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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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RISK ASSESSMENT: POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

SUBMISSION BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The following communication, received on 18 March 2015, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of the United States of America.

1. The United States notes with appreciation the extensive participation of delegates, sponsored participants from capitals and non-governmental experts, as well as the depth and quality of engagement in the Committee, at the Committee's Workshop on Risk Analysis held on 13-14 October 2014. We are committed to support the Committee's work to strengthen the implementation of the obligations of the SPS Agreement related to risk assessment. We recall the key outcomes summarized by the participants in Session 8, particularly those related to the challenges that remain for Members in the risk analysis area, and take this opportunity to present the several proposals for further action by the Committee to address those challenges. These proposals focus on three key challenges identified by Members at the Workshop, and for which they would like to see further action.

2. First, many Members cited the need to improve sharing of information related to risk assessments. In particular, some Members noted they would welcome access to other Members' completed risk assessments as well as the data used to develop those risk assessments. Such access might contribute to the timely completion of risk analysis documents and facilitate safe trade in agricultural products. With that aim, the United States would like to encourage the Committee to explore ways to facilitate greater sharing of information related to risk assessments. We note Members' obligation under Annex B paragraph 3(c) to provide *inter alia* information related to risk assessment procedures in response to a "reasonable" request by another Member. We wonder whether it would be useful for the Committee to acknowledge and elaborate on the role this obligation could play in improving the exchange of information on risk assessments as a means to address resource and capacity challenges, as well as data sourcing issues. We are interested in other Members' views.

3. Second, several Members noted they would appreciate assistance from other Members in patching gaps in their capacity to perform risk analyses. This partly pertains to the first issue outlined above on the need for a mechanism to share information about completed risk analysis documents as well as the data used to complete them. It does, however, extend beyond that to include additional concerns, such as the need for expertise on optimal methodology for performing a given risk analysis, how to determine whether the available information is sufficient to complete a risk analysis, and how to ensure risk management decisions are appropriately matched to the outcomes of a given risk analysis.

4. To help Members fill any gaps in their domestic capacity to perform risk analyses, the United States asks other Members to consider whether a mentoring program could be a worthwhile initiative for the Committee to undertake. Such an initiative could involve direct Member to Member requests for assistance (whereby a Member with experience in a given aspect of risk assessment could assist another Member seeking to gain from that experience) or through Secretariat-facilitated mentoring match making of requests for assistance and experienced candidates for providing that assistance. A mentoring program in the Committee could also involve the relevant SPS standard-setting bodies (ISSBs). Requests could be made to them to report to

the Committee on specific areas of interest by Members, including specific activities undertaken by the ISSBs related to risk analysis. As one Member noted during the workshop, the ISSBs are well-positioned to provide training on risk analysis techniques. We are open to other Members' views on how the Committee might best facilitate such exchanges.

5. Third, we note there was broad interest in a deeper exploration of the topic of risk communication, particularly in sharing Members' experiences and real-life examples where risk communication strategies were developed and deployed. As noted at the Workshop, the scientific literature on risk communication in the SPS context is evolving and many Members are still developing and refining their approaches. Given the desire among Members to have more information and discussion on risk communication, we propose that the Committee hold an informal session prior to the July 2015 Committee meeting at which Members share practical experiences and lessons learned related to risk communication strategies employed in response to an SPS issue. Goals of the discussion might include tailoring risk communication strategies to specific SPS objectives; projecting and instilling confidence in science-based risk analysis as a basis for making risk management decisions; and identifying barriers to reaching given audiences that must be overcome in implementing a successful communication strategy. Such a discussion could provide useful information to Members as well as help generate ideas on how the Committee can continue work in this area initiated by the Workshop. We welcome other Members' views on these proposals to deepen the Committee's work on risk communication.

6. Lastly, we note the work being done in FAO, WHO, Codex, OIE and IPPC, on risk assessment, risk management and risk communication and urge the Committee to collaborate efforts with these organizations as we move forward.
