

IFCS-V HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

On Thursday morning, IFCS-V (Forum V) participants met in regional groups and then convened in plenary. In the afternoon there was a meeting of contributor countries, followed by field trips. Working groups met in the evening and late into the night.

The working groups on precaution, and toys and chemical safety met in the evening, followed by the working group on heavy metals, and lastly, the working group on the future of IFCS. Deliberations continued until 1:30 am.

IFCS REGIONAL GROUPS

Regional groups met to elect their candidates for IFCS vice-presidencies and Forum Standing Committee (FSC) seats, and to consider the draft documents that had been produced by the working groups on toys and chemical safety, precaution, the future of IFCS, and heavy metals.

AFRICA: The group nominated Tanzania for Vice President, Zambia and Burkina Faso for the FSC seats, and Malawi and Angola as alternate members.

On the future of IFCS, the group did not support an option for a joint SAICM and IFCS Secretariat. On precaution, the region favored providing information to developing countries and establishing capacity-building and skill-sharing initiatives on tools and approaches for applying precaution. On heavy metals, participants supported a chemical convention approach. On toys, the group expressed concerns regarding donation of contaminated toys from developed countries, and the need to look at local informal toy production. The group noted a statement that AFRICA REGION will deliver in plenary regarding the dumping of hazardous waste in Côte d'Ivoire.

ASIA AND PACIFIC: On future of IFCS, the group supported draft text proposing the creation of a working group to prepare a decision on the future of IFCS, with the exception of JAPAN, which preferred draft text establishing a joint executive body and joint secretariat administered by UNEP to implement SAICM and IFCS activities.

On heavy metals, there was disagreement on whether to refer to the document as a "declaration" or "statement," whether to include language on "legally binding actions," and on a financial assistance mechanism.

On precaution, the group agreed to the establishment of an expert working group to develop a plan of action to implement the identified next steps.

The group nominated Iran for Vice President; China, Republic of Korea, and Thailand (*ex officio*) as FSC members; and Japan, Indonesia, and Samoa as FSC alternate members.

CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE: The group spent most of its allocated time discussing nominations for the vice presidency and FSC seats, deciding to support Hungary for the presidency of IFCS, and nominating Slovenia for Vice President and Belarus and Latvia for FSC seats. Other candidates for FSC seats included Slovakia and Hungary.

On precaution, discussions considered adding text regarding positive and negative lessons learned from case examples, and a reference to a feasibility study on a plan of action. The group supported the creation of a working group to prepare a decision on the future of IFCS.

LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN: On heavy metals, the group agreed on the importance of national inventories, and highlighting the links between heavy metals and health. BRAZIL suggested waiting until the next UNEP Governing Council meeting to address the link to health. There was also wide support for retaining language on regulating mercury exports and for supporting the call of the AFRICA GROUP for specific financial support mechanisms. The Chair mentioned statements by Germany and US that they could not consider new financial instruments.

On the future of IFCS, the group supported draft text on the creation of a working group to prepare a decision on the future of IFCS, and agreed that, based on the information available to date, they are not convinced that the full value of IFCS could be duplicated in SAICM.

WESTERN EUROPE & OTHERS: Switzerland was nominated for Vice President and Germany, Austria and US were nominated for the group's three FSC seats. Discussion on the future of IFCS was deferred to the *ad hoc* working group.

PLENARY

TOYS AND CHEMICAL SAFETY: Chair Shea presented a draft text including three recommendations for action on precaution, information sharing, and harmonization of standards. The INTERNATIONAL POPS ELIMINATION NETWORK, opposed by the EUROPEAN COMMISSION and US, asked for inclusion of global market surveillance systems involving an aggressive sampling programme. NIGERIA underscored the importance of the informal toy-manufacturing sector. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the outcome document should require the use of existing research. The US asked for reference to an "arrangement of tools and approaches." Participants agreed to further revise the document in the working group.

PRECAUTION: CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGION, AFRICA REGION, ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION, PAN INTERNATIONAL and GERMANY supported the establishment of a working group to develop a plan of action for the implementation of the identified next steps on precaution.

The US opposed, proposing participants be invited to voluntarily contribute their experiences and expertise. The CENTER OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW suggested a parallel approach. Further discussions were deferred to the working group.

HEAVY METALS: Chair Babajide presented the draft document on heavy metals and urged participants to move quickly to reach agreement on bracketed issues. CHILE asked for more focus on health issues. GERMANY stressed her lack of a mandate to discuss issues relating to new financial mechanisms. FINLAND highlighted the need for an international legally-binding instrument for mercury and, as appropriate, other metals.

The US expressed concern with language presupposing a future UNEP GC decision, while DENMARK said the document is simply a recommendation providing input from IFCS to UNEP.

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: Chair Karlaganis presented a draft document, noting that it reflects agreement on areas including the need for a “brainstorming” body and the need for institutional and resource efficiency. He reported that the major unresolved issues include: whether the future institutional arrangements of IFCS should be decided at Forum V, or if more time is required; how such a decision would be prepared; and whether change to the IFCS Terms of Reference would be necessary.

Asserting that the “house is on fire,” US called for a detailed plan of action on the future of IFCS, voiced concern about a future lack of funding, and advocated a joint executive body and joint secretariat for SAICM and IFCS, to be adopted in 2009. MEXICO noted the need to avoid any rivalry with SAICM and to take into consideration that SAICM also requires funding. The ICFTU emphasized that SAICM and ICCM lack the facility for open, transparent discussion involving all stakeholders, and warned against a premature decision. The ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FUND supported formation of a working group to report back to IFCS on options regarding integration and contribution to SAICM.

THAILAND, GERMANY and PAN emphasized the value of IFCS. PAN listed numerous pledges for financial support from non-governmental organizations and private individuals towards the future of IFCS, and called upon other governments and non-governmental organizations to contribute. GERMANY reiterated its €100,000 pledge. SWITZERLAND announced financial support of US\$50,000 for 2007 and agreed to provide free meeting space in Geneva as a further in-kind contribution. THAILAND announced a contribution of at least US\$75,000 over three years, subject to government approval. IPEN committed to raise US\$15,000 to ensure NGO participation at Forum VI, as it did at Forum V. The ALLIANCE OF PEASANTS IN THE CORDILLERA HOMELAND added a symbolic financial pledge, saying that IFCS is an important forum for communicating the views of indigenous peoples. Financial contributions of between US\$500 and US\$2,500 each were announced by TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, TANZANIA, PHILIPPINES, INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AGENDA FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT TANZANIA, and ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL TOXICOLOGISTS. NIGERIA pledged an unspecified amount. A number of private individuals also pledged contributions.

Delegates discussed an extensive list of topics to be considered by the Forum, and discussed the need to prioritize particular items. Participants stressed, *inter alia*, nanoparticles, opportunities for substitution, e-waste, health hazards associated with chemicals and metals, and water chemistry. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that priorities must be set in terms of the competence of other institutions. The US emphasized the importance of achieving consensus on the list of future topics.

AD HOC WORKING GROUPS

TOYS AND CHEMICAL SAFETY: The group modified the draft text to address concerns expressed by participants in plenary, including references to lack of information, the informal sector, and international standards. Reference to a global surveillance system was changed to language encouraging countries and regions to develop and share the results of surveillance of chemical contents of toys, and language was introduced on actions towards the elimination of lead and mercury.

PRECAUTION: The group agreed on two general areas of potential next steps: provision of information including tool-kits, practical case examples, and a list of contact points; and capacity-building and skill-sharing initiatives, including capacity-building workshops, dialogue for sharing lessons, tools and approaches, and pilot projects. The group reached consensus on text that requests that actions be undertaken between now and Forum VI to implement the identified next steps with the intention of contributing to the implementation of the SAICM. The US proposed, and the group agreed, to text encouraging IFCS participants to make available such information, assistance, and tools and approaches. Language on a feasibility study for developing a plan of action was deleted.

HEAVY METALS: The EU, FINLAND and GERMANY suggested language urging IFCS participants to initiate, continue, and intensify action, as appropriate, to reduce the supply of mercury on a global scale through voluntary measures such as an export ban preventing excess mercury from re-entering the global market and global phase out of primary production of mercury by mining. Following amendments from US, CANADA and INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MINING AND METALS, the text was agreed.

Participants agreed the title of the document to be “The Budapest Statement on Mercury, Lead and Cadmium,” and to invite UNEP GC to strengthen voluntary actions at the global level for mercury, lead and cadmium. The group discussed substituting “convention” for a “legally binding instrument” in mercury and, as appropriate, other metals of global concern. This paragraph remains bracketed.

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: The group reconvened at 10:45 pm with the aim of finalizing the draft resolution. Discussion commenced on considering holding future Forum meetings back-to-back with other events, for reasons of synergies and cost-effectiveness. SWITZERLAND suggested “proposing” such action while US preferred “urging.” GERMANY suggested referring to “other international meetings” while JAPAN favored specifically referring to “ICCM meetings.”

IN THE CORRIDORS

As delegates returned from field trips and the sun set on beautiful Budapest, it looked like it would not set on IFCS – yet. The corridors were filled with sandwiches, coffee and soft drinks in preparation for another long night of work. Many participants were heard complaining about one negotiating party, saying its resistance to internationally binding action on mercury is making it lose both credibility and goodwill. However, an observer defended this party’s actual action on mercury hazards “on the ground” under the UNEP Mercury Partnership Programme, and she added that other parties seem to wait for a convention before taking action. So much talk about mercury prompted a delegate to joke that heavy metals had “out-weighted” other agenda items. However, the “heavy” negotiating agenda seemed to be paying off, as the Budapest Statement approached completion.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of IFCS-V will be available on Monday, 2 October 2006 online at <http://www.iisd.ca/chemical/ifcs5/>