, while it is encouraging that these data confirm the quality of the risk assessments conducted, we have learned something much more important since 1992: there is a growing and urgent need to also explore the possibilities of modern biotechnology in crops that are not large commodity crops, but feed billions of people in developing countries.

Listening to the debate, however, we often get the feeling that LMOs are perceived to be among the most dangerous things on earth, rather than crop-plants that are designed to produce more or better food in an environmentally friendly way.

Such a sentiment was also apparent during last week’s Liability Meeting. We are concerned that a number of Parties appear to support the development of a liability regime that could effectively stop public research in modern biotechnology. We very much regret that the Liability Meeting did not provide the opportunity for stakeholders to express their general views at the end of the meeting, which we believe would have been important for the overall direction of the debate.

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Mr. Chairman, we are convinced that it will be crucial for the success of the Cartagena Protocol that the debate keeps sight of the original context: modern biotechnology has great potential for human well-being when, of course, developed and used with adequate safety measures for the environment and human health. Such safety measures should logically be commensurate with the level of risk involved.

Another aspect that is important for the success of the Protocol is the need to ensure the scientific quality of information being made available and assistance provided. This is particularly the case for risk assessment, information on the BCH, capacity building, and the roster of experts. We happily repeat our offer to assist the MOP and the Secretariat in the process of formulating quality criteria.

Mr. Chairman, this is the first time that we are participating in this process and while a bit overwhelmed by this whole process, we have learned every minute of this meeting. As you have noticed, for instance, we are still perfecting the art of pushing the speak button at the right moment.

Yet, we are encouraged by this week's meeting. We are encouraged by the dedication of the delegates to work day and night, and we are encouraged by the number of delegates who have been keen to talk to us.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to participating in MOP3 and we wish to assure the delegates of our availability to provide scientific information before as well as during MOP3.

I thank you very much for your attention.