**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ONLINE DISCUSSION ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS GATHERED FROM THE TESTING AND POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE GUIDANCE   
(21 APRIL TO 5 MAY 2014)**

1. In opening the discussion, the moderator of the discussion recalled decision BS-VI/12 where the COP-MOP requested the Executive Secretary of the CBD to:

*(a) Develop appropriate tools to structure and focus the testing of the Guidance;*

*(b) Gather and analyse, in a transparent manner, feedback provided as a result of testing on the practicality, usefulness and utility of the Guidance, (i) with respect to consistency with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and (ii) taking into account past and present experiences with living modified organisms; and*

*(c) Provide a report on possible improvements to the Guidance for consideration by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its seventh meeting.*

1. The moderator reminded the Online Forum of its role in the testing of the Guidance, as mandated by the COP-MOP, to “provide input, inter alia, to assist the Executive Secretary in his task to structure and focus the process of testing the guidance, and in the analysis of the results gathered from the testing”.
2. The moderator further noted that 54 submissions were received as a result of the testing of the Guidance. Among these, 41 were from Parties (including 26 from developing countries), 3 from other Governments and 10 from organizations. The moderator also stated that the original submissions including comments and suggestions for the improvements of the Guidance were made available by the Secretariat at: <http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/testing_guidance_RA.shtml>.
3. Twenty nine messages were posted during the two-week discussion which focused on the analysis of the results gathered from the testing, aggregation of suggestions and comments to facilitate further discussions and a process for improving the Guidance.
4. In considering the ***number of submissions***, it was noted that a sample size of 54 submissions is adequate to determine the robustness of the results and usefulness and practicality of the Guidance.
5. It was also noted that, while there was a high number of submissions from Parties for such a demanding task, there is a need to take into account that only 25% of the Parties to the Protocol took part in the testing of the Guidance. Nevertheless, it was further noted that the high level of agreement among the different categories of submissions provides strong indication of the emerging trends, which would only be corroborated in the event that further testing takes place.
6. There were diverging views among the participants of the discussion- as to how much emphasis could be placed on either the quantitative or the qualitative feedbacks during the analysis of the results of the testing. It was noted that, as with similar types of surveys, the rating scales (i.e. quantitative feedback) are mandatory and constitute the core of the results while the optional written comments (i.e. qualitative feedback) constitute a means of clarifying issues and understanding some aspects of the quantitative feedback. On the other hand, it was also noted that surveys based on rating scales may not give meaningful insights and that the analysis of the results should focus primarily on the qualitative feedback.
7. With regard to the ***quantitative feedback***, it was noted that the highest level of agreement that the Guidance is useful was among the Parties that participated in the testing, among which over half were developing countries.
8. It was also noted during the discussions that despite the overall numbers indicating, on average, a high approval of the Guidance, the distinction between “developed” and “developing” countries does not assist in the analysis of the results and in quantifying the usefulness of the Guidance and the Roadmap. There were suggestions that more useful conclusions could be drawn if the analysis were based on a comparison of the responses between countries that conduct risk assessments on a routine basis and countries with less experience in risk assessment.
9. Some participants noted that the quantitative results seem to show a trend that countries that conduct risk assessments on a routine basis do not consider the Guidance and the Roadmap useful, whereas countries with little experience in risk assessments considered the Guidance more useful. It was also noted that the different ratings provided in the quantitative feedback may also result from the different approaches to risk assessment as a whole, rather than a simple reflection of their experience in conducting risk assessments.
10. Further, it was suggested that in order to determine if there is a correlation between the level of experience of countries in conducting risk assessments and how they evaluate the Guidance, a full weighted average could be presented, where the averages under each category are weighted in relation to the number of respondents.
11. With regard to the ***qualitative feedback***, there was a general agreement that the results of the testing indicate that the testers engaged in a constructive dialogue which could lead to the improvement of the Guidance, and that there is a needs for a mechanism to be put in place where the comments emanating from the testing can be meaningfully used and taken into account in a transparent manner. Participants also noted that, considering the extensive effort that has gone into the testing process, very detailed analysis needs to be made of the feedback so as to capture all the salient points carefully in the improvement of the Guidance.
12. Some participants were of the view that the analysis prepared by the Secretariat was an over-simplification of the qualitative feedback and may not necessarily capture the details of the multitude of suggestions for improvements. These participants requested that the analysis document produced by the Secretariat for consideration by the COP-MOP needs to include a paragraph which indicates that the sample lists of the suggestions for improvements are incomplete and interpretive of the original comments.
13. A way forward for further improvement of the Guidance on the basis of suggestions submitted as part of the testing exercise was proposed and supported by several participants. The following step-wise process of actions were suggested:
    1. Grouping the original suggestions proposed during the testing of the Guidance into categories, e.g. editorial comments and those related to translation issues, applicable to all sections of the Guidance versus comments on a specific section, general versus specific comments, regarding the methodology of risk assessment process and methodology, etc.
    2. Streamlining and condensing the suggestions above into concrete text proposals for possible improvement of the Guidance, while establishing a mechanism to ensure transparency which would show how each suggestion for improvement was dealt with and explaining why some suggestions were modified or not considered. This could be done in small groups of 2-3 people per section of the Guidance;
    3. Requesting feedback on the concrete text proposals from the online forum through multiple rounds of online discussions, closely moderated, in an attempt to reach consensus on the proposed changes;
    4. Revising the Guidance to introduce the changes where consensus could be reached among the experts representing the Parties;
    5. Adding a question to the national report format on the implementation of the Protocol where Parties could indicate if they are using the Guidance and include any suggestions for possible improvements.
14. Additional remarks on a way forward with regard to improving the Guidance included:
15. Making use of available experience outside of the Online Forum during the process for improving the Guidance;
16. Prioritizing the improvement of the Roadmap before improving the sections on specific types of LMOs or traits (Part II) and before embarking on the development of additional guidance documents;
17. Noting that as with any such evolving documents, when new information becomes available, a process for improvements needs to be in place while noting also the dire needs identified by developing countries for guidance on risk assessment, the mechanism in place for improvement must not however delay the adoption of the Guidance;
18. Questions to monitor the percentage of Parties adopting and using the Guidance could be added to the next national reporting cycle.