



**CBD Informal SBSTTA24 Virtual Session
17-19 and 24-26 February, 2021**

February 18-19, 2021

Agenda Item 4. Synthetic Biology

Synthetic biology is a new and emerging Issue for the CBD, is developing at a rapid and unprecedented rate, and calls for strong precautionary regulations.

We need to act now with extreme precaution and declare an immediate global moratorium on any release of gene drive organisms into the environment. We reiterate the paramount importance of free prior informed consent of all potentially affected peoples. Development of organisms containing engineered gene drives is progressing, with claims of release plans, ahead of urgently needed international contained use regulations.

In addition to concern about the impacts of gene drives, we call on parties to insist that free and prior informed consent be obtained before any release of synthetic biology organisms, components or products that may impact traditional knowledge, practices, livelihoods and use of land, resources and water.

We strongly support the establishment of a Multidisciplinary Technical Expert Group (MTEG) to ensure that SBSTTA discussions include the needed early analysis. The MTEG should include expertise from women, indigenous people and local communities. It should also include technology assessments that are participatory, as this will help assessments about health, socioeconomic, and cultural impacts.

The most recent AHTEG on Synthetic Biology flagged concerns about new transient modification biotechnologies, such as gene silencing RNAi sprays, and how they should be governed given their novel risks. We urge parties to request work exploring both the risks and governance of transient modification and other emerging new biotechnologies.

Before any organisms, components and products of synthetic biology are approved for release into the environment or market, developers should be required to develop additional detection, identification and monitoring tools. Currently, these tools are inadequate and insufficient.

Thank you, Chair.