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PAKISTAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT**

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PRESS RELEASE

Seminar on Genetically Modified Organisms-Applications and Implications

“As Pakistan like other countries of the world is adopting genetically modified techniques in crops to boost its yield and curtailing use of pesticides, the protection of human health and biodiversity should be given top priority in the process”; Mr. Hameed Ullah Jan Afridi, the Federal Minister for Environment stated while inaugurating a seminar on Genetically Modified Organisms-Applications and Implications, organized by National Biosafety Centre of Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency today.

He stated that The subjects of GMO and Bio-safety are new for us. Bio-technology, its dynamics and rapidly evolving scientific research, has created need for GM applications in our lifelines including agriculture, health, industry and environment. Modern techniques of biotechnology are being utilized to stabilize and enhance crops yield, improve livelihood of poor population, provide nutrient-enriched and better quality food, and reduce negative environmental impacts. Where these benefits could give boost to economy and provide food security there unknown fear due to their health and environmental implications, particularly for developing countries like Pakistan, become more significant. The bio-accidents in the agricultural countries like Cotton Leaf Curl Virus in Pakistan, threatened agriculture economy and vanished popular varieties of crops. Our consumers in most cases are not aware of the GM ingredients in seed and food due to lack of knowledge. Under the international obligations, the consumer has the right to be informed of the GM products. Our Bio-safety Centre should address this aspect and a system of labeling of GM foods and fodder should to be put in place.

The Minister commented that the release of GM crops without carrying out proper risk assessment could create havoc and adversely affect non-GM crops by contaminating them with their modified genomes. Before commercially release of GM crop, I stress upon scientists to fully understand the economic value of agriculture produce particularly our cotton which is backbone of Pakistan economy. Our institutions like National Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Centre for Excellence in Molecular Biology and National Institute of Agriculture and Biology can play a vital role in research and developments of GM Technology and promoting its responsible use.

Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, Secretary Ministry of Environment highlighted concerns of the community about risks associated with GMOs and their products. He concluded his remarks by expressing highest gratitude to all the stakeholders in the field of modern biotechnology and urges them to join hands together to harvest the benefits of this technology while being cautious to the risks associated with it.

Director General, Pak-EPA briefed the audience about the biosafety issues and the implementations efforts of the National Biosafety Centre of Pak-EPA. Dr. Kausar Abdullah Malik explained the efforts exerted and problems faced during the development of National Biosafety Guidelines and Pakistan Biosafety Rules,2005. Dr. Anwar Nasim extended cooperation and assistance the Commission on Biotechnology to promote biosafety and biotechnology in Pakistan.

There were two technical sessions each comprising of four papers each. In the first session the application of GMOs in agriculture, food, and medicine were discussed. The GMO detection system, economic prospectus of GM crops and Intellectual Property Rights issues for GMOs were also discussed in the technical session II.

The Seminar was widely attended by representatives of MinFAL, research institutions, academia, NGOs and media. The discussion remains healthy and enlightened. The main issues raised included promotion mechanisms of GM crops release, IPR issues, health and safety.

The concluding session of the workshop was chaired by Dr. Anwar Nasim. He appraised efforts being made for such activity. The Secretary, MoE thanked the participants of the seminar for their active participation.

(Asif S. Khan)
Director General, Pak-EPA/
Official Spokesman, Ministry of Environment
Government of Pakistan,
Islamabad.
Dated: 13th May, 2008.