

BRS Conventions COPs Highlights: Wednesday, 1 May 2019

Delegates convened in plenary in the morning to work on joint issues including: synergies to combat illegal trade and traffic in chemicals and wastes; gender mainstreaming; and venue and date of the next meetings. In the afternoon, delegates focused on work related to the Stockholm Convention, including exemptions, DDT, and PCBs.

Contact groups met throughout the day on listing of chemicals under the Stockholm Convention (SC), technical matters under the Basel Convention (BC), budget, joint issues, and technical assistance and financial resources.

Joint Sessions of the COPs

Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions

Mainstreaming gender: The Secretariat introduced the documents (CHW.14/22, INF/55; RC/COP.9/18, INF/45; POPS/COP.9/25, INF/58). Several parties expressed support for the updated BRS Gender Action Plan, with many outlining national actions to mainstream gender for the sound management of chemicals and wastes. The EU requested the Secretariat to continue to update subsequent COPs on implementation of the Plan. The AFRICAN GROUP and IRAQ called for technical assistance to support gender mainstreaming.

PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK (PAN) noted that women are more biologically sensitive to pesticides and called for more work on this issue. INDEPENDENT ECOLOGICAL EXPERTISE called for a risk evaluation of products to which predominantly women are exposed. International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) stressed the importance of correcting the “power imbalance” in chemicals and wastes decision-making processes.

Delegates agreed to note this information in the report.

Synergies in preventing and combating illegal traffic and trade in hazardous chemicals and wastes: The Secretariat introduced the documents (CHW.14/23, INF/42; RC/COP.9/19, INF/33; POPS/COP.9/26, INF/42).

PAKISTAN, supported by PALESTINE and LIBYA, highlighted the problem of illegal exports of plastic scrap and garbage from developed to developing countries and called for “strict action” on illegal dumping.

The AFRICAN GROUP, with TOGO, TANZANIA, NIGER, SOUTH AFRICA, and the GAMBIA, highlighted the importance of the regional centres in fighting illegal traffic and trade. NIGERIA called for the Secretariat to organize sub-regional capacity-building activities.

KAZAKHSTAN supported synergies. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for strengthening cooperation among the BRS Conventions and the Montreal Protocol.

The EU said work on this issue should build on previous decisions and be cost effective.

The US cautioned that a joint glossary of terms might conflate the legal autonomy of the Conventions. IPEN called for development of a glossary of terms and a form to report on illegal trade. PAN urged inclusion of civil society organizations in monitoring.

Delegates forwarded this issue to the joint issues contact group.

From science to action: The Secretariat introduced the documents (CHW.14/24, INF/40; RC/COP.9/20, INF/35; POPS/COP.9/27, INF/44). The AFRICAN GROUP and others welcomed the revised roadmap for enhanced science-based action in implementation. URUGUAY called for improved participation of scientific and academic communities.

NIGERIA called for financial resources to implement the roadmap. The EU proposed textual changes, including to postpone the date for parties to report on implementation to 2023. The AFRICAN GROUP requested time to consult, and delegates agreed to return to this issue later.

Venue and Date of the Next COPs

The Secretariat introduced the documents (CHW.14/INF/57; RC/COP.9/INF/46; POPS/COP.9/INF/60) and highlighted an offer from Kenya to host the 2021 COPs, pending successful conclusion of a host country agreement. KENYA, supported by the EU, TANZANIA, UGANDA, and NIGERIA, outlined its offer, highlighting the country’s experience with hosting COPs of other multilateral environmental agreements and meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly. Delegates requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft decision.

Other Matters

Admission of Observers: The Secretariat introduced the documents (CHW.14/INF/58; RC/COP.9/INF/47; POPS/COP.9/INF/50). Delegates agreed to take note of the observer requests.

Preventing harassment: Parties took note of the guidelines preventing and addressing all forms of harassment at BRS meetings (CHW.14/INF/47; RC/COP.9/INF/48; POPS/COP.9/INF/51).

Partnerships: The Secretariat introduced the BC Partnership Programme (CHW.14/18). BC COP14 President Zivayi Matiza explained this item would be discussed jointly to ensure a consistent approach toward partnerships.

URUGUAY welcomed the establishment of partnerships with a pre-established framework, specific terms of reference, and work programme that allows progress to be measured.

IRAN, NIGERIA, and INDIA called for a partnership on lead-acid batteries. ARGENTINA and the GAMBIA cited the benefits of partnerships for addressing illegal traffic. ARGENTINA and CHINA highlighted the role of the regional centres.

Noting that only the BC has partnerships, SWITZERLAND said that the SC and RC could start partnerships under their respective Conventions and, with the EU, queried the need for joint discussions.

Parties forwarded discussions to the joint issues contact group.

Stockholm Convention COP9

Rules of Procedure for the COP

The Secretariat introduced the document (POPS/COP.9/3), noting that Paragraph 1 of rule 45 on voting procedures remains in brackets. Delegates agreed to defer this issue to COP10.

Matters related to the implementation of the Convention

Listing of chemicals in annex A, B or C to the Convention: Amendment proposed by the Russian Federation: COP9

President Khashashneh invited the Russian Federation to update plenary on its proposed amendment.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the precautionary principle should be followed “within reasonable limits” and called for the POPRC to develop guidelines on its application of the principle and take a decision on the need to improve the mechanism for listing chemicals.

President Khashashneh invited the Russian Federation to submit a conference room paper (CRP) detailing its proposal.

Measures to reduce or eliminate releases from intentional production and use: Exemptions: The Secretariat introduced the document (POPS/COP.9/4), noting that delegates may wish to include language in the draft decision indicating that, due to the listing of dicofol, production and use of DDT as a closed-system site-limited intermediate in the production of dicofol will not be extended.

The EU supported the draft decision. Several delegates recognized the efforts of the POPs Review Committee (POPRC). MEXICO expressed concern about the limited number of notifications. NIGERIA shared information on locally available non-POP alternatives and called for more technical and financial support. IPEN emphasized that exemptions should be for specific products and said each listing should require labelling new products that contain POPs. The US called for information on exemption registration and expiration dates to be included on the Secretariat website.

Parties requested the Secretariat to update the draft decision and suspended discussion.

DDT: The Secretariat introduced the documents (POPS/COP.9/5, INF/6). UNEP reported on the implementation of the DDT Alternatives Roadmap and the Global Alliance for the Development and Deployment of Products, Methods and Strategies as Alternatives to DDT for Disease Vector Control (INF/8). The WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) highlighted information on the use of DDT and alternatives in disease vector control (INF/7).

Several countries reported on national efforts to eliminate DDT stockpiles, with PERU, SOUTH AFRICA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, and YEMEN calling for technical assistance. GUINEA, SENEGAL, RWANDA, and HONDURAS highlighted bans of DDT in their countries. NAMIBIA noted difficulties related to DDT elimination. UGANDA announced its intention to revert to DDT to address vectors resistant to alternatives.

CÔTE D’IVOIRE noted the importance of the precautionary principle and emphasized the need to find a viable alternative. BANGLADESH urged the DDT expert group to establish a timeline for the global phase-out of DDT. The AFRICAN GROUP and others called on UNEP and WHO to provide clear guidance on the safety of DDT for indoor residual spraying for disease vector control.

The EU encouraged parties on the DDT register to respond to the questionnaire in order to receive technical or other assistance.

PAN urged greater attention to: illegal agricultural use of DDT; funding for non-chemical management approaches to vector control; and, with IPEN, called for improving reporting. The draft decision was orally amended according the EU proposal.

PCBs: The Secretariat introduced the documents (POPS/COP.9/6, Add.1, INF/11) and presented the report on progress toward elimination of PCBs (INF/10), emphasizing that reported data are incomplete and incomparable.

Many relayed their national activities, with developing countries underscoring that technical assistance is needed to reach the 2025 phase-out and 2028 elimination targets. NORTH MACEDONIA urged identification of innovative funding modalities, noting current funding is limited.

The EU, supported by SWITZERLAND, NORWAY, and CANADA, proposed revisions to the draft decision, including requesting the Secretariat to report on progress and develop guidance on a standardized approach to developing PCB inventories with support of the small intersessional working group (SIWG). CANADA suggested urging parties to provide information on progress in their fifth national reports.

JAMAICA called for the Secretariat, with the SIWG and PCB Elimination Network, to develop a global strategy for the elimination of PCBs.

UNEP said the financial basis for work on PCB elimination is weak and enhanced collaboration is needed to meet the targets.

IPEN called for prioritizing guidance on, and funding and transfer of, non-combustion technologies. Describing contaminated sites as burdens her community did not create, ALASKA COMMUNITY ACTION ON TOXICS urged elimination of PCBs.

Delegates adopted the decision as amended.

Measures to reduce or eliminate releases from wastes:

The Secretariat introduced the document (POPS/COP.9/10). The EU proposed amendments to the draft. Delegates requested the Secretariat to revise the draft decision to include the EU amendments contained in CRP.5

Contact Groups

Listing of chemicals under the SC: Delegates focused on the scope of substances included in the listing of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts, and related compounds. Delegates defined a process that initially uses the list provided by the POPRC, then invites parties to submit information on additional compounds, which would be compiled by the Secretariat in consultation with the POPRC, made available on the Convention website, and updated periodically. All welcomed this “living list” approach, and many parties supported characterizing the list as “indicative” to emphasize that the listing includes all related compounds. One party opposed this characterization.

BC Technical Matters: Participants discussed the practicality of two options proposed for low POP content values (CHW.14/INF/9). Participants agreed to discuss Option 2, which includes hexa-, hepta-, tetra-, penta- and deca-BDE, in a Friends of the Co-Chairs group and to decide among the three values proposed (50mg/kg, 500mg/kg and 1000mg/kg). They also discussed textual options for the draft decision on POPs waste technical guidelines (CHW.14/7), acknowledging that some proposed language will depend on the results of the SC listing contact group.

Joint Issues: On science to action, views diverged on whether to have countries report in 2021 or 2023. On illegal traffic, several opposed and one country supported the development of a glossary for the RC and SC. Parties amended the draft decision to clarify that the Secretariat should develop an explanatory note to accompany the reporting form, and several countries expressed the need for reporting on illegal traffic to be voluntary.

In the Corridors

The TripleCOP was full steam ahead on Wednesday. Delegates arrived buoyed by the Technical Matters group’s quick success in finalizing all of the POPs waste guidelines except the low-POP content values, a feat several participants attributed to the solid work of the SIWG. However, challenges quickly emerged.

As in past years, developing countries were divided over the continued need for DDT. While many highlighted the availability of safe, affordable alternatives to this toxic substance, others underscored that with insecticide-resistant vectors on the rise, DDT is the “ultimate go-to” in the fight against malaria. Many lamented slow progress toward the 2025 and 2028 PCB goals, with one delegate suggesting the COP may need to revise the goals entirely.

While work on technical issues progressed, several participants were surprised by views expressed on a non-technical issue: gender mainstreaming. Several women expressed frustration with both the excuses for slow progress and limited visibility of women in high-profile roles in these COPs, with one saying, “look, we’re here, doing the work, and actively shaping these Conventions.”