

Statement by the delegation of the Cook Islands on capacity building

Mr. Chairman, I have the honor to speak on behalf of the 43 Members and Observers of the Alliance of Small Island States – AOSIS. Our delegations will be speaking as a group at this first meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol, as well as at the future sessions. Our group held a preparatory workshop last week in Saint Kitts and Nevis. We thoroughly discussed all issues on the agenda of this meeting.

My delegation will be the spokesperson for the Alliance of Small Island States in this working group, and I wish to share with other delegations some of our views on capacity building. We have generally agreed that the potential benefits and the possible threats posed by modern biotechnology to Small Island Developing States creates a very difficult and unique scenario for SIDS as a group among developing countries. We therefore reaffirm the principles of the Rio Declaration and the Barbados Declaration, in that special attention and care must be given to SIDS unique constraints, given our vulnerability to external shocks and relative dependence on certain imports and exports. Since SIDS are entirely or predominantly coastal entities, there is the potential to view SIDS as possible laboratory sites for controlled experimentation with field releases. Moreover, the lack of infrastructure, capacity, legislation and information in SIDS on current biotechnology experimentation and use raises concerns. In addition the fragility of the biodiversity in SIDS makes the risk management particularly difficult.

It has been generally noted that the capacity building needs of SIDS will be a very great challenge. This issue will remain a major preoccupation for the group for a considerable time.

While we have not made a final decision on what capacity building requirements will be needed for our countries, the following issues should be taken into account as fundamental recommendations:

- the creation of national centers for information exchange, utilizing existing capacity where appropriate such as the national focal points for biodiversity;
- the creation of regional biosafety and biotechnology centers of excellence, and where possible these should build on existing capacities, bearing in mind the need for a careful balance between the scientific and technical advice with legal and regulatory frameworks, utilizing regional organizations and universities where appropriate;
- the establishment of a SIDS biosafety network, as a means of information sharing of particular concern to SIDS, building on the existing infrastructure and linkages provided by SIDSNet;
- the need to focus on strengthening countries ability to carry out risk assessments, to evaluate and control risks, and to thoroughly manage these risks in the short and long term; and
- the need to also focus on the training and education needs of SIDS in the determination of their needs in complying with and effectively implementing the Cartagena Protocol, through workshops and training courses at the national, regional and inter-regional level.

There is also a need to look at the unique situation of SIDS when providing guidance on the development of legislation on biosafety. This is particularly relevant in the context of any discussion on transit of LMOs.

Let me also mention the generous offer by the Government of Cuba to host an international workshop on capacity building on biosafety for developing countries in 2001.

Mr. Chairman, we are of course not in a position to answer, in an absolute fashion, the question of what are our capacity building needs. We can not say that we will need so many microbiologists, so many biochemists, so many pharmacologists. We know that we will need some of these, and we also know that there may be some existing capacity in our regions. One of our first tasks will be to look into the status of our capacity. A parallel priority will be to hold national and regional meetings that would further elaborate on our capacity building needs. We will require financial and technical assistance to carry out these activities, which we expect will lead to concrete national needs assessments.

Mr. Chairman, we do have some concrete textual proposals to the document, which we can put forward at the appropriate time. Let me only mention that we wish to adhere strictly to the text of the protocol, and that the terminology which recognizes the special needs of the least developed and small island developing States among them must be retained in our decision.

Thank you.

### Specific textual proposals

#### INSTITUTION BUILDING

##### *Needs assessment and Biosafety framework planning:*

- Add bullet “g) Identify and create plans to make linkages to related national and international environmental programs.”

##### *Long-term regime building/maintenance*

- Add bullet “d) Develop/strengthen legal structures and instruments on Liability and redress.”

#### RISK ASSESSMENT

##### *General risk assessment capacities*

- Modify bullet d) as follows: “Identification and capacity to understand relevant biotechnology processes and applications.”

### *Science and socio-economic capacities*

- Modify bullet a) as follows: “Analyse risks to conservation, protection and sustainable use of biodiversity”
- Modify bullet f) as follows: “Assess the value and roles of biodiversity to local and indigenous communities”
- Modify bullet g) as follows: “Cooperation on research and information on socio-economic considerations related to biodiversity”

## RISK MANAGEMENT

### *General risk management capacities*

- Modify as follows: “Understanding and ability to apply risk management tools to accepted preset standards in relevant biotechnology sectors.”

### *Implementation of decisions*

- Modify bullet b) as follows: “Monitoring actual environmental impacts as compare to the anticipated results”
- Add bullet “d) Emergency response capacity to mitigate risks presented by an intentional LMO introduction which has had unexpected and undesirable outcomes.”

## CROSS-CUTTING CAPACITIES

### *Data management and information-sharing*

- Add bullet “d) Creation of national and regional centers for information exchange.”

### *Involvement of stakeholders e.g. non-governmental organizations, local communities, private sector*

- Modify bullet a) as follows: “Capacity to negotiate with and provide opportunity for stakeholders’ involvement.”
- Modify bullet b) as follows: “Process for stakeholders’ consultation in development of risk assessment and management regimes.”
- Modify bullet c) as follows: “ Process for stakeholders’ consultation prior to decision.”

### *Regional capacity development*

- Modify bullet c) as follows: “Training of human resources, including the creation of regional training centers.”
- Modify bullet d) as follows: “Information sharing, including the creation of regional centers for information exchange and strengthening of existing regional training centers/institutions.”