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## **WRI Welcomes New Treaty Governing Living Modified Organisms**

WASHINGTON, DC, September 9, 2003 – The World Resources Institute (WRI) welcomes the coming into force of the first legally-binding international treaty governing shipments of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.

The treaty, known as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, comes into effect on Sept. 11 -- 90 days after it was ratified by Palau, the 50<sup>th</sup> country to do so. There are currently 103 signatories to the protocol.

“This is a historic treaty, marking the commitment of the international community to ensure the safe transfer, handling, and use of the products of modern biotechnology,” said WRI president Jonathan Lash. “If implemented effectively, the Cartagena Protocol is a powerful instrument to deal with the risks posed by modern biotechnology especially to poor farming communities throughout the world.”

The Cartagena Protocol aims to contribute to the safe transfer, handling, and use of living modified organisms that may have adverse effects on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It also takes into account risks to human health and their socio-economic impacts particularly on poor farmers and indigenous peoples. The heart of the treaty is the establishment of a procedure called Advanced Informed Agreement (AIA), which requires governments to give consent before living modified organisms, can be imported into a country. It also requires governments to ensure that the public has a say in making decisions on living modified organisms.

Studies indicate that today, more than half of the world’s population live in countries where genetically modified or transgenic crops are approved and grown. Since they were first introduced in 1996, the global area planted to these crops increased from 1.7 million hectares to 58.7 million hectares as of 2002. This ranks as one of the highest rates of adoption for new crop technologies. The principal transgenic crops are soybean (62 % of the global area), corn (21%), cotton (12%), and canola (5%).

The Cartagena Protocol, part of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), took five years to negotiate before it was adopted in 2000. To date, 57 countries and the European Union have ratified the protocol. Despite the active role it has taken in negotiations, the United States cannot ratify the Cartagena Protocol because it is not a signatory to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity.

“This is another example where the United States is lagging behind the rest of the world in dealing with global environmental concerns,” said Dr. Tony La Vina, WRI senior fellow and co-author of the new report, *An Explanatory Guide to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety*. “The United States, and specially its private sector, is the leading proponent of this technology and should take the lead on making sure that it is handled and released safely.”