Response of Armenia to the Report of the External Review of ECPGR

In compliance with the decision of the ECPGR Steering Committee made at its 11th meeting in 2008, the first Independent External Review of ECPGR was carried out in 2010.

Based on the results of a series of meetings with ECPGR Secretariat team, some members of ECPGR Working Groups as well as relevant staff of the partner international organizations, analyzing of background documents, reports and stakeholders survey results and teleconferences, organized with active participation of Bioversity International the Panel prepared a comprehensive analytical report with conclusions and recommendations which has been shared with national coordinators for their consideration.

Recognizing that the recommendations made are of high importance for the future of ECPGR as an instrument for plant genetic resources work within European region,

Noting that the role of ECPGR should be raised and its mandate should be enlarged as the European network for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and potential platform to the European Union for coordination and priority setting in the frameworks of undertaken global initiatives in the area of conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture,

Acknowledging that the Panel's conclusions in case of their endorsement and adoption by the Steering Committee will lead to the necessity of investment of additional financial resources,

Considering the response of Bioversity International to the Report of the External Review of ECPGR as host of the ECPGR Secretariat,

Concerned that membership of Armenia in ECPGR significantly depend on recommended institutionalization reforms provided by Panel,

We would like to share our opinion on the main findings and recommendations presented in the Report of the External Review of ECPGR.

We would like to sincerely thank the Review Panel for intensive work done, thorough analysis of the ECPGR longstanding activity, its effectiveness and outcomes and for a coherent report shared with national coordinators.   We would like to thank the ECPGR Secretarial for their contribution in preparation and implementation of the Panel Review and organization of the extra meeting of ECPGR Steering Committee where the recommendations made by the Panel will be jointly discussed.

ECPGR objectives

- ✓ We support the Review Panel recommendation on establishing a clear hierarchy of objectives and their reformulation to refer the implementation of the GPA and ITPGRFA

- ✓ We support an idea of establishing more accountability among ECPGR membership, but the scope of accountability should be clarified and clear understanding of responsibilities in this regard is needed.

Effectiveness and impact

✓ We agree with the Review Panel recommendation to continue to support weaker national programmes to achieve the level of capacity and structure.

✓ We support an idea on integration characterization and evaluation data into EURISCO, but in our country this information is not available (or very limited *[the characterization and evaluation data on crop varieties released in the country are included in the FAO National Information Sharing Mechanism on PGRFA]* or scattered), therefore the incorporation of C&E data in the European catalogue requires financial and technical resources.

✓ The Central Crop Databases which have been established by the initiative of separate institutes and ECPGR Working Groups and are maintained by individual European institutions have a quite long history and are of high value for users. The Central Crop Databases and EURISCO significantly complement each other and resolving the duplication of information, in our opinion, is not of priority significance. Ideally, EURISCO as an integrated catalogue should include the data from ECPGR Central Crop Databases, it is a matter of time. The "competition" can lead to more efficient work in terms of inclusion of new accessions and C&D.

✓ We fully support future development of EURISCO and its integration into a global system (such as GENESYS); the role of EURISCO should be strengthened since for some countries (Armenia is among those) this catalogue i is the only available web-based tool for reporting to the ITPGRFA Secretariat on implementation of multilateral system of Access and Benefit-sharing.

✓ The strengthening the collaboration and linkages with EUCARPIA is supported considering the potential of ECPGR as a European platform for conservation and utilization of PGRFA. We would like to suggest to strengthen the collaboration also with other relevant international associations, like ISHS which has a Plant Genetic Resources Commission among its Working Groups.

Priority setting mechanisms

✓ The recommendation on incorporation of quantitative indicators into reporting formats and establishing of verifiable indicators and benchmarks can be supported as in case of reasonable indicators it will lead to more efficient work of ECPGR and its Working Groups and contribute to priority setting.

✓ The application of the indicators reflecting the performance of the responsibilities defined will facilitate the evaluation and monitoring of the work done and progress achieved during the each Phase both by the Steering Committee and an external review. Since the picture will be more clear and the weakest points can be easily revealed, there probably will be no need for an external review to be conducted once per phase, and the regular interval of the implementation of an external review can be longer than it was recommended by the Panel (or it can commissioned by the Steering Committee in case of some planning institutional or operation reforms).

Modus Operandi and governance and Funding

✓ We realize the Panel's recommendations on undertaking the activities in support of developing countries only in case of their recovering from external sources. The scope of the responsibilities of the ECPGR Secretariat (or an Executive Director) can include inter alia the securing of external sources to support developing countries.

- ✓ In general the rules of procedure of ECPGR operation are quite functioning and transparent. Network Coordinators have more initiative and responsibility than Working Group members, but each of them was welcome to provide proposals and suggestions. In spite of providing by the Secretariat the decisions for endorsement there always was a space for expressing individual opinions, visions. Nevertheless the panel's recommendation on making decision making more transparent and inclusive is supported.

- ✓ The recommendations on dissemination of the agreed work plans, report publications, etc. are mainly in line with the decisions made at the last Steering Committee meeting and are fully supported.

- ✓ The recommendation on ECPGR collaboration with the EC and the Secretariat of the ITPGRFA is supported. In spite of the common ground between the organizations the clear mechanism of cooperation should be identified.

- ✓ We support the recommendation on strengthening of the role of ECPGR, but the option suggested by the Panel and targeted on the institutionalization through obtaining a legal persona, consolidating organizationally under the Executive Director and establishing an Executive Committee by electing President and Vice-presidents will lead to increase of country contributions. In spite of a continued interest and expectations of the country's authorities with regard to the membership in ECPGR, Armenia has an accumulated debt. Therefore country contributions which will have to be increased threaten Armenian participation in the ECPGR.

- ✓ We do not realize a direct link between a stronger institutionalization and the ownership of ECPGR by Member Countries. We share the Panels view on adapting the organizational structure of ECPGR to its objectives and goals, but we would like to discuss as well other options of the strengthening of the role of ECPGR and organizational reforms (like merging/elimination of working groups, establishing ad hoc working groups for some specific objectives request of the Steering Committee, etc.).