

PRRI MOP4 Statement on Risk Assessment - 13 May 2008

Thank you Mr./Mrs. Chairman,

I speak on behalf of the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI).

PRRI believes that one of the great values of the Biosafety Protocol is that it reflects international agreement on the principles and methodology for risk assessment of releases of living modified organisms (LMOs). Risk assessment (RA) is key to the functioning of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB), as it is the basis for decision making under the Protocol procedures. All provisions under the CPB, such as rules for transboundary movement, liability and redress, Advanced Informed Agreement (AIA), only make sense once actual risk assessments have been conducted, and decisions based on these risk assessments have been made.

There is some misperception that there is little experience with risk assessment of LMOs and that adverse effects have been identified. PRRI wishes to point out that the agreed principles and methodology for RA as laid down in Annex III of the Biosafety protocol were not invented during the negotiations, but are in fact a reflection of the knowledge and experience gained over 25 years. Many thousands of field trials and over a hundred genetically modified crop varieties for commercial use have been approved using those agreed principles and methodology. From all these applications there is not one single verifiable report of adverse effects to either human health or biodiversity of presently released crops, indicating that the current RA and management is indeed effective.

It is important to remember that the precautionary approach does not mean 'zero risk'. RA methodology is based on the precautionary approach, using verifiable and replicable scientific reasoning that can be conducted in a transparent manner. Ideally it should only test meaningful hypotheses and not lead to unnecessary data gathering or other costly hurdles. PRRI believes that current agricultural practices should be used as a baseline for RA, to allow lower-risk technologies to replace less safe methods. The potential benefits of adoption should also be considered.

Given that in the Fourth meeting, the Parties to the Protocol will commence reviewing the functioning of the Protocol, PRRI believes that this review should evaluate the experience to date with the RA methodology, considering:

- The number of risk assessments that have been conducted consistent with the RA methodology.
- Whether there are cases for which that RA methodology has not been adequate.



- The applicability of the RA methodology to other types of LMOs than genetically modified crop plants, and areas where further guidance maybe useful.

It is important to:

- clarify the misperceptions on the experience and effectiveness on RA;
- identify areas where biosafety research does not generate information that is necessary for determining safety;
- and determine whether and which further guidance for the rapidly advancing biotechnology applications is needed.

Thank you very much for your attention.