Meet calls for laws for biotechnology

KUALA LUMPUR — The world’s development of biotechnology must be done in a way that is both safe and ensures a better quality of life, delegates to a UN-Asia-Europe-sponsored meeting in the Malaysian capital have agreed.

The delegates agreed also that although the global biotech industry generated revenue totalling US$40 billion a year, most of the world’s biodiversity remained untapped.

The developing countries have the potential to develop biotechnology, the meeting, jointly organised by the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies and the Asia-Europe Foundation, found.

But it was agreed that there was an immediate need to establish protocols for the safe transfer, handling and use of GMOs.

The meeting, a high level dialogue on trade, biotechnology and sustainable development in Kuala Lumpur last Saturday, follows the just-ended 7th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in the Malaysian capital.

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Purpose of the dialogue was to cultivate integrated approaches to trade, biotechnology and sustainable development.

The meeting will be followed by the first Meeting of Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety that begins today and will end on Friday.

Opening the meeting, Malaysia’s Deputy Prime Minister, Najib Razak, said that achieving equilibrium between trade and the sustainable development of biotechnology was possible.

But he issued a plea for makers of genetically modified foods, GMOs, to co-operate in ensuring their products are safe.

“We urge other countries, in particular major producers and exporters of GMOs, to join the rest of the world in making it a safer place as we seek to reap the vast benefits of biotechnology,” he said.

It was also important to develop laws that “give teeth” to international conventions and protocols that ensure a safe and transparent regime for GMOs.

Senior Asian and Europe scientists and specialists in trade and biotechnology put their views to the meeting about the links between trade, biotechnology and sustainable development to last Saturday’s meeting.

The governance of such development, international agendas for biotechnology and trade, necessary precautions and risks were also discussed.

The meeting agreed that the major facing governance for sustainable was the need to for co-ordination between economic and environmental institutions.

They decided also that multilateral trade agreements tend to produce binding decisions that have a direct impact on policies chosen by national governments for economic and social development, public health and the environment.

It was critical that international policy makers understand the links between the regulation of biotechnology in trade and sustainable development if they were to make informed, equitable and long-term decisions. — VNS