

## Memorandum

**DATE:** June 14, 2002

**A / PARA / TO:** Council

**CC:** Alternative Representatives  
Joint Public Advisory Committee

**DE / FROM:** Executive Director

**OBJET / ASUNTO / RE:** Article 13 Report on Genetic Diversity of Traditional Maize Varieties in Mexico

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I am pleased to inform you that the Secretariat of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation will begin to develop a Secretariat report to Council, pursuant to Article 13 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, on issues related to the protection of plant genetic diversity for maize. The report proposes to examine several issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of traditional maize varieties in Mexico. These issues could include, *inter alia*, the relationship between the production of traditional maize varieties and the conservation and sustainable use of megadiversity in Mexico; the effects of trade liberalization in the farm sector, effects of non-traditional corn imports on the conservation of traditional maize varieties; and the effectiveness of domestic policy measures in place in Mexico, including the moratorium on planting transgenic corn varieties, and on protecting traditional maize varieties.

The report lies within the scope of the 2002 Annual Program of Work, and will address matters directly related to two program areas within the CEC: Environment, Economy and Trade, which is currently examining the environmental effects of trade liberalization in the agricultural sector, building on three past reports (1999, 2001, 2002) by the Secretariat which examined the effects of trade on traditional maize varieties; and the Conservation of Biodiversity program area, in which, *inter alia*, the issue of “insufficient knowledge on the impact of emerging technologies, such as the use of transgenics, [is] one of North America’s most important concerns to biodiversity” (CEC *Baseline Report* 2000). The issue will be addressed in the final CEC Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity.

The potential effects of transgenic corn on traditional varieties of maize in Mexico has been a source of public concern for several years. Following the introduction by the Mexican government of a moratorium on the planting of transgenic corn crops, the issue of the effectiveness of this measure remains a source of analysis and debate. Since April 2002, the CEC Secretariat has received a number of letters and petitions from members of civil society in Mexico and worldwide, requesting that the Secretariat initiate an analysis of this issue.

The contents of the Secretariat report will be conveyed to the Parties in the coming months. In general, it will include an overview of crop genetic diversity of maize in Mexico; the dynamic links between genetic crop diversity, biodiversity, and the livelihood of indigenous community groups and other issues; the effects of trade liberalization on traditional maize variety; a review of the scientific literature of relevance to the relationship between transgenic corn and traditional maize varieties; the role and effectiveness of centers of species origin in ensuring the long-term sustainability of traditional maize; a literature review complemented by an analytical survey of

the effectiveness of the *in situ* moratorium intended to halt contamination by transgenic corn crops.

In preparing this report, the Secretariat will seek the input on competent international and national organizations, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the Convention on Biodiversity, farming organizations and cooperatives, the private sector, other interested members of civil society, as well as input from the three NAAEC Parties.

The Secretariat proposes to submit the draft report to Council no later than April 2003.