

IFCS-V HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2006

IFCS-V (Forum V) was opened on Monday morning. Following keynote speeches and award presentations, plenary heard the President's Progress Report and addressed organizational and administrative items. In the afternoon, plenary addressed the future of IFCS, and sound management of chemicals and poverty reduction. The *ad hoc* working group on the future of IFCS met in the evening. Participants were also presented with a Hungarian music cultural performance by children.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

Suwit Wibulpolprasert, IFCS President, opened Forum V saying that transparency and equality are crucial elements of the IFCS decision-making process. He highlighted the importance of information disclosure for promoting better understanding and reducing selfishness.

Katalin Szili, President of Parliament, Hungary, highlighted the increased responsibility to prevent threats to public health and welfare from chemical sources. She urged participants to identify modes and methods for preventing and responding to such threats and ensuring greater security.

Lajos Molnár, Minister of Health, Hungary, highlighted some measures to generate further advancement in chemical safety, including: continuing to develop chemical safety databases; increasing public awareness, especially among vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and the elderly; promoting special training for toxicology specialists; and providing first aid and medical care to those contaminated by chemicals.

Noting the role of IFCS in supporting the development of SAICM, Miklós Persányi, Minister of Environment and Water, Hungary, said IFCS' capacity should continue to be used to support the sound management of chemicals.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Fatemeh Vaez Javadi, Vice President and Minister of Environment, Iran, noted the widening gap between developed and developing countries in terms of capacity to manage chemical threats to human health and security, reviewed some of Iran's programmes for addressing these threats, and expressed a wish to cooperate with other countries in sharing experiences, technical information, and knowledge. She urged the SAICM Secretariat to prioritize support for information sharing and technology transfer, and said that the IFCS still has much to contribute through its open, transparent and issue-oriented approach.

Joel Forman, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, spoke on the early and delayed consequences to children's health due to early exposure to chemicals. He emphasized the sensitivity of fetuses

and young children to chemical exposure and outlined childhood and adult diseases that can result. Forman underlined the high social and economic costs of exposure, noted that information on chemical toxicity is incomplete, and called for a global public health policy, informed by scientific evidence, to reduce costs and save lives.

Virgie Dammay, Alliance of Peasants in the Cordillera Homeland, the Philippines, said that chemicals have been widely used since the introduction of intensive farming systems, resulting in diseases, especially skin diseases. She introduced a sustainable traditional farming system promoted by her organization among the peasants of the Northern Luzon Cordillera, which does not use any synthetic chemicals.

Ana Vera Lemos, Environmental Justice, Mozambique, reported on civil society efforts to improve local chemical disposal policies in Mozambique. She said involving civil society in environmental and chemical policy-making processes saves time and money, raises awareness and allows local people to be consulted. She noted the need for reliable information, and advocated using international networks and donors to influence government policy.

AWARDS

President Wibulpolprasert explained that the Special Recognition Award recognizes exceptional contributions to a special topic or activity related to chemical safety, and the Award of Merit recognizes overall contribution to chemical safety.

HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol of Thailand and Chulabhorn Research Institute were awarded the Special Recognition Award for building capacity for chemical safety and for research to prevent negative impacts of chemicals in all areas of development.

Roy Hickman, Canada, and Ulrich Schlottmann, Germany, were awarded the Award of Merit. Schlottmann, on his and Hickman's behalf, stressed the relevance of Forum V for deciding the future of IFCS, reviewed achievements of IFCS, and highlighted the IFCS' spirit of cooperation and openness.

PROGRESS REPORT, ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

President Wibulpolprasert outlined the document "12 Year IFCS and President Progress Report for Forum V, 2006." He underscored IFCS' work as one of the key factors for SAICM success. On the future of global chemical safety, he noted the need for: promoting multi-sectoral and multi-party participation; balancing "greed growth-based" development with "sufficiency-based" development; and increasing the number of grass-root women's alliances around the world. He especially thanked Georg Karlaganis (Switzerland), Jamidu Katima (Tanzania) and Romeo Quijano (Philippines), for their work.

Jules de Kom (Surinam) was elected as Rapporteur of Forum V. Participants approved the Proposed Agenda, Annotated Agenda and Time Schedule.

Discussion on "IFCS Administrative Items," which includes consideration of a future budget, was postponed pending agreement on the future of IFCS.

FUTURE OF IFCS

Georg Karlaganis (Switzerland) presented the "Thought Starter on the Future of IFCS" paper (IFCS/FORUM V/02-TS) as a basis for discussion. Noting the UNEP resolution on IFCS (UNEP/GCSS.IX/6/Add.2, Annex III, Resolution 3), he said the IFCS has a mandate to continue its role as a consultative, information-sharing body, and can do so as a complement to SAICM.

The regions of LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, and AFRICA supported continuation of IFCS, and praised its work and its open, transparent and inclusive process.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION said that IFCS' role should include: identifying priorities; assessing the global situation in chemical safety; promoting cooperation among member countries; promoting national capacity; strengthening national efforts; and advising governments.

Nigeria for the AFRICA REGION stated that IFCS bridges a gap between policy and science and should not be replaced by a high level political body such as International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM). With GERMANY and TANZANIA, she emphasized that ICCM does not have IFCS' role of an open, inclusive forum that promotes transparent interaction between governments and stakeholders. HUNGARY supported a future role for IFCS as an open forum, advocated the enhancement of synergies between ICCM and IFCS, and proposed that a meeting be held next year on cooperation and linkages between ICCM and IFCS.

The US said that SAICM provides for stakeholder participation and addressing emerging issues, and on behalf of the US and AUSTRALIA, proposed "sunsetting" IFCS or merging IFCS with SAICM. JAPAN did not support "sunsetting" IFCS or the other proposed options, and said further elaboration was needed. SWITZERLAND and NORWAY underscored the need for both policy-setting and brainstorming forums, and called for a mutually supportive approach for SAICM and IFCS. The AFRICA REGION stated that SAICM is still new and lacks a secure financial mechanism to achieve the 2020 goal. GERMANY emphasized that IFCS is still needed given the current lack of effective working structures under SAICM, and proposed: strengthening SAICM/ICCM and its Quick Start Programme (QSP); using IFCS to fill the gaps between existing international chemical management and the demands of Agenda 21; and using IFCS as a "think tank" and consensus-building forum when preparing for ICCM-2. ZAMBIA, MADAGASCAR, IRAN, FRANCE and PAN INTERNATIONAL supported the continued existence of IFCS. GERMANY announced a contribution of €100,000 for IFCS in 2007, subject to parliamentary approval, and encouraged other donors to follow suit.

An *ad hoc* working group, chaired by Georg Karlaganis, Switzerland, was established to continue discussing the future of IFCS.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Maria Neira, WHO, urged consideration of how "chemicalization" is driven and managed.

Lynn Goldman, Johns Hopkins University, reviewed the poverty reduction and the sound management of chemicals "Thought Starter" paper (IFCS/FORUM V/04-TS), highlighting the disproportionate vulnerability of the poor to exposure to hazardous materials. She called for efforts to increase interaction

between chemical managers and the designers and implementors of poverty reduction strategies. She reviewed case studies of "preventable tragedies" involving hazardous waste disposal without containment, waste scavenging, battery recycling, placer gold mining, lead pottery usage, electronic waste, and inappropriate pesticide usage.

Jill Hanna, European Commission, noted that simply demonstrating strong links between chemicals and poverty will not necessarily ensure funding, since chemicals compete with many other challenges to be addressed by donors, such as bad governance and gender inequity. She highlighted the importance of using evidence from the Millennium Environmental Assessment and WHO environment and health initiative to link chemical issues to the Millennium Development Goals. She also suggested that studying the costs incurred by the absence of sound chemical management would build a strong case for donor support. Hanna underscored that SAICM QSP will not be the only financial mechanism for chemical management, and that the EU is putting into place a programme covering such issues.

Sarojeni Rengam, Pesticides Action Network - Asia and Pacific, said that countries that have equitable and efficient land tenure systems and ensure property rights for both men and women have developed faster and achieved higher levels of food security, health and welfare. Noting the links between poverty and pesticide contamination, Rengam said small farmers, agricultural workers and indigenous people have no say in determining agricultural practices. She emphasized the need for capacity building and empowerment to allow the participation of peasants, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers, the urban poor and women in the elaboration and implementation of poverty reduction policies.

Nelson Manda, Zambia, presented perspectives from developing countries, reviewing a number of case studies highlighting, *inter alia*, diffuse responsibility for chemicals management, weak institutions, and lack of capacity of other institutions to deal with the negative impacts of inappropriately-managed chemical issues. He highlighted that health crises caused by PCB pollution from electrical industries owned by governments can result in resources being diverted from poverty reduction.

Participants' discussions included: funding availability and mobilization for chemical safety activities and phasing out DDT use, especially in malaria zones; and the importance of empowering and involving grassroots organizations and farmers in policy formulation.

AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON FUTURE OF THE IFCS

The *ad hoc* working group on the future of IFCS met on Monday night with the aim of working towards a draft recommendation. Following some opening interventions, participants undertook a preliminary "brain storming" session to facilitate open discussions. Discussion continued late into the night.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The topic that kept participants chatting in the corridors concerned the future of IFCS. Some participants were overheard saying that in the end the fate of IFCS will depend on availability of financial resources, while others wondered what leverage developing countries would present to press for keeping IFCS. In a different circle, delegates were commenting on the value of IFCS for developing countries, including its advisory role on scientific and technical issues. As one seasoned veteran noted, in the long term, when SAICM is implemented, IFCS might become redundant but, in the meantime, many consider that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."