Regional Training Workshop

"Enforcement of biosafety regulations: principles, specific examples and institutional communication and cooperation"

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Opening Statement
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Opening address
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Distinguished Guests
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to welcome you all on behalf of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on this regional training workshop on enforcement of biosafety regulations and institutional communication and cooperation.

Also, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to our partner, the Czech Government, with which we have a long tradition in cooperating on biosafety area; it can be traced back to 2006, and which made this event possible.

I would like to limit my speech to two points: (i) placing the outcomes of the present meeting into **food security** context, aligned with the FAO mandate; and (iii) FAO position on the transgenic technology.

Food security

Today, the producers more than ever need our support in promoting innovative ways to boost production. The challenge is to produce and supply enough safe and nutritious food in a sustainable way for a growing global population, which is projected to reach 9.15 Bn by 2050.

A convergence of factors has made food security one of the most important global issues. An increasing population wants a **more varied diet**, but is trying to grow more food on less land with limited access to water, all the time facing increased costs for production inputs, such as fertilizer, fuel and transportation.

At the regional level, the situation with food security is not elsewhere promising: if we look at progress on MDG 1 for the Caucasus and Central Asian region—the poor countries of this region where FAO focuses its efforts—we see that, according to the 2011 MDG report, the proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day has actually quadrupled between 1990 and 2005. In 1990 6% of the population of these countries lived in extreme poverty, while in 2005 19% of the population did.

Agricultural research and technology adoption have enabled a growing populace to avoid mass starvation. They have increased much-needed food supplies, reduced hunger and alleviated poverty. Nonetheless, agricultural production will need to increase by 60% worldwide and double in the

developing countries by 2050. Most of the increase in production (more than 85 percent) over the next 40 years is expected to derive from improved yields rather than expansion of arable farmland. The challenge is made more pressing by climate change and the eroding natural resource base, both projected to have an impact on agricultural productivity and poverty. In a warmer world with harsher, more variable weather, plants and animals raised for food will need to have the biological capacity to adapt more quickly than ever before.

FAO welcomes scientific and technological research that can help to improve or increase food production. GMOs are an option that needs to be explored and can contribute to food security. FAO supports a science-based evaluation system that would help to weigh the benefits and the risks of each GMO before it is incorporated into a food production system. At the global level, it is important that countries agree to standards and norms on GMOs, for instance with regards to food labeling for consumers.

But the decision of whether a country should adopt or not GMOs is not a decision that FAO can make, it is the responsibility of each government. FAO's role is to support them, as requested, so they can make sound decisions and build capacities so that they are in position to regulate the use of GMOs if they decide to use it. Upon official request, FAO is working together with governments on this issue.

Often, a question rises of whether **GMOs are necessary** or not.

As things stand now, there are many other technologies - conventional technologies – that have already been successful, but which poor farmers don't even have access to. These are technologies that could lead to significant increases in food production.

But we cannot afford not to explore this possibility, provided that every technology has its limits. Generally speaking, in the future, we will need all the resources we can make use of, and this may include GMOs, because we cannot be sure at this point in time what will happen with increasing temperatures and climate change.

Finally, during the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan, a Strategic Plan for full implementation of the Protocol until 2020 was agreed.

However, the institutional and individual capacities in of government officials, policymakers, scientists, inspectorates, extension services and other CSOs to implement and enforce national biosafety frameworks or issues associated with high uncertainty and high political stand, were seen as a weakness and limiting factor in Europe and Central Asia.

Dear Participants,

This Forum is pioneering in bringing together senior officials from both Ministries of environment and agriculture and scientists from 16 countries in Europe and Central Asia sharing their experiences in implementation and enforcement of their NBFs and discussing how their communicate and cooperate in order to reach the goals faster and in a sustainable way.

I wish all of us to have a fruitful discussion and successful meeting.

Thank you.