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PREPARATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL BIOTECHNOLOGY FORUM

Note by the Secretariat

Reports on activities related to the Global Biotechnology Forum to be held at Concepción, Chile from 2 to 5 March 2004, in compliance with Board decision IDB.26/Dec.8, particularly paragraphs (b) and (c).

I. BACKGROUND AND RELATION TO UNIDO'S MANDATE

1. In line with resolution GC.9/Res.2 and the medium-term programme framework 2002-2005 UNIDO promotes transfer of technology with a view to enhancing the productivity, competitiveness and quality of the industrial base of all developing countries, particularly by linking biotechnological solutions with existing sectoral programmes of UNIDO (GC.9/Res.2/A (f)). In the area of agro-industries, UNIDO promotes the use of biotechnology to upgrade underutilized raw materials, and of novel and safe strains of micro-organisms in fermented foods, to enhance the nutrient content of food. UNIDO also promotes the use of biotechnology to produce chemical feedstock from underutilized agricultural by-products (GC.9/Res.2/B (a) and (c)). In the area of environmental management, biotechnology can make a contribution to UNIDO's work on the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants by providing biological solutions to supplant technologies that pollute the biosphere and/or deplete finite resources, and introducing bio- and phyto-remediation for cleaning heavily contaminated soils. Furthermore, in

the area of industrial energy efficiency and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, biotechnology can produce cleaner coal and petroleum and produce cleaner fuels such as biodiesel, ethanol, methane and molecular hydrogen as a means of lowering the levels of greenhouse gases (GC.9/Res.2/B (b), (d) and (e)). As regards UNIDO's endeavour to assist developing countries and countries in transition to build up their institutional capacities, especially those relating to the preparation and application of technical regulations and standards, UNIDO's programme on biosafety deals precisely with those issues (GC.9/Res.2/A (b)).

2. In summary, UNIDO has, for many years, consistently played the role of a facilitator in industrial sectors that stand to reap very significant benefits from biotechnology innovations, such as textiles, leather, food, wood, pulp and paper, chemicals, metals and minerals, and energy. Furthermore, through the establishment of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in the mid 1980s, UNIDO has played a pioneering role within the United Nations system in promoting biotechnology for sustainable development.

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3. The priorities of the Global Biotechnology Forum, as shown above, are clearly related to UNIDO's mandate as indicated in the medium-term programme framework, 2002-2005. Thus, the biotechnology programme is interrelated with most of UNIDO's other ongoing programmes.

II. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PREPARATORY PROCESS

4. To ensure that ongoing normative activities in other relevant international forums are considered in the planning of the Global Biotechnology Forum, UNIDO was represented at the BIOVision 2003 conference held at Lyon, France, in April 2003. Furthermore, the Permanent Representative of Chile promoted the Forum at a meeting at OECD, also in April 2003. In addition, UNIDO has invited FAO, OECD, UNEP, UNESCO and the World Bank to participate in the International Steering Committee for the planning of the Forum programme.

5. As regards UNIDO's achievement in the preparation of the Forum, the first regional consultative meeting was held at Nairobi from 20 to 23 March 2003. A full report is available at the Secretariat and on the Forum website.¹ The second regional meeting will take place at Brasilia from 22 to 25 July 2003. A regional meeting for Asia is planned in October 2003. The regional meeting for Europe is foreseen in connection with the tenth session of the General Conference of UNIDO (1-5 December 2003). The Forum programme has been finalized in close cooperation with the International Steering Committee and is available at the Secretariat and on the Forum website. As regards briefings of regional groups, a meeting was held at the request of GRULAC on 13 March 2003.

III. ACTION REQUIRED OF THE BOARD

6. The Board may wish to take note of the information contained in the present document.

¹ http://binas.unido.org/global_forum/