

**STATEMENT MADE BY THE INTERNATIONAL PLANT PROTECTION
CONVENTION AT THE MEETING OF 15-16 NOVEMBER 1995**

The International Plant Protection Convention is an international agreement within an identified Secretariat. At the request of the members of the GATT, the FAO Conference in 1989 considered this issue and agreed to the establishment of a Secretariat with the functions of the establishment of Standards, information exchange, coordination and technical assistance. Resources became available in the biennium 1992/1993 to establish the Secretariat.

In 1993, the Twenty-seventh FAO Conference adopted an interim procedure for the development and adoption of standards. This procedure includes as a final step the endorsement of a standard by the FAO Conference.

The FAO Conference adopted a first standard in 1993, called "Principles of Plant Quarantine as Related to International Trade". In October 1995, the Twenty-eighth FAO Conference endorsed three more standards, these being:

- "Guidelines for Pest Risk Analysis" which defines and describes the process of Pest Risk Analysis for plant quarantine pests;
- "The Code of Conduct on the Import and Release of Exotic Biological Control Agents";
- "Requirements for the Establishment of Pest Free Areas", which provides basic criteria for Pest Free Areas in relation to plant pests in exporting and importing countries.

Three more standards are in preparation for endorsement by the FAO Conference in 1997. These are "Guidelines for Survey and Monitoring Systems", "Framework for an Export Certification System" and "Inspection Methodology". Further standards will be begun next year for endorsement in 1999.

Two issues need to be considered with this programme, one relating to scope and the other to procedure:

- Concerning scope, the IPPC Secretariat at present handles plant quarantine standards only. Other standards that would be applied for phytosanitary reasons, but of a quality nature, like the percentage of scab on potatoes, or virus freedom of planting material, are not addressed at this moment. Some of the Regional Plant Protection Organizations have started work on this subject but this still has to be discussed and developed further to achieve global agreement.

- Concerning procedure, the IPPC Secretariat works on a two-year cycle, as the FAO Conference, which approves the Standards, meets every second year. The total process of preparation and adoption of standards, however, takes four years. This involves drafting by working groups, evaluation by an expert committee, the members of which have been nominated by Regional Plant Protection Organizations, and rounds of commenting by governments either through Regional Plant Protection Organizations or directly to FAO. Before submission to the Conference, FAO members may comment further in the Committee of Agriculture and the FAO Council. Although this process of consensus building is both time-consuming and resource-intensive, it has been found to be the absolute minimum to obtain endorsement.

The present system is provided for from FAO's Regular Programme, which is paid for by assessed contributions from members. The Secretariat now includes three full time professional positions. As the activities of the Secretariat also include information exchange, technical assistance and coordination, not all its tasks can be handled in an optimal manner.

An increase in the production of Standards and technical assistance would require additional resources. In this respect, it should be noted that FAO's approved budget for 1996-1997 is in real terms lower than the budget for 1994-1995. An increase in activities would, in particular, require an increase in the number of working groups and expert sessions for which the Secretariat provides funding; a larger workload may also require separate inter-governmental session to adopt Standards, as both RPPOs and the FAO governing bodies would be overwhelmed by the additional work.

Several governments have requested FAO to initiate a revision of the International Plant Protection Convention. This would include bringing it in line with the SPS Agreement, its scope, standard setting and its Secretariat. This issue was discussed at the Twenty-eighth Conference of FAO in October 1995 and the Conference agreed that the Secretariat would take up the amendment of the Convention in the biennium 1996-1997. It is hoped that an amended version of the Convention could then be adopted by the Twenty-ninth Conference in October/November 1997.