



SAICM PREPCOM3 HIGHLIGHTS

MONDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2005

On the opening day of the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the Development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM PrepCom-3), delegates heard opening statements, and agreed to base discussions on the drafts prepared by the Secretariat of the high-level declaration, overarching policy strategy, and global plan of action. In the afternoon, delegates discussed the draft global plan of action and list of concrete measures. A contact group on the draft global plan of action met in the evening.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

President Viveka Bohn (Sweden) opened the meeting. Haruko Hirose, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), speaking on behalf of UNIDO's Director-General, highlighted the integration of chemicals issues in UNIDO programmes on policies and regulations, institutions and sectoral capacity building, and multilateral conventions.

Werner Wutscher, Secretary-General, Austria's Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, stressed that a global management system for chemicals should be led by precaution and prevention, and noted SAICM's role in a new paradigm of chemicals policy.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, noted that heads of state at the 2005 World Summit had agreed to promote the sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes throughout their life cycle by adopting and implementing a voluntary SAICM. He stressed the importance of implementing SAICM in the context of the overall development agenda.

Suwit Wibulpolasert, President of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), stressed the need to improve the inclusive and participatory nature of SAICM. He provided the example of a rice farmers' foundation in Thailand which, with the support of the government, successfully switched from cash-crop and industrial farming to traditional ways of farming without synthetic chemicals.

Noting that the SAICM process is a multi-sectoral endeavor, Robert Visser, Chair of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), emphasized that priority setting and coordination in the implementation of SAICM are critical.

Shoji Nishimoto, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), stressed that efforts required for the implementation of SAICM should be strongly linked to existing initiatives to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and fully incorporated in national development strategies.

Marcel Boisard, Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), pointed to UNITAR's participation in the implementation of SAICM through: training; capacity building for government officials, NGOs and disadvantaged groups; and the development of methodologies and guidance documents for chemicals management.

Mario Molina, recipient of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, referred to his research on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and their effects on the ozone layer. He explained how international agreements and scientific cooperation helped engage industry and develop innovative replacements for hazardous chemicals, ensuring both economic growth and protection of human health and the environment.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Delegates adopted the agenda (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/1) without amendment, and elected Soodsakorn Putho (Thailand) and Jacqueline Alvarez (Uruguay) to fill vacancies as Vice-Presidents of the PrepCom Bureau.

Matthew Gubb, Secretariat, summarized intersessional work, drawing attention to revised drafts of the high-level declaration (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/2), overarching policy strategy (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/3), and global plan of action, including concrete measures (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/4). He also noted the compilation of comments received on the three documents (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/INF/22).

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SAICM

President Bohn asked delegates whether the draft high-level declaration, overarching policy strategy, and global plan of action could be accepted as a basis for discussion. Numerous delegates supported this proposal. Croatia, on behalf of the CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP, said that the documents reflected the comments raised during its regional consultations. The UK, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), stressed the need for further work on: risk reduction; financial considerations; principles and approaches; and the global plan of action and its list of concrete measures, which he said requires prioritization. He further supported the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) as a forum to oversee and review the SAICM without creating a new body, and UNEP as the SAICM's Secretariat. Thailand, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, called for the simplification, streamlining and prioritization of concrete measures. He noted that some parts of the three documents need some restructuring, but found them to be good starting points for discussion.



Nigeria, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed the need to establish a sustainable financial mechanism and enhance capacity building, and called for regional bodies to be fully integrated into SAICM implementation initiatives.

Mexico, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), said SAICM should contribute to the MDGs. He called for open, transparent and reliable information sharing on chemicals and a new multilateral fund for SAICM's implementation.

Highlighting several guiding principles in finalizing the three documents during this meeting, the US stressed that SAICM should: use a voluntary approach that will work for all stakeholders; aim at developing a balance in meeting both national and international needs; and use a science-based approach and existing mechanisms for its implementation.

The INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHEMICAL ASSOCIATIONS called for the recognition of the value of chemicals in eradicating disease and improving public health, and for harmonization according to internationally-accepted risk management principles. NORWAY suggested integrating efforts through different sectors and bridging the gap between developed and developing countries. The PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK suggested focusing on vulnerable people and on risk reduction, and urged more people-centered agriculture.

Egypt, on behalf of the ARAB GROUP, emphasized the role of the global plan of action in setting priorities, particularly for funding, and called for clearer criteria for measurement of the quality of chemicals management. The INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS urged implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) goal on chemicals, particularly with regard to risk assessment and minimizing chemical exposure of workers and children.

Stressing that the transboundary nature of chemicals requires a global response, ALGERIA expressed hope that SAICM will result in improved financial and technical assistance to ensure the sound management of chemicals in developing countries. IRAN urged consideration of the proposal by the IFCS meeting of experts (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/INF/9) to address the widening gap between developed and developing countries in chemicals management capacity, by establishing a process to facilitate strengthening country capacity for the sound management of chemicals, and by carrying out a pilot project between PrepCom-3 and the ICCM.

SWITZERLAND said that the global plan of action is a toolkit for the implementation of SAICM and that concrete measures should not be further negotiated during this meeting. INDIA emphasized that the SAICM process should be entirely voluntary, and not involve monitoring and review. He called for financial arrangements and capacity building for the implementation of SAICM, noting that actions taken by developing countries to implement SAICM depended on adequate funding.

The INTERNATIONAL POPS ELIMINATION NETWORK appealed to donor countries to provide substantial funding for SAICM, and proposed phase-outs of hazardous chemicals and substitution of chemicals that may pose unmanageable risks. The INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MINING AND METALS noted the contribution of chemicals to poverty eradication and sustainable development, which has an economic and social, and not just an environmental, dimension. The INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE recommended a risk management approach, and called for using the current definition of the precautionary approach.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that without incentives for better chemicals management, countries with economies in transition and developing countries could be further disadvantaged in their economic development. Stressing

mercury-related issues, IRAQ discussed: chemical technology to reduce environmental impacts; regulation; disposal; and extraction. She recommended that production methods using mercury compounds be stopped. HAITI called for an inter-sectoral approach with increased funding, and called on countries to ratify chemicals-related conventions. UKRAINE suggested applying the Hippocratic principle, "do no harm," in chemicals management, and criticized the pharmaceutical industry for putting profit above ethics.

GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION: Kaj Juhl Madsen, Secretariat, presented the draft global plan of action (SAICM/PREPCOM.3/4), which he said incorporates the work carried out by regional groups during the intersessional period, including a proposal to add an executive summary to the list of concrete measures. Stressing that the global plan of action is a voluntary instrument applicable to each country according to its needs and capabilities, President Bohn asked delegates to identify those issues which may prompt concerted global action, and the measures that imply additions or changes to existing international chemicals policy.

All regional groups, and JAPAN, underscored a number of concrete measures which in their view should be discussed at PrepCom-3. EGYPT expressed concern at the discussion's focus on concrete measures, and not on a global plan of action to assist countries in achieving their objectives. He said a global plan should include fundamental principles, detailed objectives, and strategic considerations referring to implementation, coordination mechanisms at the national, regional, global levels, and financial mechanisms, as well as overall targets and priorities. President Bohn clarified that the possible confusion derived from the fact that the global plan of action was renamed "concrete measures," given the three-tiered approach of SAICM, and proposed the issue be discussed later. The Committee decided to create a contact group on the global plan of action, chaired by Jamidu Katima (Tanzania), to consider the proposals put forward by the regional groups and other delegations.

CONTACT GROUP ON GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION

The contact group on the global plan of action met in the evening to discuss the group's organization of work. Many delegates preferred discussing the executive summary and concrete measures separately, but opposed dividing into smaller groups. One participant cautioned against negotiating the whole text and suggested focusing on actions at international level. Noting that several regional groups had expressed concerns on specific concrete measures, Chair Katima suggested compiling a list of concrete measures that may need to be amended, and asked delegations to provide the rationale for these amendments. The group agreed to focus on a subset of concrete measures, and to start work by discussing the executive summary of the draft global plan of action.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Have you already seen Vienna at night? This popular Austrian song might become the theme song for SAICM PrepCom-3, as it is faced with an extensive number of issues to be resolved prior to the ICCM. Many delegates expected a long week ahead, as some thorny issues remain unresolved, such as the institutional arrangements for the SAICM and financial matters. While the global plan of action is meant to constitute not a negotiated instrument but a guide for relevant actors to implement the SAICM, some participants expressed concern that discussion on concrete measures will be a considerably time-consuming and complex task. A key question will be the extent to which SAICM will identify specific priorities for future global action. While some delegates were optimistic that a week of hard work will bear fruit by establishing the basis for a robust SAICM, others questioned whether the limited time will mean that key issues will have to be left for the ICCM to resolve.