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## PRRI Statement on GM Trees – 27 May

Mr. Chair,

We have heard with interest the calls for further research on GM forest trees from several parties. The Public Research and Regulation Initiative would like to emphasize that field research on GM trees is essential for biosafety assessments. Such research is currently underway in no less than 19 countries in over 20 species of fruit and nuts, pulp and paper and horticultural crops evaluating nine different types of traits. These include pest and disease resistance, such as fungus resistance in bananas, abiotic stress such as temperature and drought, yield, quality and phyto-remediation. The reason for these field trials is that they are the **ONLY** way to assess the risk and benefits of GM trees on a case by case basis, since laboratory analyses cannot provide meaningful ecological information, meaningful assessment of environmental variation and aspects of tree management.

We ask parties to recognise the importance of this research also in their own government research institutes and universities.

For this reason, we strongly advocate the need for such controlled field releases of forest trees.

With regard to the proposed text we have the following suggestions:

- The phrase: “which is the basis for the precautionary approach as set out in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety” incorrectly suggests that the precautionary approach is set out (or redefined) in the protocol. We propose that the text should read, consistent with the Protocol itself: “which is the basis for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety”.
- We support the rest of the text until line 7 up to “of genetically modified trees”.
- We suggest deleting the text beginning on line 7 with “and collaborate with..” to the end of the paragraph
- We specifically request that the last paraphrase on line 10 beginning with “and only release” to the end of the paragraph be deleted.

The above suggestions reaffirm the need to apply the precautionary approach as stated in principle 15 of the Rio Declaration and welcomes the decision of MOP4 to establish an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on risk assessment. The reason for the deletion of the end of the paragraph is that this simply states the terms of reference of this Expert Group, and those are yet to be established under the decision of MOP4. The last paraphrase is contradictory to the decision of MOP4 to establish an ad-hoc working group on risk assessment by pre-supposing the recommendations of this group. This paraphrase can be interpreted as a prohibition of public field research of GM trees required to assess biosafety, the mandate of the protocol. The Public Research and Regulation Initiative is happy to assist in providing further information for your deliberations.

Thank you Mr. Chair.