



SBSTTA 24 online sessions, February, 2021
Agenda Item 4: Synthetic Biology

Thank you Chair,
I am speaking on behalf of the CBD Alliance

Since this Convention made its first decision on Synthetic Biology at SBSTTA 14 in Nairobi, Synthetic Biology has expanded in scope, scale, depth of intervention and disruption at a dizzying speed. The parties to the CBD were wise to start engaging early in governing Synthetic Biology in accordance with the precautionary principle. It is now wrong time to abdicate oversight and derail a decade of careful work. You are being asked (again), whether Synthetic Biology is a new and emerging Issue for the CBD. It clearly is.

2) You are being asked to establish a Multidisciplinary Technical Expert Group (MTEG) to provide early and up-to-date analysis to SBSTTA, supported by a range of expertise, including that of indigenous peoples and local communities. Participatory technology assessment methodologies are key for the MTEG to adequately assess health, socioeconomic, cultural and ethical impacts. Civil Society strongly supports the establishment of this MTEG.

3) Parties are asked to consider the development and application of new biotechnologies where engineered nucleic acids are used in the open environment, such as RNAi sprays. The most recent AHTEG on Synthetic Biology flagged concerns that these new transient modification biotechnologies may fall outside of the Cartagena Protocol. How should they be governed given their novel risks? We urge parties to request work by the CBD to explore both the risks and governance of these transient expression technologies.

4) We are very concerned that research and development of organisms containing engineered gene drives is progressing, with clear plans for release. We reiterate the need to apply extreme precaution on gene drive organisms and to re-emphasize the importance of free prior informed consent of potentially affected peoples. We call for an immediate global moratorium on the release of gene drive organisms into the environment, including experimental release. International contained use regulations for gene drive organisms don't exist and are urgently needed.

5) Free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) must be obtained before releasing any Synthetic Biology organisms, components or products that may impact traditional knowledge, innovation, practices, livelihoods and use of natural resources.

6) Further work is needed on detection, identification and monitoring of organisms, components and products of Synthetic Biology, as current detection tools are not sufficient to identify those. Additional

detection, identification and monitoring tools should be required of developers before any approval of release into the environment or market.

Thank you.