

STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL PLANT PROTECTION
CONVENTION (IPPC) AT THE MEETING OF 1-2 JULY 1997

Revision of the IPPC

The revision of the IPPC was recommended by the FAO Committee on Agriculture in May 1995 and was approved by the FAO Conference in November 1995. The FAO Conference decides on amendment of the Convention.

Since mid-1995 the IPPC Secretariat has worked on the revision of the Convention. FAO has organized a number of rounds of consultations with Governments and Regional Plant Protection Organizations, including an Expert Consultation, and an Intergovernmental Technical Consultation which was held in January 1997. To complete this work, the FAO Committee on Agriculture in April established an open-ended working group which resolved practically all outstanding issues. The last two remaining issues were then resolved at the FAO Council in June 1997 through an informal working group. As a consequence, a text remains now without any brackets and has been recommended by the FAO Council for adoption by the FAO Conference. The text will still be considered before the Conference by the Committee for Constitution on Legal Matters in October 1997. Its main task will be to advise whether there will be any additional obligations. If there were, this would have effects on its coming into force. The Secretariat would, however, propose that the new text represents greater precision and a clarification of obligations, non an extension. Furthermore, the place and legal wording of one article needs to be discussed.

The main changes in the Convention:

- (i) References have been made to technical justifications, transparency, and the avoidance of arbitrary or unjustified discrimination or disguised restriction in SPS.
- (ii) Substantial text has been added on the development of harmonized phytosanitary measures and international standards. In a number of articles the procedure for the development and approval of standards has been described, including the role of the Secretariat and the establishment of a Commission for Phytosanitary Measures.
- (iii) International Economic Integration Organizations that are members of FAO could become a party to the Convention, if they had partial or full competence in relation to Phytosanitary Measures.
- (iv) New wording for Phytosanitary Certificates and the Certifying Statement was developed, which will make Certification more reliable. However, it was recognized that further work is required on this subject in the future.

(v) A major agreement is the inclusion of phytosanitary measures for regulated non-quarantine pests. This will allow the Secretariat to start work on Standards for such pests; it also brings the IPPC in line with the mandate of the SPS in relation to phytosanitary measures.

(vi) The revised Convention better defines the relationship with Regional Plant Protection Organizations.

(vii) The amended text describes International Standards and indicates that the Commission on Phytosanitary measures will adopt these. This will replace the present rather cumbersome procedure which was established by the FAO Conference during the Uruguay Round. The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures will have broad responsibilities in relation to the implementation of the Convention, including future amendment. The Parties to the Convention would be the members of the Commission.

(viii) The revised Convention officially provides for a Secretariat. The present Secretariat was established by a decision of the FAO Conference after a request of technical assistance by the Director-General of GATT during the Uruguay Round.

(ix) An article on technical assistance has been added which has become important in relation to the implementation of the Convention.

(x) The obligations on information exchange have been rationalized and parties are required to establish a contact point for purposes of the implementation of the Convention.

The changes in the Convention will only come into force when two-thirds of the parties have accepted the amendments. It should be noted that this may take time. Therefore, the FAO Secretariat will propose a number of interim measures for the period between the approval of the amendments and their implementation after the coming into force of the amendments. This will include the establishment of an Interim Commission on Phytosanitary Measures and the authorization for the Secretariat to start work on Standards for regulated non-quarantine pests. It may also be possible to start using the revised phytosanitary certificates on a voluntary basis.

Technical assistance

FAO organized an African Expert Consultation on the International Plant Protection Convention on 2 and 3 June 1997 in Rome. The meeting was funded by the Netherlands. The objective of the meeting was to review the work done in revising the IPPC and to discuss the implications of the revision of the IPPC on the implementation of the Convention in Africa. Information was provided on the SPS Agreement and its relationship to the IPPC, and discussions focused on the relevance of changes in the IPPC. Experts participated from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Practically all experts were heads of plant protection or plant quarantine in their respective countries.

The experts supported the changes in the IPPC, but were particularly concerned about the ability of their countries to fulfil the requirements as outlined in the Convention. It was recognized that there was a need for improving national infrastructures and policy-level awareness to facilitate international trade while protecting national agriculture from new introductions that would require costly interventions. Furthermore, there was a strong feeling that cooperation at sub-regional and regional levels needed to be strengthened in order to meet trade requirements at intra- and inter-regional levels.

In discussing the IPPC and SPS Agreement, it became clear that it will be difficult for most African countries to meet the obligations of the SPS Agreement, although their Governments have made commitments to do so. Infrastructure is lacking in most countries.