

FIFTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY: 25-29 SEPTEMBER 2006

The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS Forum V) begins today at the Congress and World Trade Center in Budapest, Hungary.

Convening under the theme "Chemical Safety for Sustainable Development", Forum V is expected to take stock of progress achieved on the commitments and recommendations made at previous sessions of the Forum and consider strategies to address a number of identified priorities. At Forum V, delegates will consider the future of the IFCS in light of the final agreements on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). Delegates will also focus on topics relating to: sound management of chemicals and poverty reduction; applying precaution in the context of chemical safety; further global action on heavy metals; addressing the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies; and toys and chemical safety.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IFCS

The concept of an intergovernmental forum to address chemical safety originated during preparations for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, when the UNCED Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) identified the collaborative efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), within the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS), as the nucleus for international cooperation on the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals. The PrepCom invited the IPCS to identify possible intergovernmental mechanisms for risk assessment and chemicals management. In response, UNEP, ILO and WHO convened an expert meeting in London, UK, in December 1991 to consider priority areas for an international strategy and proposals for an intergovernmental mechanism for the environmentally sound management of chemicals. The meeting resulted in a recommendation to establish an intergovernmental forum on chemical risk assessment and management that was forwarded to UNCED.

At UNCED, delegates adopted Agenda 21, a programme of action for sustainable development. Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 addresses the "Environmentally Sound Management of Toxic Chemicals Including Prevention of Illegal International Traffic

in Toxic and Dangerous Products," and contains an international strategy for action on chemical safety with six priority Programme Areas: expanding and accelerating international assessment of chemical risks; harmonization of classification and labelling of chemicals; information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks; establishment of risk reduction programmes; strengthening of national capabilities and capacities for management of chemicals; and prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products. Chapter 19 also calls for the establishment of an intergovernmental forum on chemical safety.

FORUM I: In April 1994, UNEP, ILO and WHO convened the International Conference on Chemical Safety in Stockholm, Sweden. The Conference established the IFCS and constituted the first meeting of the Forum (Forum I). The Conference adopted a resolution with detailed recommendations on Priorities for Action in implementing Agenda 21, and the Terms of Reference for the IFCS, establishing IFCS as a mechanism for cooperation among governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to promote chemical risk assessment and the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

FORUM II: Forum II, held in February 1997 in Ottawa, Canada, made recommendations on the Programme Areas identified in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, and on emerging issues such as endocrine disrupting chemicals and pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Delegates reached agreement on a number of actions regarding the structure and function of the IFCS. The Forum Standing Committee (FSC) was established as a mechanism for responding to new developments and advising on preparations for future meetings.

FORUM III: Forum III was held in October 2000, in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, under the theme "In Partnership for Global Chemical Safety." Delegates reviewed the IFCS, assessed progress made on implementing Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, reached agreement on the Priorities for Action Beyond 2000, and issued the Bahia Declaration on Chemical Safety. The Bahia Declaration lists six priorities for review at future Forums, as well as key goals with target dates for their achievement. The Priorities for Action Beyond 2000 include recommendations that are linked to these goals and organized according to the six Programme Areas set forth in Agenda 21. Forum III also considered: the prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products; barriers to information exchange; information exchange for chemical production decision making; PRTRs and emissions inventories; a capacity-building network

for the sound management of chemicals; awareness raising and the prioritization of chemicals management capacity-building issues at the political level; and the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS).

WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT (WSSD): The WSSD convened from 26 August to 4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and adopted, among other outcomes, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), a framework for action to implement the UNCED commitments that includes a number of new commitments. The issue of chemicals management is addressed primarily in Chapter III on Changing Unsustainable Patterns of Production and Consumption, which reflects a renewed commitment to the sound management of chemicals. Chemicals-related targets contained in the JPOI include: the aim to achieve, by 2020, the use and production of chemicals in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment; the development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) based on the Bahia Declaration and IFCS Priorities for Action beyond 2000; and the national implementation of the new GHS, with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008.

UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL (GC): At its 21st session in 2001, the UNEP GC adopted decision 21/7, which requested the UNEP Executive Director, in consultation with governments, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), IFCS and others, to examine the need for a SAICM.

In February 2002, at its seventh Special Session/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the UNEP GC agreed in decision SS.VII/3 that a SAICM was needed, and requested its Executive Director to develop a SAICM with the IFCS Bahia Declaration and Priorities for Action Beyond 2000 as its foundation. This process was to entail an "open-ended consultative meeting involving representatives of all stakeholder groups" jointly convened by UNEP, IFCS and the IOMC.

The 22nd session of the UNEP GC, held in February 2003, reached agreement on a number of chemicals-related issues. Delegates adopted decision 22/4 endorsing the concept of an international conference, with preparatory meetings, as the basis for developing a SAICM.

FORUM IV: Forum IV convened in November 2003, in Bangkok, Thailand, under the theme "Chemical Safety in a Vulnerable World." Forum IV took stock of the progress achieved on the commitments and recommendations made at Forum III, focusing on topics relating to: children and chemical safety; occupational safety and health; hazard data generation and availability; acutely toxic pesticides; and capacity building. Delegates also considered and made decisions on the GHS, and illegal traffic.

In response to decisions SS.VII/3 and 22/4 IV of UNEP GC, Forum IV discussed the further development of a SAICM, and forwarded a non-negotiated compilation report on its work to SAICM PrepCom-1, addressing, among others: life-cycle management of chemicals since Agenda 21; new and ongoing challenges; gaps in life-cycle chemicals management; and resources for capacity building and implementation.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

SAICM: SAICM was developed over the course of three meetings of the Preparatory Committee: PrepCom-1 (9-13 November 2003, Bangkok, Thailand); PrepCom-2 (4-8 October 2004, Nairobi, Kenya) and PrepCom-3 (19-24 September 2005, Vienna, Austria). SAICM was adopted at the International

Conference on Chemicals Management (4-6 February 2006, Dubai, United Arab Emirates) and includes a High-level Declaration, an Overarching Policy Strategy and a Global Plan of Action.

ROTTERDAM CONVENTION (PIC): The Rotterdam Convention entered into force in February 2004, and has been ratified by 110 parties. Two Conferences of the Parties (COP) have been held. COP-1 (20-24 September 2004, Geneva, Switzerland) adopted the necessary decisions to make the legally-binding PIC procedure operational. Delegates addressed procedural issues and other decisions associated with the entry into force of the Rotterdam Convention.

COP-2 (27-30 September 2005, Rome, Italy) adopted 15 decisions on, *inter alia*: operational procedures of the Chemicals Review Committee (CRC); the finalization of arrangements for the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat; pilot projects on the delivery of regional technical assistance; and cooperation and synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention secretariats. Delegates agreed to forward a bracketed text on a compliance mechanism to COP-3 and to task the Secretariat with a study on financial mechanisms.

BASEL CONVENTION: COP-7 (25-29 October 2004, Geneva, Switzerland) adopted decisions on: definitions of hazardous wastes, hazardous waste characteristics and a number of technical guidelines; guidance elements for bilateral, multilateral or regional agreements; and the follow-up to the WSSD. COP-7 set the budget for 2005-2006 and took decisions on the Strategic Plan and the 2005-2006 Work Programme for the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG).

OEWG-4 (4-8 July 2005, Geneva, Switzerland) addressed a range of issues including technical guidelines on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative, and ship dismantling. OEWG-5 (3-7 April 2006, Geneva, Switzerland) mostly focused on financing and synergies among the chemicals-related Conventions, technical guidelines on POPs, and ship dismantling.

STOCKHOLM CONVENTION (POPs): The Stockholm Convention entered into force in May 2004, and has been ratified by 130 parties. Two COPs have been held. COP-1 (2-6 May 2005, Punta del Este, Uruguay) adopted a broad range of decisions relating to: providing for evaluation of the continued need for DDT use for disease vector control; establishing a review process for entries in the register of specific exemptions; adopting guidance for the financial mechanism; establishing a reporting schedule; establishing arrangements for monitoring data on POPs; adopting rules of procedure and financial rules; adopting the budget for the Secretariat; and establishing the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee.

COP-2 (1-5 May 2006, Geneva, Switzerland) adopted 18 decisions on, *inter alia*, DDT, exemptions, financial resources and mechanisms, implementation plans, technical assistance, synergies, and effectiveness evaluation.

2005 WORLD SUMMIT: Regarding chemicals management, the Summit (14-16 September 2005, UN headquarters, New York) agreed to promote the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle, with the aim that, by 2020, chemicals are "used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment." Delegates resolved to implement a voluntary strategic approach to the international management of chemicals, and to support developing countries in strengthening their capacity for the sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes.