

**STATEMENT BY
HAMDALLAH ZEDAN
ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

At the Opening Session of the
Intersessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention
Montréal, 28 June 1999

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome you to Montreal for the inter-sessional meeting on the operations of the Convention. I know that many of you were here last week to participate in the fourth meeting of SBSTTA. I hope you had a good weekend and were able to re-charge your batteries ready for this week's meeting. For those delegates who have joined us for this meeting, I wish you a special welcome to Montreal.

This is an extremely important meeting of the Convention. During the inter-sessional period between the fourth and fifth meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) work has been advancing on various fronts. The issues that this meeting will address will assist the Conference of the Parties, when it meets in Nairobi next year, to take decisions on how to further improve the operations of the Convention. As you have just stressed, Mr. President, it is only through effective management and organisation of our limited resources that the Convention will be able to achieve its ambitious aims. Nowhere is this more apparent than from the vantage point of the Secretariat.

With a view to making the most effective use of the Convention's resources, the Conference of the Parties last year embarked upon a process of reviewing the operations of the Convention. The changes resulting from this review have already made a significant impact on the operations of the Convention as demonstrated at the SBSTTA meeting last week. The review, however, was not complete. Some issues were left unresolved: hence the origin of this meeting.

Mr. President,

From our perspective, you have mentioned the most critical issues confronting the effective operations of the Convention. I would like to support and echo your comments.

I would especially like to take this opportunity to reinforce the importance of your observations regarding the need to develop a more effective method for producing and using scientific assessments. This is fundamental to the success of the Convention. Last week, the Chairman of SBSTTA and I both emphasised the need for SBSTTA to focus on the preparation of scientific, technical and technological advice of the highest quality. As the Chairman noted, SBSTTA needs to base its work on the best available science and knowledge and to provide the bridge between research and policy-making. This will only happen if a more systematic approach is

adopted with respect to assessments. How this can be achieved is a critical issue for this meeting as much as it is a matter for SBSTTA itself.

At its meeting last week, SBSTTA adopted a number of recommendations on how to ensure the provision of such scientifically-based advice to the Conference of the Parties. In particular, it made recommendations on a strategic plan, on peer review and scientific assessments, on a system of notifications to Parties, on closer links between scientific bodies, and on matters of co-operation generally. These are matters that we will be considering at this meeting. The recommendations that SBSTTA adopted last week are available to assist you in your review of the operations of the Convention.

Another issue especially close to our hearts in the Secretariat is the need for clear decisions by the Conference of the Parties. Decisions should identify who is expected to do what, with what resources, in what time frame, and by what means their implementation will be monitored and measured. This type of clarity is to assist you as Parties, the Secretariat, and the other bodies and processes whose co-operation the COP is seeking. Ambiguous decisions are not only hard to implement, and undermine the authority of the Conference of the Parties; they also waste resources.

This meeting will also address questions of access to genetic resources and benefit sharing. Access and benefit sharing is a key topic for COP/5. It is a critical aspect of the Convention. Moreover, it is one of the few areas where the Convention is expected to lead policy development. It is also one of the most political and complex issues which the Convention addresses. As such, it has already received considerable attention within the COP. Unfortunately, although understandably, progress has been slow. Therefore, it is important that this meeting focus on issues on which it can make progress while recognising that broad and comprehensive progress cannot be made on all aspects of the matter at the same time. One important aspect where progress can be achieved is in providing guidance to the Expert Panel on Access and Benefit Sharing, which is to meet in Costa Rica in October this year. I am really thankful to the Governments of Costa Rica and Switzerland who will co-host the meeting.

Finally, Mr. President, as you have noted, there will be an opportunity this week to consult on the process for the adoption of the protocol on biosafety. This will be possible on the margins of this meeting and at the consultation that will take place on Thursday. I am pleased to see that many of the negotiators from the Cartagena meeting are here today. We have made facilities available for informal consultations. I would urge everyone involved in this process to make the most of this vital opportunity to identify a clear process for finalizing the negotiations on the protocol. I will ensure that the resources of the Secretariat are available for this purpose.

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,

Allow me to repeat my thanks to the Governments who provided support to enable wider participation in this meeting and to repeat that, as always the Secretariat stands ready to assist you in your endeavours.

Thank you.