



CGRFA-10 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2004

Delegates to the tenth regular session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA-10) heard reports from international organizations and addressed: a Norwegian proposal to establish a seed storage facility in the Arctic Circle; the draft code of conduct on biotechnology; future work of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITWG-PGR); cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); and FAO activities on agricultural biodiversity. The Near East nominated Egypt, Iran and Jordan for participation in the ITWG-PGR, and Egypt, Iran and Yemen for the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITWG-AnGR).

PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

SVALBARD FACILITY: NORWAY presented a proposal to establish a seed storage facility in the Arctic Circle. He said the facility would duplicate material kept in existing gene banks, on a voluntary basis, and function as an international safety net. Many delegates welcomed the initiative, and ANGOLA expressed appreciation for Nordic support to the Southern African plant genetic resources programme. The UK highlighted its capacity-building programme regarding recalcitrant seeds. The International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), on behalf of the CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (CGIAR), emphasized that eleven of its centers are committed to submitting duplicates of their in-trust collections.

Responding to questions, NORWAY added that: the facility does not aim to replace existing gene banks; seed regeneration should be supplied by the gene banks; operating costs will be moderate and funding can be expected through the Global Crop Diversity Trust; an international committee could discuss governance of the facility; and material covered by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR) could be the first benchmark.

CODE OF CONDUCT ON BIOTECHNOLOGY: The Secretariat presented a progress report on the draft code of conduct on biotechnology, including a list of potential areas for future work (CGRFA-10/04/13). The US and AUSTRALIA requested time to review the report. The Netherlands, on behalf of the European Community and its Member States (EU), emphasized the central role of the Biosafety Protocol and prioritized work on: national capacity building and international

cooperation; biosafety and environmental concerns; and, with BRAZIL, incentives to promote appropriate modern biotechnologies.

Highlighting incidents of genetic contamination of the CGIAR collections and the need to extend access and benefit-sharing (ABS) regimes to animal genetic resources (AnGR), ANGOLA urged addressing: gene flow and liability; biosafety; and genetic use restriction technologies. Cameroon, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, underlined the need to develop capacity in African countries to create demand-driven genetically modified (GM) crops. NORWAY called for addressing unintended gene flows and building national capacities. BRAZIL emphasized genetic resource conservation and ABS issues. IRAN prioritized a mechanism for the recognition of the country of origin of genetic resources. The THIRD WORLD NETWORK stressed the need for regulation preventing the introgression of transgenic materials into centers of origin. The ACTION GROUP ON EROSION, TECHNOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION (ETC GROUP) said the Commission should work on gene flow and liability, and monitor developments on intellectual property rights and new technologies. Chair Eng-Siang Lim (Malaysia) said the final decision will be taken during discussion on CGRFA's future work.

ITWG-PGR FUTURE WORK: CANADA presented a compromise reached in an informal group, noting that the ITWG-PGR would: undertake a preliminary analysis on technical cooperation between the CGRFA and the ITPGR Governing Body; review the Global Plan of Action (GPA) and the State of the World report; advise on capacity building relating to the GPA; and receive information on the Svalbard storage facility, the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the IPGRI draft guidelines on transgenes in *ex situ* collections. The US requested work on markets as a means of access to crop genetic services and conservation of agricultural biodiversity. The EU and ANGOLA supported stakeholder involvement in the review of cooperation between CGRFA and ITPGR. Chair Lim noted that additional items may be included when discussing CGRFA's future work.

REPORTS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Chair Lim introduced the reports from international organizations (CGRFA-10/04/11.1-3 and Add.1).

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: The CBD outlined relevant decisions of its seventh Conference of the Parties, including: initiation of a global partnership to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010; negotiations on an international legally binding regime on ABS; and a cross-



cutting initiative to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger by 2015.

The WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH (OIE) offered to contribute to CGRFA's work on: facilitating access to and transfer of AnGR; developing the first State of the World report on AnGR through regional consultations; and evaluating the feasibility of AnGR gene banks. The WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION reported on the outcomes of the seventh session of its Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, including creation of a policy forum on traditional knowledge, and work on disclosure requirements in patent applications. The UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY offered to assist the CGRFA on ITPGR implementation and other areas. The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NEW VARIETIES OF PLANTS (UPOV) stated that the UPOV Convention and the ITPGR should be mutually supportive.

Tunisia, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, urged the CGRFA to endorse the suggestion made by the OIE on regional consultations for developing the State of the World report, as fully reflecting African countries' needs, with the EU welcoming the OIE's offers regarding AnGR.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: The CENTER FOR THE APPLICATION OF MOLECULAR BIOLOGY TO INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE invited delegates to a presentation of BIOS – Biological Innovation for Open Society, an open access regime for biological enabling technologies. The INTERMEDIARY TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT GROUP (ITDG) outlined threats to agricultural biodiversity, including monocultures, proprietary seeds and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Concerned about GMO contamination due to food aid, he invited the Commission to take action to decontaminate the food aid pipeline, and called for full implementation of farmers' and livestock keepers' rights. ACTION AID INTERNATIONAL called for: effective farmers' participation in the CGRFA and ITPGR bodies; recognition of traditional knowledge, and farmers' and women's contributions; extension of the ITPGR list of crops; allocation of resources for ITPGR implementation; and consideration of unintended gene flow. The PEASANT MOVEMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES (KMP) highlighted the negative impacts of the International Rice Research Institute's work on farmers in the region, elaborating issues of corporate control over food and livelihoods, health and the environment.

CGIAR: IPGRI presented a report on the activities of the CGIAR centers, including partnerships with other institutions and organizations. He outlined activities on livestock, aquatic and forestry genetic resources, and tabled a CGIAR proposal to establish an international research facilitation unit cutting across all agricultural biodiversity components.

COOPERATION WITH THE CBD

The Secretariat outlined issues and ways to strengthen cooperation with the CBD (CGRFA 10/04/12), including an in-depth review of the CBD work programme on agricultural biodiversity and further development of agricultural biodiversity indicators.

The EU prioritized collaboration in developing an international ABS regime, CBD thematic work programmes, and reporting and indicators. CANADA supported: linking the GPA with the Global Plant Conservation Strategy; reviewing the CBD work programme on agricultural biodiversity; reporting on the establishment of the initiative on biodiversity for food

and nutrition at the next meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice; developing agricultural biodiversity indicators; and holding technical consultations on agriculture, food, nutrition and biodiversity.

The CBD emphasized that FAO is its lead partner for the implementation of its work programme on agricultural biodiversity and prioritized: revision of the work programme; the cross-cutting initiative on biodiversity for food and nutrition; and further work on domesticated animal breeds and plant varieties. The US requested to finalize discussion on collaboration with the CBD during discussions on the future work of the CGRFA, to obtain an overview over activities planned and resources needed.

FAO REPORTS ON ACTIVITIES ON AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY

The Secretariat presented the reports on FAO policies, programmes and activities on agricultural biodiversity, regarding sectorial and cross-sectorial matters, and priority areas for inter-disciplinary action (PAIAs) (CGRFA-10/04/10.1-3).

SWITZERLAND called for developing guidelines on sustainable agriculture and rural development, particularly in mountain regions. Regarding PAIAs, the EU emphasized, *inter alia*: integrated biodiversity management; provision of technical expertise and assistance to developing countries; partnership with the CBD; and continuation of cooperation between the FAO and the International Federation for Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

IFOAM highlighted the First World Conference on Organic Seeds, held in Rome in July 2004. Noting that GMOs are a biological and economic threat to organic agriculture, she called for guidelines on the co-existence of conventional and GM crops.

Chair Lim urged delegates to promote the CGRFA agenda in the different FAO programmes and activities, and to use its human and financial resources. The Secretariat added that requesting new activities will require either a revision of priority setting or new funds. In the discussion, delegates also addressed: coordination between FAO activities; organic farming and sustainable agriculture; and capacity building for biosafety. TURKEY suggested that the FAO engage in harmonizing national legislative efforts on AnGR. The Secretariat announced a study on existing legal frameworks to be published in 2005, and UGANDA offered to share its AnGR Breeding Act as a model for other countries.

IPGRI offered its collaboration on the proposed cross-cutting initiative on biodiversity for food and nutrition. Responding to a question by ACTION AID INTERNATIONAL on greater NGO participation in the preparation of the FAO Report on the State of Food and Agriculture, the Secretariat reported that discussions are on-going.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Several participants, anxious for a bit of sparkle, left the room disappointed, as the discussions on the development of the code of conduct on biotechnology were conducted in a business-as-usual manner. One noted with astonishment that disagreements were not even articulated, let alone resolved. Others, however, were quick to point out that it is the Commission's duty to provide balanced technical and policy advice on genetic resource issues, and avoid political controversies.

One participant cautioned that all unresolved issues will beleaguer tomorrow's discussion on defining the Commission's future work, and expected delegates to find their sparkles when having to compromise different regional priorities and articulate a comprehensive strategy for the years to come.