

Resolution 8/83

INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKING ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

THE CONFERENCE,

Recalling its Resolution 6/81 on plant genetic resources,

Recognizing that:

- (a) plant genetic resources are a heritage of mankind to be preserved, and to be freely available for use, for the benefit of present and future generations;
- (b) full advantage can be derived from plant genetic resources through an effective programme of plant breeding, and that, while most such resources in the form of wild plants and old land races are to be found in developing countries, training and facilities for plant survey and identification and plant breeding are insufficient or even not available in many of those countries;
- (c) plant genetic resources are indispensable for the genetic improvement of cultivated plants, but have been insufficiently explored and are in danger of erosion and loss;

Considering that:

- (a) the international community should adopt a concrete set of principles designed to promote the exploration, preservation, documentation, availability and full use of relevant plant genetic resources essential to agricultural development;
- (b) it is the responsibility of governments to undertake such activities as are needed to ensure the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, evaluation, documentation and exchange of plant genetic resources in the interest of all mankind; to provide financial and technological support to institutions engaged in such activities; and to ensure the equitable and unrestricted distribution of the benefits of plant breeding;
- (c) progress in plant breeding is essential to the present and future development of agriculture; and the establishment or strengthening of plant breeding and seed production capabilities, at the national, sub-

regional and regional levels, is a prerequisite to making efficient use of international cooperation in the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, evaluation, documentation and exchange of plant genetic resources;

1. Adopts the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources attached hereto;
2. Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution and the attached International Undertaking to Member Nations of FAO, to non-Member Nations which are members of the United Nations, any of its Specialized Agencies or the International Atomic Energy Agency, and to autonomous international institutions having responsibilities with respect to plant genetic resources, and to invite them to inform him whether or not they are interested in the Undertaking and to what extent they are in a position to give effect to the principles contained in the Undertaking;
3. Urges Governments and the aforesaid institutions to give effect to the principles of the Undertaking and to support and participate in the international arrangements outlined therein;
4. Endorses the Director-General's proposal for the establishment as soon as possible, within the framework of FAO, of an intergovernmental committee or other body on plant genetic resources open to all States interested in the Undertaking.

(Adopted 23 November 1983)

Annex to Resolution 8/83

INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKING ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

I. GENERAL

Article 1 - Objective

1. The objective of this Undertaking is to ensure that plant genetic resources of economic and/or social interest, particularly for agriculture, will be explored, preserved, evaluated and made available for plant breeding and scientific purposes. This Undertaking is based on the universally accepted principle that plant genetic resources are a heritage of mankind and consequently should be available without restriction.

Article 2 - Definitions and Scope

2.1 In this Undertaking:

- (a) "plant genetic resources" means the reproductive or vegetative propagating material of the following categories of plants:
 - (i) cultivated varieties (cultivars) in current use and newly developed varieties;
 - (ii) obsolete cultivars;
 - (iii) primitive cultivars (land races);
 - (iv) wild and weed species, near relatives of cultivated varieties;
 - (v) special genetic stocks (including elite and current breeders' lines and mutants);

- (b) "base collection of plant genetic resources" means a collection of seed stock or vegetative propagating material (ranging from tissue cultures to whole plants) held for long-term security in order to preserve the genetic variation for scientific purposes and as a basis for plant breeding;

- (c) "active collection" means a collection which complements a base collection, and is a collection from which seed samples are drawn for distribution, exchange and other purposes such as multiplication and evaluation;

- (d) "institution" means an entity established at the international or national level, with or without legal personality, for purposes related to the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, evaluation or exchange of plant genetic resources;

- (e) "centre" means an institution holding a base or active collection of plant genetic resources, as described in Article 7.

2.2 This Undertaking relates to the plant genetic resources described in paragraph 2.1(a), of all species of economic and/or social interest, particularly for agriculture at present or in the future, and has particular reference to food crops.

Article 3 - Exploration of Plant Genetic Resources

3.1 Governments adhering to this Undertaking will organize or arrange for missions of exploration, conducted in accordance with recognized scientific standards, to identify potentially valuable plant genetic resources that are in danger of becoming extinct in the country concerned, as well as other plant genetic resources in the country which may be useful for development but whose existence or essential characteristics are at present unknown, in particular:

- (a) known land races or cultivars in danger of becoming extinct due to their abandonment in favour of the cultivation of new cultivars;
- (b) the wild relatives of cultivated plants in areas identified as centres of genetic diversity or natural distribution;
- (c) species which are not actually cultivated but may be used for the benefit of mankind as a source of food or raw materials (such as fibres, chemical compounds, medicine or timber).

3.2 Special efforts will be made, in the context of Article 3.1, where the danger of extinction of plant species is certain, or is likely, having regard to circumstances such as the clearance of vegetation from tropical rain forests and semi-arid lands with a view to the expansion of cultivated areas.

Article 4 - Preservation, Evaluation and Documentation of Plant Genetic Resources

4.1 Appropriate legislative and other measures will be maintained and, where necessary, developed and adopted to protect and preserve the plant genetic resources of plants growing in areas of their natural habitat in the major centres of genetic diversity.

4.2 Measures will be taken, if necessary through international cooperation, to ensure the scientific collection and safeguarding of material in areas where important plant genetic resources are in danger of becoming extinct on account of agricultural or other development.

4.3 Appropriate measures will also be taken with respect to plant genetic resources held, outside their natural habitats, in gene banks or living collections of plants. Governments and institutions adhering to this Undertaking will, in particular, ensure that the said resources are conserved and maintained in such a way as to preserve their valuable characteristics for use in scientific research and plant breeding, and are also evaluated and fully documented.

Article 5 - Availability of Plant Genetic Resources

5. It will be the policy of adhering Governments and institutions having plant genetic resources under their control to allow access to samples of such resources, and to permit their export, where the resources have been requested for the purposes of scientific research, plant breeding or genetic resource conservation. The samples will be made available free of charge, on the basis of mutual exchange or on mutually agreed terms.

II. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Article 6 - General

6. International cooperation will, in particular, be directed to:

- (a) establishing or strengthening the capabilities of developing countries, where appropriate on a national or sub-regional basis, with respect to plant genetic resources activities, including plant survey and identification, plant breeding and seed multiplication and distribution, with the aim of enabling all countries to make full use of plant genetic resources for the benefit of their agricultural development;
- (b) intensifying international activities in preservation, evaluation, documentation, exchange of plant genetic resources, plant breeding, germ plasm maintenance, and seed multiplication. This would include activities carried out by FAO and other concerned agencies in the UN System; it would also include activities of other institutions, including those supported by the CGIAR. The aim would be to progressively cover all plant species that are important for agriculture and other sectors of the economy, in the present and for the future;
- (c) supporting the arrangements outlined in Article 7, including the participation in such arrangements of governments and institutions, where appropriate and feasible;
- (d) considering measures, such as the strengthening or establishment of funding mechanisms, to finance activities relating to plant genetic resources.

Article 7 - International Arrangements

7.1 The present international arrangements, being carried out under the auspices of FAO and other organizations in the United Nations System, by national and regional institutions and institutions supported by the CGIAR, in particular the IBPGR, for the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, evaluation, documentation, exchange and use of plant genetic resources will be further developed and, where necessary, complemented in order to develop a global system so as to ensure that:

- (a) there develops an internationally coordinated network of national, regional and international centres, including an international network of base collections in gene banks, under the auspices or the jurisdiction of FAO, that have assumed the responsibility to hold, for the benefit of the

international community and on the principle of unrestricted exchange, base or active collections of the plant genetic resources of particular plant species;

(b) the number of such centres will be progressively increased so as to achieve as complete a coverage as necessary, in terms of species and geographical distribution, account also being taken of the need for duplication, of the resources to be safeguarded and preserved;

(c) the activities of the centres that are related to the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, rejuvenation, evaluation and exchange of plant genetic resources will be carried out with due account being taken of scientific standards;

(d) sufficient support in funds and facilities will be provided, at the national and international levels, to enable the centres to carry out their tasks;

(e) a global information system, under the coordination of FAO, relating to plant genetic resources maintained in the aforementioned collections, and linked to systems established at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, will be developed on the basis of relevant arrangements that already exist;

(f) early warning will be given to FAO, or to any institution designated by FAO, of any hazards that threaten the efficient maintenance and operation of a centre, with a view to prompt international action to safeguard the material maintained by the centre;

(g) the IBPGR pursues and develops its present activities, within its terms of reference, in liaison with FAO;

(h)

- (i) the general expansion and improvement of related professional and institutional capability within developing countries, including training within appropriate institutions in both developed and developing countries, is adequately funded; and
- (ii) the overall activity within the Undertaking ultimately ensures a significant improvement in the capacity of developing countries for the production and distribution of improved crop varieties, as required to support major increases in agricultural production, especially in developing countries.

7.2 Within the context of the global system any Governments or institutions that agree to participate in the Undertaking, may, furthermore, notify the Director-General of FAO that they wish the base collection or collections for which they are responsible to be recognized as part of the international network of base collections in gene banks, under the auspices or the jurisdiction of FAO. The centre concerned will, whenever requested by FAO, make material in the base collection available to participants in the Undertaking, for purposes of scientific research, plant breeding or genetic resource conservation, free of charge, on the basis of mutual exchange or on mutually agreed terms.

Article 8 - Financial Security

8.1 Adhering Governments, and financing agencies, will, individually and collectively, consider adopting measures that would place activities relevant to the objective of this Undertaking on a firmer financial basis, with special consideration for the need of developing countries to strengthen their capabilities in genetic resource activities, plant breeding and seed multiplication.

8.2 Adhering Governments, and financing agencies, will, in particular, explore the possibility of establishing mechanisms which would guarantee the availability of funds that could be immediately mobilized to meet situations of the kind referred to in Article 7.1(f).

8.3 Adhering Governments and institutions, and financing agencies, will give special consideration to requests from FAO for extra-budgetary funds, equipment or services needed to meet situations of the kind referred to in Article 7.1(f).

8.4 The funding of the establishment and operation of the international network, insofar as it imposes additional costs on FAO, in the main will be funded from extra-budgetary resources.

Article 9 - Monitoring of Activities and Related Action by FAO

9.1 FAO will keep under continuous review the international situation concerning the exploration, collection, conservation, documentation, exchange and use of plant genetic resources.

9.2 FAO will, in particular, establish an intergovernmental body to monitor the operation of the arrangements referred to in Article 7, and to take or recommend measures that are necessary or desirable in order to ensure the comprehensiveness of the global system and the efficiency of its operations in line with the Undertaking.

9.3 In the performance of its responsibilities outlined in Part II of this Undertaking, FAO will act in consultation with those Governments that have indicated to FAO their intention to support the arrangements referred to in Article 7.

III. OTHER PROVISIONS

Article 10 - Phytosanitary Measures

10. This Undertaking is without prejudice to any measures taken by Governments - in line with the provisions of the International Plant Protection Convention, adopted in Rome on 6 December 1951 - to regulate the entry of plant genetic resources with the aim of preventing the introduction or spread of plant pests.

Article 11 - Information on the Implementation of this Undertaking

11. At the time of adhering, Governments and institutions will advise the Director-General of FAO of the extent to which they are in a position to give effect to the principles contained in the Undertaking. At yearly intervals, they will provide the Director-General of FAO with information on the measures that they have taken or propose to take to achieve the objective of this Undertaking.

286. It was further recommended to establish, within the framework of FAO, an intergovernmental committee or other body open to all governments interested in the Undertaking, which would, in particular, monitor the operation of the international arrangements proposed in the Undertaking.

(Adopted 23 November 1983)