

## Summary of the Meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions: 26-30 July 2021

With a streamlined agenda of time-sensitive work, parties and stakeholders to the three global hazardous chemicals and wastes conventions convened online for the first of two segments of their biennial meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (COPs). Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions dealt with urgent operational and substantive work including, *inter alia*, election of officers for the Rotterdam Convention (RC) and Stockholm Convention (SC), the programmes of work and budgets for all three conventions, and a decision regarding the SC's financial mechanism. In light of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the remainder of the COPs' agendas was deferred to June 2022, when parties and stakeholders expect to meet face-to-face.

Delegates convened in plenary on the first and last days of the week-long meeting, and parties met in a contact group that was closed to observers on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday to negotiate the interim programmes of work and budgets to keep the conventions operating until delegates can meet face-to-face. Several side events were held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, including on [plastic pollution](#) and on the 20th Anniversary of the SC's adoption.

Key outcomes from this meeting included the adoption of the 2022 interim budgets, the election of members of the SC Effectiveness Evaluation Committee and the recently-established RC Compliance Committee, and the agreement to forward two important reports to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to inform its eighth replenishment. This last item was particularly important for many developing countries who have had long-standing frustrations with the difficulty of accessing GEF funding to support the implementation of their obligations under the SC.

Delegates completed their planned work, reaching agreement on each of the items on the agenda. They achieved success despite technical challenges that slowed proceedings and made it difficult for some participants to be heard or seen at different times throughout the week. Over 1,000 participants joined the fifteenth meeting of the COP to the Basel Convention (BC COP15), the tenth meeting of the COP to the Rotterdam Convention (RC COP10) and the tenth meeting of the COP to the Stockholm Convention (SC COP10). The virtual segment convened from 26-30 July 2021.

## A Brief History of the Hazardous Chemicals and Wastes Conventions

In 2010, the COPs to the BRS Conventions began the process of enhancing cooperation and coordination. As a result, the three COPs have been meeting together since 2013 and are coordinated by a single Secretariat, which is principally housed within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Rotterdam Convention is jointly supported by UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The first extraordinary meeting of the BRS COPs (ExCOPs) met in February 2010 in Bali, Indonesia, following the work of the *Ad Hoc* Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the BRS Conventions, which was mandated to prepare joint recommendations on enhanced cooperation and coordination for submission to the three COPs. Delegates adopted an omnibus synergies decision on joint services, joint activities, synchronization of the budget cycles, joint audits, joint managerial functions, and review arrangements. The ExCOPs decided to review the effectiveness of the synergies arrangements in 2013.

The second ExCOPs were held in conjunction with the back-to-back meetings of the COPs in April/May 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates adopted an omnibus decision on enhancing cooperation and coordination among the BRS Conventions. The ExCOPs, *inter alia*, decided to undertake a review of the synergies

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process and the organization of the Secretariats, and to continue to present joint activities as an integral part of the proposed programmes of work and budgets of the three Conventions. On enhanced cooperation and coordination among the technical bodies of the BRS Conventions, the ExCOPs, *inter alia*, requested alignment of the working arrangements of the RC Chemical Review Committee (CRC) with those of the SC Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) to support effective participation of experts and observers, and encouraged the POPRC to involve experts from the Basel Convention when discussing waste issues. On wider cooperation, the ExCOPs requested the Secretariat to enhance cooperation with the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and expressed interest in coordinating with the Minamata Convention on Mercury. On facilitating financial resources for chemicals and wastes, the ExCOPs welcomed an integrated approach that includes mainstreaming, industry involvement, and dedicated external finance.

### Basel Convention

The Basel Convention (BC), which was adopted in 1989 and entered into force on 5 May 1992, is the first of the BRS Conventions. It was created to address concerns about the management, disposal, and transboundary movement of the estimated 400 million tonnes of hazardous wastes that are produced worldwide each year. The guiding principles of the Convention are that transboundary movements of hazardous wastes should be: reduced to a minimum; minimized at the source; managed in an environmentally sound manner; and treated and disposed of as close as possible to their source of generation.

In September 1995, at BC COP3, parties adopted the Ban Amendment, which bans the shipment of hazardous wastes for final disposal and recycling from Annex VII countries (EU, OECD and Liechtenstein) to non-Annex VII countries. The Ban Amendment entered into force in May 2019, after it was ratified by three-fourths (66) of the 87 parties that were parties to the Convention when the amendment was adopted.

There are currently 188 parties to the Basel Convention and 100 parties to the Ban Amendment.

**Recent Highlights:** At COP13 (2017), delegates adopted guidance to assist parties in developing strategies for implementation of the Cartagena Declaration on the Prevention, Minimization and Recovery of Hazardous Wastes and other Wastes. COP13 also adopted additional technical guidelines on POPs wastes, mercury wastes, and e-wastes, established a new partnership on household waste, and agreed to include marine litter in the programme of work of the Basel Convention's Open-ended Working Group.

At COP14 (2019), parties took a landmark step to address certain plastic wastes under the Convention. Parties also adopted technical guidelines on environmentally sound management of electrical and electronic waste (e-waste). Key aspects of the e-waste issue remain, and an Expert Working group was established to answer questions about the export of e-waste for refurbishment—an issue some characterized as a loophole that allows end-of-life products to be exported under the guise of reparability.

### Rotterdam Convention

The Rotterdam Convention (RC), which was adopted in September 1998 and entered into force on 24 February 2004, creates legally-binding obligations for the implementation of the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure. The objectives of the

Convention are to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm, and to contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals by: facilitating information exchange about their characteristics; providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export; and disseminating these decisions to parties. There are currently 164 parties to the Convention and a total of 52 chemicals listed in Annex III, including 35 pesticides, 16 industrial chemicals, and one chemical in both the pesticide and the industrial chemical categories.

**Recent Highlights:** For many years, parties have been unable to reach consensus to list several chemicals recommended by the CRC for inclusion in Annex III, including carbosulfan, fenthion, paraquat dichloride formulations, and chrysotile asbestos. The COP has agreed that each of these chemicals meets all criteria for listing but has not yet reached consensus to include them in Annex III. One of the most significant outcomes of COP9 in 2019 was the decision to adopt a compliance mechanism. This challenging issue had been on the Convention's agenda for 15 years, and at COP9 only one party objected to its establishment. Parties took the unprecedented step of voting to establish a new annex that would delineate the procedures and mechanisms to facilitate parties' implementation of their obligations (Annex VII). Four parties have opted out of this compliance mechanism.

### Stockholm Convention

The Stockholm Convention (SC), which was adopted in May 2001 and entered into force on 17 May 2004, calls for international action on three categories of persistent organic pollutants (POPs): 1) pesticides, 2) industrial chemicals, and 3) unintentionally produced POPs. The SC requires parties to prevent the development of new POPs and promote best available techniques and best environmental practices for replacing existing POPs. The Convention, which initially addressed 12 substances (informally known as “the dirty dozen”), was designed to facilitate the review and addition of new chemicals through a three-stage scientific review process prior to consideration for listing by the COP. Since 2009, the COP has added 18 new POPs, including both pesticides and industrial chemicals, to the annexes of the Stockholm Convention. There are currently 184 parties to the Convention.

**Recent Highlights:** At its 2017 meeting, the SC COP agreed to list short-chain chlorinated paraffins in Annex A (elimination) of the Convention. Due in part to its widespread use in a range of applications, this industrial chemical was under review by the POPs Review Committee (POPRC) for ten years before it was recommended for listing, and the COP agreed to allow several specific exemptions for continued production and use.

At SC COP9, in 2019, parties agreed to list the pesticide dicofol and the industrial chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts, and PFOA-related compounds in the annexes to the Convention. Ongoing issues include work to: reduce stockpiles of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); review the continued need for DDT for disease-vector control; and achieve consensus to establish a compliance mechanism.

## Report of the Meetings

On Monday, SC COP10 President Silvija Kalnins (Latvia), RC COP10 President Serge Molly Allo'o Allo'o (Gabon), and BC COP15 President Osvaldo Álvarez-Pérez (Chile) opened the meetings of their respective COPs. Álvarez-Pérez explained that the three COP Presidents would rotate presiding over the joint sessions of the BRS COPs, further noting that when one of them presides, he or she would be doing so on behalf of the other two presidents.

### Joint Session of the BRS COPs

Joyce Msuya, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, underscored that a quarter of the global burden of disease is related to environmental factors, including pollution. Emphasizing that the pandemic presents an unprecedented opportunity to build back better, she commended the BRS COPs for demonstrating how interlinkages can address the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

In a pre-recorded statement, FAO Director General Qu Dongyu underscored the important role of the BRS treaties in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting that through the RC, FAO focuses, with UNEP, on reducing the risks of hazardous pesticides while ensuring sufficient, healthy and affordable food for all. He called for making the post-COVID planet a better and healthier one for everyone. Due to difficulties with the transmission of the video on the conference online platform, Rémi Nono Womdim, Executive Secretary of the RC, FAO, later delivered the statement again on Qu's behalf.

Highlighting the theme of these meetings, "Global Agreements for a Healthy Planet," Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, BRS Conventions, noted the extensive consultations that resulted in the agreement to hold these meetings in two segments: an online component followed by a face-to-face component. Welcoming new parties to the BRS Conventions, Payet highlighted two landmark events: the entry into force of the BC Plastic Amendments and the 20th anniversary of the SC's adoption.

On behalf of the BC COP15 and SC COP10 Presidents, RC COP10 President Allo'o Allo'o said this online segment of the COPs was a testament to delegates' dedication to continuing to fight to meet the conventions' goals and the importance of these three conventions for attaining a healthy planet for all. He explained that the budgetary work before the parties was essential for continuing the work of the conventions, including for the intersessional work that has continued despite the pandemic.

The Dominican Republic, on behalf of the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), *inter alia*, requested the GEF to speed up its approval process to ensure it provides the necessary resources to support implementation of parties' commitments, called for updating technical guidelines on the export of dangerous wastes under the BC, and urged parties to make a global effort to address marine and plastic waste.

Poland, on behalf of the CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGION, welcomed the opportunity to address the most urgent issues for these conventions online, thanked those countries that provided financial support to enable participation in the virtual meeting, and highlighted the importance of effective implementation of all three conventions.

Slovenia, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU) and its Member States, underscored that international cooperation is essential to achieving the conventions' objectives, said the 2030

Agenda is a high priority for the EU and its Member States, and emphasized that several major environmental issues can be attributed in part to poor management of chemicals and wastes.

Iran, on behalf of the ASIA PACIFIC REGION, highlighted the growing problem of medical waste in developing countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomed the entry into force of the BC's Ban Amendment. He also underscored the challenges of effective participation in online meetings, and said virtual meetings should be limited to emergency situations and administrative work.

The opening statement of the Africa Region could not be delivered on Monday due to connectivity problems. At the start of plenary on Friday, South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICA REGION, delivered its statement. She requested that an incident involving the illegal dumping of chemicals and hazardous waste from two EU Member States be addressed at the 2022 meeting of the COPs. She underscored the critical need for a mandate and funding from the COPs in 2022 for the immediate updating of lead-acid battery guidelines under the BC. She also flagged the need: for additional, adequate resources for implementation as POPs are added to the SC; to meet the SC target dates related to PCBs; and for consistency in addressing non-compliance, whether relating to assessed contributions or obligations to make adequate resources and technology available to developing countries.

### Adoption of the Agendas and Organizational Matters

On Monday, BC COP15 President Álvarez-Pérez, RC COP10 Vice-President Mohammad Khashashneh (Jordan), and SC COP10 President Kalnins introduced the agenda for each COP (UNEP/CHW.15/1; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/1; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/1), which were adopted without amendment.

**Organization of work:** On Monday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents, including the scenario note (UNEP/CHW.15/INF/1; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/INF/1; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/1), the tentative schedule of work for the online segment of the meetings (UNEP/CHW.15/INF/2; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/INF/2; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/2), the annotations to the provisional agendas (UNEP/CHW.15/1/Add.1; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/1/Add.1; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/1/Add.1), and the provisional list of meeting documents (UNEP/CHW.15/INF/71; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/INF/43; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/6).

BC COP15 President Álvarez-Pérez noted that work would be divided between the online and face-to-face segments of the meetings. He explained that the online segment would focus on the most time-sensitive issues that could not be deferred to 2022, and said that much of the work would take place in a contact group on budgets and programmes of work, open to parties only, that would meet Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

**Election of officers:** On Monday, the Secretariat introduced the item (RC/COP.10/25/Rev.1; POPS/COP.10/31/Rev.1; CHW.15/INF/3, RC/COP.10/INF/3 and POPS/COP.10/INF/3), explaining that parties to the RC and SC were invited to consider extending until the closing of COP10, in June 2022, the terms of office of members of the CRC and the POPRC. He also explained that, at this meeting, RC parties had to elect 15 members of the Compliance Committee established by RC COP9, and SC parties had to elect 10 members of the Effectiveness Evaluation Committee established by SC COP9. He reminded each region to transmit the names of their candidates to the Secretariat no later than 1:00 pm UTC+2 on Thursday, 29 July, to allow the election at Friday's plenary session.

On Friday, the Secretariat introduced a joint conference room paper (CRP) with nominations to the RC's Compliance Committee and the SC's Effectiveness Evaluation Committee (RC/COP.10/CRP.2, POPS/COP.10/CRP.3), and noted the budget contact group had cleared the decision's financial implications. The RC and SC COP Presidents noted that consideration of this agenda item would resume during the face-to-face segment.

**RC Compliance Committee:** Eight delegates were elected until the close of COP11: Fredrick Muchiri (Kenya), Awidya Santikajaya (Indonesia), Karmen Krajnc (Slovenia), Lendita Dika (North Macedonia), Vilma Morales Quillama (Peru), Tamara Morrison (Jamaica), Adly Manseri (Belgium), and Martin Lacroix (Canada). Seven delegates were elected until the close of COP12: P'Malinam Essolakina Bafei (Togo), Paulina Pashukeni Shilunga (Namibia), Syed Mujtaba Hussain (Pakistan), Hanadi Al Rabai'eh (Jordan), Silvana Bunea (Romania), Osvaldo Álvarez-Pérez (Chile), and Matthias Wolf (Germany).

**RC Chemical Review Committee:** Delegates agreed to extend until the closing of COP10 the terms of office of the 17 members of the CRC with terms of office otherwise ending on 30 April 2022.

**SC POPs Review Committee:** Delegates agreed to extend until the closing of COP10 the terms of office of the 17 members of the POPRC with terms of office otherwise ending on 4 May 2022. They also confirmed the appointments of Ingrid Hauzenberger (Austria), Greg Hammond (Canada), Ved Prakash Mishra (India), and Syed Mujtaba Hussain (Pakistan), replacing members previously designated by the respective parties.

**SC Effectiveness Evaluation Committee:** Ten delegates were elected until the close of COP11: Razaz Ibrahim (Sudan), Joswa Aoudou (Cameroon), Jiang Chen (China), Zaigham Abbas (Pakistan), Kateřina Šebková (Czech Republic), Ivan Djurickovic (Serbia), Agustin Harte (Argentina), Linroy Christian (Antigua and Barbuda), Ramon Guardans (Spain), and Sara Broomhall (Australia).

**Credentials:** On Monday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (CHW.15/INF/4, RC/COP.10/INF/5, and POPS/COP.10/INF/7). RC COP10 President Allo'o Allo'o welcomed new parties that had joined the Conventions since the last COPs: Algeria (RC), Barbados (RC), Equatorial Guinea (SC), Uzbekistan (SC), and Tuvalu (BC and RC).

On Friday, the Secretariat presented a report on credentials for each of the BRS Conventions. These reports were adopted by the respective COPs, with the understanding the agenda item would be reopened at the face-to-face segment of the COPs in June 2022.

### **Programmes of Work and Budgets**

On Monday, the Secretariat introduced the items (CHW.15/29, RC/COP.10/26 and POPS/COP.10/30; CHW.15/INF/68/Rev.1 and INF/69; RC/COP.10/INF/48/Rev.1 and INF/49; POPS/COP.10/INF/70/Rev.1 and INF/71). He explained this online segment of the COPs was necessary to consider interim and simplified budgets for 2022 to allow for the BRS Secretariat's continued operations until the full budget negotiations for the 2022-23 biennium could take place in the face-to-face COPs segment. He explained that the budget consisted of two parts: the first funded by new contributions by parties and the second by a supplementary fund derived from savings in the 2020-21 budget arising from activities that could not be implemented during the pandemic.

The EU called for keeping the interim budget as close to the 2020-21 budget as possible, and questioned the need to budget for another meeting of the BC Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) at the end of 2022. He introduced a CRP proposing minor changes to the documents prepared by the Secretariat (Joint CRP.1).

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION underscored that adopting a one-year interim budget via online negotiations due to the COVID-19 pandemic was an exceptional situation, and stressed that budgets in subsequent years will need to be adopted face-to-face and for two-year periods. He highlighted the importance of allocating resources in the draft budget for face-to-face events, notably of COP and Bureaux meetings. Noting their long-standing support of multilingualism, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said cutting spending on interpretation of official meetings and pre-session documents was unacceptable, and flagged that some of the latest BRS questionnaires were drafted in three languages only.

In response to a query from the Russian Federation, the Secretariat explained that contributions to the interim budget due in October 2021 would be based on the current UN Scale of Assessments. He further clarified that when the 2022-23 budget is finalized by the face-to-face COPs, the newly revised UN Scale of Assessments would apply.

SWITZERLAND expressed general support for the path forward set out in the preparatory documents, but opposed the proposed change of practice with respect to UNEP waiving programme support costs for funding travel by participants in BRS meetings. He noted the BRS Conventions have always requested that UNEP waive those costs so that money supporting participation in physical meetings is always used in full, and underscored that in light of the upcoming face-to-face meeting, these resources are even more important.

Regarding the Secretariat's proposed budget, CHINA noted that only a single scenario had been prepared, and that the criteria used for selecting the costs of activities were not clear and did not appear to be based on a zero nominal growth scenario. The Secretariat clarified that the proposal essentially used a zero nominal growth scenario, but locked-in staff cost increases would require reduction in activity costs. He explained the scenario put forward aims to maintain the level of service at COPs, and thus lands somewhere between the two scenarios typically put forward.

Noting that containing the pandemic remains a stark challenge, CHINA pointed to uncertainty as to whether meetings postponed to 2022 can be held face-to-face and called on the Secretariat to update its plan for using projected savings should meetings continue to be held online.

GHANA acknowledged the context in which the programmes of work and budgets have been prepared, and explained this is cause for further budget review.

South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICA REGION, highlighted urgent activities that require funding in 2022, including: updating the BC's technical guidelines on waste lead-acid batteries since the current guidelines do not reflect best practices nor account for their health impact; additional and adequate resources for the meeting of the CRC; and providing adequate and sufficient resources under the SC, including for updating national implementation plans.

SC COP10 President Kalnins proposed, and delegates agreed, to establish a joint contact group tasked with developing the interim programmes of work and budgets for 2022 and preparing a draft decision for each COP. The US sought confirmation that non-party

states were allowed to participate in the contact group, noting this had been the practice at earlier COPs. BC COP15 President Álvarez-Pérez explained that past practice had been for the budget contact group to be open only to parties. Responding to a query from CANADA, SC COP10 President Kalnins explained that the Presidents and the Bureaux had provided for the group to be closed to non-parties so that the online platform could be secured and allow for parties to speak openly and frankly.

Noting that while they are not party to the Conventions, they are a signatory of all three, the US hoped to join the contact group to observe the proceedings and that knowledge thus gained would be helpful in view of the US joining the Conventions as a party in the future.

The Secretariat clarified that while at one time under the SC non-party states did sit in on the budget contact group, for the last couple of meetings, US participation in the group had not been noted. He summarized that past practice has been mixed in this regard and said it was up to the COPs to decide on the way forward.

Parties agreed to follow the provision agreed by the Bureaux for a contact group open to parties only. Reginald Hernaus (Netherlands) and Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) chaired the contact group, which met on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

At the start of plenary on Friday, Contact Group Co-Chair Hernaus reported on the group's output, thanking the more than 300 participants for their constructive work. He explained that the decisions regarding the interim budgets still included text in brackets relating to the preparation of the programmes of work and budgets for the resumed segment of the COPs and to implications for parties whose contributions to the budget are in arrears.

BC COP15 President Álvarez-Pérez introduced the relevant documents (BC CRP.2, RC CRP.3, SC CRP.4 and Joint BC CRP.2/Add.1, RC CRP.3/Add.1, SC CRP.4/Add.1). Álvarez-Pérez noted that the tables and figures in the joint document had been agreed to by all parties, and that the related draft decisions contained some text that had not yet been agreed. Explaining that the three draft decisions had some of this bracketed text in common, he explained that any solution parties could identify for one decision would apply to the other two. He led delegates through consideration of the bracketed text, seeking agreement that would allow delegates to remove the brackets and produce "clean" decision texts.

Delegates began by discussing proposed text that would require the Secretariat to undertake a full consultation with parties and take their views into account as part of its preparation of a revised proposal for the programmes of work and budgets for the biennium 2022-23.

Slovenia, on behalf of the EU, supported by NORWAY and SWITZERLAND, preferred to delete this text, saying this requirement would be unusual and infeasible and that parties would be fully consulted during the COP.

IRAN emphasized that the text should remain, and his delegation could not compromise on this point, saying it is established practice for the Secretariat to ask the parties' views during preparation of the budget.

Noting different views on the bracketed text within the paragraph, President Álvarez-Pérez proposed deleting the paragraph altogether. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION opposed this proposal, underscoring that the paragraph makes an important request to the Secretariat to provide information about savings incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The AFRICA REGION emphasized that the Secretariat consults with the Bureau, which consults with regions before making a decision, and said further consultation would be difficult for the Secretariat. She supported retaining the paragraph in order to mandate the Secretariat to provide an updated budget.

The EU asked the Secretariat to explain the usual practice so parties could decide if it needed to be reiterated in the paragraph. President Álvarez-Pérez asked the Secretariat to explain whether the language in brackets complies with the Secretariat's practice.

The Secretariat explained that when it is preparing the budget for the next biennium, it prepares the number of scenarios the COP has requested, presents these scenarios in regional meetings prior to the meetings of the COPs, and publishes an information document with: the audited financial statements of all three conventions, income information, and a budget performance report. He further explained that the information requested in the bracketed text would be available at the end of March 2022, when the accounts for 2021 are closed, and said this would leave two and a half months to conduct consultations with parties, which could be challenging.

Noting that it would be difficult for the Secretariat to conduct the proposed consultations in such a short timeframe, Álvarez-Pérez suggested maintaining the text "in full consultation with Parties" and deleting "and taking into account their views...." He said that parties will have the opportunity to express their views during the meeting of the COP.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION and IRAN expressed support for the President's proposal.

Álvarez-Pérez then invited parties to consider two paragraphs of bracketed text referring to the financial rules on outstanding contributions. The first paragraph stipulated that no representative of any party in arrears would be eligible to be a member of the Bureau or any subsidiary body of the COP, except for parties that are least developed countries, small island developing states, or those parties that are respecting an agreed schedule of payments. The second paragraph recognized, *inter alia*, the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy and on developing countries in particular, and that such parties strive to pay their assessed annual contribution in full and on time.

Álvarez-Pérez proposed removing the brackets around both paragraphs.

IRAN supported this proposal.

The EU, supported by NORWAY, supported removing the square brackets around the first paragraph. IRAN opposed this proposal, saying that the two paragraphs were a package.

SWITZERLAND opposed removing the brackets around the second paragraph and suggested the concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could be reflected in the meeting report.

Álvarez-Pérez suggested moving the text in the second paragraph to the preamble of the decision, noting that the text is not operative and would therefore be better suited to this section.

IRAN said it could support moving both paragraphs to the preamble, but opposed moving only the second. He said the first paragraph included punitive measures against developing countries in arrears, and said the addition of the second paragraph would provide a full picture as to the reasons that parties may be in arrears.

After extensive discussion and a 30-minute break for the interpreters, Álvarez-Pérez proposed removing the brackets from both paragraphs and amending the text of the second paragraph to delete the reference to the impact of the pandemic on the payment of assessed annual contributions.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and COSTA RICA supported this proposal. IRAN raised a concern about the allocation of parties' annual contributions to elements of conventions they have not ratified. Citing specific concerns about the RC Compliance Committee, he asked if text he had prepared on this issue could be included in the RC decision.

RC Vice President Khashashneh requested guidance from the Secretariat. The BRS Legal Advisor explained that pursuant to Rule 3 of the financial rules, which is common to the three conventions, the programme of work and budget is to be adopted by consensus by the parties. She said that Rule 5 provides that once this operational budget is approved, the distribution of costs among parties is done on the basis of the UN Scale of Assessments, and the financial rules do not include consideration of different rights or obligations parties might have under a convention.

Khashashneh asked Iran if the decision could be adopted, saying that Iran's intervention and suggested text would be reflected in the meeting report. IRAN responded this was not acceptable to his delegation, as parties to an instrument should pay for that instrument, and requested that the Secretariat ensure that financing of the RC compliance mechanism is provided only by parties that are party to the annex adopting the mechanism.

The BRS Secretariat said this request would be against the financial rules agreed by the COPs to each Convention and would be impractical to administer. Noting this was a matter of principle that had not been anticipated in the financial rules, IRAN stressed the legal and political implications of asking a party to pay for a mechanism to which it was not a party.

Khashashneh suggested this text could be put in an annex to the meeting report and requested further guidance from the Secretariat. The Legal Advisor confirmed that Iran could forward a CRP for consideration at the next segment of the meeting, in 2022.

IRAN said his proposal should be included in brackets in the decision, not in an annex to the report. After further discussion with the Legal Advisor, Iran agreed to provide a CRP, and said it would be important to include a footnote stating that the proposal relates to allocation of money to the RC Compliance Committee. He emphasized that the budget decision should be considered to be tentative, as his delegation could not agree to allocation of Iran's contribution to the compliance mechanism.

The Legal Advisor clarified that the decision provides for preparation of a revised programme of work and budget, which will be discussed at the face-to-face segment of the COPs. She explained Iran's concerns would be reflected in the report of the current segment, and that a CRP would carry over to the second part.

IRAN said his delegation could not agree to this approach.

Noting that this issue had been discussed at length, TOGO suggested the COP consider voting. IRAN said that a vote would compromise national positions, send a bad signal, and jeopardize the RC. The EU supported the Legal Advisor's explanation and said the decision should remain as is. SWITZERLAND emphasized parties have to follow the financial rules, said it would be open to discussing this sensitive question at the next segment of the meeting, and opposed amending the existing decision text.

IRAN underscored that his delegation could not go along with the decision unless his proposed text was included in brackets in the decision text.

Noting that time left with interpretation for the meeting was waning, Khashashneh invited delegates to consider other issues on the agenda while he worked with the Secretariat to develop a possible solution. When delegates returned to this discussion, the Secretariat suggested adding a footnote to the interim budget with the wording of Iran's proposal for further consideration at the next segment of the meeting. IRAN said he was comfortable with this approach.

Delegates then adopted the interim budgets and programmes of work for each of the conventions. The convention-specific decisions are set out below.

**Final Decisions: BC:** In the decision on the interim programmes of work and proposed budgets of the BC (UNEP/CHW.15/CRP.2 and CRP.2/Add.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- approves, on an exceptional basis, an interim programme budget of USD 4,964,844 for the first year of the biennium 2022-23;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the BC to make commitments up to the amount of the approved interim operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23, and within this amount to make commitments required to implement activities planned for the second year of the biennium;
- approves the supplementary budget of USD 999,151 for 2022;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the BC to make commitments to the amount of the approved supplementary budget, using, on an exceptional basis, the available cash balance in the BC General Trust Fund; and
- decides to maintain the working capital reserve at the level of 15% of the interim operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23.

**RC:** In the decision on the interim programmes of work and proposed budgets of the RC (UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/CRP.3 and CRP.3/Add.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- approves, on an exceptional basis, an interim programme budget of USD 4,259,022 for the first year of the biennium 2022-23;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the RC to make commitments up to the amount of the approved interim operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23, and within this amount to make commitments required to implement activities planned for the second year of the biennium;
- approves the supplementary budget of USD 677,893 for 2022;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the RC to make commitments to the amount of the approved supplementary budget, using, on an exceptional basis, the available cash balance in the RC General Trust Fund; and
- decides to maintain the working capital reserve at the level of 15% of the interim operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23.

**SC:** In the decision on the interim programmes of work and proposed budgets of the SC (UNEP/POPS/COP.10/CRP.4 and CRP.4/Add.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- approves, on an exceptional basis, an interim programme budget of USD 6,106,100 for the first year of the biennium 2022-23;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the SC to make commitments up to the amount of the approved interim

operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23, and within this amount to make commitments required to implement activities planned for the second year of the biennium;

- approves the supplementary budget of USD 1,269,869 for 2022;
- authorizes the Executive Secretary of the SC to make commitments to the amount of the approved supplementary budget, using, on an exceptional basis, the available cash balance in the SC General Trust Fund; and
- decides to maintain the working capital reserve at the level of 15% of the interim operational budget for the first year of the biennium 2022-23.

### ***Venue and date of the resumed meetings of the COPs***

The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (UNEP/CHW.15/30/Rev.1; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/27/Rev.1; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/32/Rev.1), noting that the second segment of these COPs is scheduled to be held face-to-face in Geneva from 6-17 June 2022, with preparatory meetings on 5 June.

SC COP10 President Kalnins proposed that parties adopt the draft decision set out in the documents, pending confirmation by the budgets contact group that relevant budgetary needs have been accommodated.

SOUTH AFRICA supported the draft decision and emphasized the need to avoid imposing further restrictions on travel.

The EU suggested amending the draft decision to add the word “preferably” before the phrase “face-to-face” in order to account for pandemic-related uncertainties about the possibility of holding the meeting in person.

GHANA expressed reservations about the EU proposal, emphasizing that more virtual meetings would be challenging for colleagues from his region.

Noting that his colleagues were missing out on the current discussion due to connectivity problems with the meeting platform, THE GAMBIA called for inclusivity and supported Ghana’s statement. Also citing the connectivity challenges participants were experiencing in the current meeting, IRAN said it could not support the EU’s proposed amendment to the draft decision.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized that it will be necessary to hold face-to-face meetings of the COPs, due to uneven access to technology.

SWITZERLAND said the objective should be to meet face-to-face and said the existing draft decision text did not preclude adjusting meeting arrangements if the COVID-19 crisis were to persist.

BRAZIL, supported by CHILE, emphasized that substantive issues should be dealt with in an inclusive manner, said that online meetings are too precarious to allow for inclusivity, and said it could not support the proposed amendment.

The EU clarified that its proposal was intended to allow for an online meeting if gathering face-to-face proved to be impossible, and emphasized that the proposed amendment was not intended to show preference for virtual meetings.

ARGENTINA and MOROCCO supported adoption of the draft decision without the amendment, noting their preference for face-to-face meetings in Geneva.

IRAN supported adoption of the original draft decision and said organization of another virtual meeting of the COPs would be unacceptable to his delegation.

The AFRICA REGION emphasized the need for parties to be able to participate in deliberations, said the current meeting illustrated the substantial challenges related to connectivity, and said inclusive meetings would have to be held in person.

SC COP10 President Kalnins thanked delegates for the good discussion and proposed that parties adopt the draft decision without amendment, pending confirmation that its budgetary implications could be accommodated in the supplementary budget for 2022.

**Final Decision:** Parties agreed to the decision setting out the proposed venue and date for the resumed meeting as 6-17 June 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland (UNEP/CHW.15/30/Rev.1; UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.10/27/Rev.1; UNEP/POPS/COP.10/32/Rev.1).

### **Stockholm Convention COP10**

The SC addressed only one agenda item separately from the joint sessions of the COPs: financial resources and mechanism to this Convention.

#### ***Financial resources and mechanism***

On Monday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents, including the report on the needs assessment and review of the financial mechanism (UNEP/POPS/COP.10/29), the draft report on the fifth review of the financial mechanism (UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/32), and the assessment of funding needs of parties that are developing countries or countries with economies in transition to implement the SC for the period 2022-2026 (UNEP/POPS/COP.10/INF/33). He noted that the SC COP10 Bureau had agreed that the COP should consider a process-oriented decision on the financial mechanism.

SC COP10 President Kalnins emphasized that a process-oriented decision is important for the implementation of the convention, as it provides vital information regarding funding needs for the eighth replenishment of the GEF. Due to connectivity issues, the statements of some parties could not be heard or were only partially translated by the interpreters.

IRAN said the GEF takes a politicized and discriminatory approach toward certain parties and requested the COP to urge the GEF to assess proposals based only on environmental and technical criteria.

Noting that requirements for implementation of the Stockholm Convention are likely to grow, CHINA underscored the need for adequate, predictable, and increased funding.

The AFRICA REGION called for the GEF to increase funds allocated for the elimination of POPs and to streamline its process to make funds more accessible.

The EU supported forwarding the two reports to the GEF and called on the SC COP to send a clear message on resource needs for the convention’s implementation. SWITZERLAND supported adoption of the draft decision and said it stands ready to engage as proponents for change.

Emphasizing that a considerable quantity of PCBs is still due for elimination prior to the 2025 target, GRULAC introduced a CRP outlining a request to the GEF to streamline its approval process, as GEF provisions on PCBs cause delays and additional costs to stakeholders (POPS/COP.10/CRP.2).

SOUTH AFRICA, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, and BRAZIL highlighted the need for improved financing and called for requesting the GEF to streamline its process for project approvals. ARGENTINA called for flexibility in financing and

better alignment with national plans. COLOMBIA underscored the need to transmit the message to the eighth GEF replenishment process on the importance of PCB elimination.

MOROCCO and GHANA emphasized the need for increased resources for monitoring POPs and the urgency of providing technical assistance to less well-resourced countries. Underscoring that his continent still has more than 2 million tonnes of PCBs to manage, CÔTE D'IVOIRE called for increased financing.

THE INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN) underscored the need to prioritize non-combustion technologies for the destruction of PCBs and other POPs, noting that they are an environmentally sound alternative to combustion technologies.

SC COP10 President Kalnins proposed to consult with interested parties in order to revise the draft decision prepared by the Secretariat for consideration in plenary on Friday.

At the start of plenary on Friday, SC COP10 President Kalnins reported on consultations she had been conducting on this topic, noting that additional consultations were still required before she could bring text forward to the COP for consideration.

At the end of the scheduled plenary, Kalnins noted she would use the remaining ten minutes of interpretation to introduce text arising from her consultations (POPS/COP.10/CRP.5). She explained this text attempts to address the various interests of the parties concerned as well as reflect issues raised in plenary.

IRAN declared the decision did not enjoy consensus, said it echoed the interest of only certain parties, and noted that efforts and consultations to reach a balanced and inclusive agreement at this online COP had failed. Explaining that some parties, including Iran, have been deprived of rights under the SC, he called for non-discriminatory access to the GEF. PALESTINE supported Iran and called for funds to be disbursed without discrimination, decrying that GEF funds are not available to some countries due to political issues.

Several regions and many parties supported the proposed draft decision.

The CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGION stressed the importance of agreeing on a decision to forward the needs assessment to the GEF's eighth replenishment process and supported the draft decision.

The EU supported the draft decision. SWITZERLAND acknowledged the importance of the decision for the successful implementation of the SC, especially for recipient countries, and said the draft decision reflected a spirit of compromise.

GRULAC warned of the consequences to developing countries if the draft decision could not move forward. BRAZIL noted that this item's inclusion in the agenda for the online segment of the COP pointed to the urgency of adopting a decision, and stressed the importance of forwarding the Fifth Assessment and the Needs Assessment to the GEF in time to impact its next replenishment. MEXICO supported the draft decision, including its emphasis on PCBs. JAMAICA supported the timely forwarding of the two reports to the GEF.

The AFRICA REGION noted this decision was a prime opportunity, and one that parties could not afford to miss, to request additional and adequate funding for the effective implementation of the convention. Noting the ever-increasing competition for resources, she said the draft decision would send a clear and positive message to the GEF. ZAMBIA and GHANA stressed the urgency

of their region's needs, including in light of the impending 2025 and 2028 targets related to elimination and environmentally-sound management of PCBs. The SEYCHELLES noted small island developing states face many threats and require financial support to be able to implement their National Implementation Plans.

Summarizing the debate while the Secretariat resolved technical issues that prevented some parties from taking the floor, SC COP10 President Kalnins recognized the extensive support for this decision from a few regions and from a group of countries. Regarding the concerns raised by Iran and Palestine, she pointed to a paragraph in the decision that requests the Secretariat to continue to compile information on the financial mechanism and update relevant documents for consideration by parties at the face-to-face segment of COP10. Noting that at national and regional scales other environmental issues so often take precedence over chemicals management, she highlighted parties' concerns that waiting until the face-to-face segment of SC COP10 to adopt a decision on this item would be too late to inform the GEF replenishment, and implored Iran and Palestine to support the decision.

Saying time is of the essence, GRULAC stressed the importance of this decision for their region to access funds they need in a time of historical crisis within a pandemic that demands solidarity. She appealed to parties to support the draft decision. COLOMBIA expressed the urgent need to adopt the decision and not lose the opportunity to provide guidance to the GEF to obtain accessible, adequate and predictable resources for all developing countries.

IRAN thanked parties for their efforts, but noted parties that have been deprived of GEF support for the last 10-15 years have no more strategic patience, and stressed compromise was not possible on the issue.

Noting that he would not oppose the decision, PALESTINE stressed the need to secure funds for all parties. He highlighted discrimination prevents some countries from getting any GEF funding, and called for securing funding for those parties to implement their SC obligations. Joining concerns raised about the timeliness of forwarding the COP's reports to the GEF, he cautioned that failing to do so could lead to an allocation of funds detrimental to the implementation of the chemicals agenda.

SIERRA LEONE supported GRULAC and the Africa Region.

Following a break to finalize discussions on the RC budget decision, Kalnins again recalled the overwhelming support for the draft decision, and appealed for its adoption. Hearing no objections, she adopted the decision.

IRAN said technical difficulties had prevented him from objecting to the adoption.

Kalnins pled for Iran to accept the decision as adopted, and IRAN asked for the meeting to be paused to allow consultations. After the pause, Kalnins suggested that Iran's concerns be reflected in the report of the meeting and underscored that the agenda item would remain open for discussion at the face-to-face segment of COP10.

IRAN lamented it was a bad day for the BRS COPs and said its trust has been lost.

Commending the decision, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND, the EU, BRAZIL, CANADA, and GRULAC expressed thanks to SC COP10 President Kalnins and support for her leadership.

**Final Decision:** In its decision (UNEP/POPS/COP.10/CRP.5), the SC COP, *inter alia*:

- requests the Secretariat to forward to the GEF the report on the fifth review of the financial mechanism and the report of the



full assessment of the funding necessary and available for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention for the period 2022-2026;

- strongly encourages the donors to the GEF Trust Fund, at its eighth replenishment, to significantly increase the allocation for the SC, to assist recipient countries, in full conformity with the provisions of the Convention, in fulfilling their commitments related to, among others, the elimination of the use of PCBs in equipment by 2025 and the environmentally sound waste management of liquids containing PCBs and equipment contaminated with PCBs as soon as possible and no later than 2028;
- requests the GEF to consider the forwarded reports in the negotiations of the GEF Trust Fund's eighth replenishment, to also consider continuing to improve its access modalities, and to submit an updated report to the face-to-face segment of COP10; and
- requests the Secretariat, as appropriate, to continue to compile information on matters related to the financial mechanism and to update the relevant documents for consideration by the face-to-face segment of COP10.

### **Closing Session of the BRS COPs**

#### ***Adoption of the Meeting Reports***

In plenary on Friday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents: a draft report of the joint COP session (CHW.15/L.1, RC/COP.10/L.1, POPS.COP.10/L.1) and a draft report of the SC session on the financial mechanism (POPS.COP.10/L.1/Add.1). BC COP15 President Álvarez-Pérez led parties through the adoption of the report of the joint session and SC COP10 President Kalnins through the report of the SC COP session. Parties agreed to adopt the reports and entrust their finalization to the COPs' Rapporteurs: for the BC, Joseph Cantamanto Edmund (Ghana); for the RC, Agnieszka Jankowska (Poland) replacing Jeanelle Kelly (Saint Kitts and Nevis); and for the SC, Seyed Mahdi Parsaee (Iran).

#### ***Suspension of the Meetings***

At the conclusion of the meetings, neither Rémi Nono Womdim, Executive Secretary of the Rotterdam Convention, FAO, nor Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions, were able to deliver their planned remarks due to technical problems. Carlos Martin-Novella, Deputy Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions, spoke on their behalf, thanking participants for their hard work throughout the week and looked forward to seeing everyone face-to-face "in a few months" in Geneva.

Speaking on behalf of all three COP Presidents, SC COP10 President Kalnins thanked participants, noting not only the challenges of the virtual format but also the very challenging working hours for many delegates. She highlighted key outcomes of the online segment, notably the adoption of the 2022 interim budgets, the election of members of the RC Compliance Committee so that they can begin their work assisting parties in resolving compliance difficulties, the election of members to the SC Effectiveness Evaluation Committee to start the SC's second effectiveness evaluation, and the agreement to forward two important reports to the GEF to inform its eighth replenishment. She underscored the COPs would resume their important work at the face-to-face segment of these meetings.

Each COP President then adjourned their respective COP with the expectation of reconvening in a face-to-face meeting from 6-17 June 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland.

### **A Brief Analysis of the 2021 BRS COPs**

When delegates to the 2019 "Triple COPs" bade farewell to each other at the end of the meeting, they were celebrating several major policy achievements, including the adoption of the Basel Convention Plastic Amendments and—after 15 years—establishment of a Rotterdam Convention compliance mechanism. Delegates were reveling in these successes and lauding the increasingly evident benefits of close collaboration among these three linked conventions on chemicals and waste. A key factor in achieving consensus on a series of complex issues was, of course, the skill of the facilitators and the time people had to work toward agreement together, whether as a large group or in bilateral discussions. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this dynamic, and as this meeting illustrated, the challenges of building consensus on complex issues are exacerbated when delegates are gathering virtually, across time zones, and relying on communication technologies that can be unreliable.

This first of two segments of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Conferences of the Parties (BRS COPs) convened to address the most pressing issues on the agenda—those items that will keep the conventions operating until delegates can gather face-to-face in June 2022. This, in itself, has become the norm across many multilateral environmental agreements that have convened virtual sessions since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in this case, these agenda items were far from apolitical, and delegates worked through an arduous week of negotiations to achieve agreement on these critical issues. This brief analysis reviews key outcomes of the meeting, as well as two central and enduring challenges: financial support for the sustainable management of chemicals and waste, and the meaning—and operationalization—of universal access and participation.

#### ***Keeping the lights on***

Essential work on the COPs' agenda included approving the interim budgets and programmes of work that would enable the BRS Secretariat and Conventions to operate beyond 2021. In addition, parties needed to ensure that seats on subsidiary bodies were filled, thus ensuring these committees can carry out essential work to inform decision-making in future meetings of the COPs.

This aspect of parties' work was straightforward, thanks in part to advance coordination between the Bureaux and regions. Under the Rotterdam Convention, parties elected the inaugural members of the Compliance Committee, which will support parties in implementing their obligations under the convention. They also extended the terms of office of members of the Chemical Review Committee (CRC), a body of scientific experts that supports the COP in determining which substances should be subject to the convention's prior informed consent procedure. Citing the CRC's unusually heavy agenda for its forthcoming meeting, several parties highlighted the importance of this committee and lauded the COP's decision to fund an extra day for this meeting.

As participants marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Stockholm Convention, parties elected members to the Effectiveness Evaluation Committee, which is charged with conducting the second effectiveness evaluation of this agreement. They also extended terms of office for members of the Persistent

Organic Pollutants (POPs) Review Committee (POPRC), widely heralded as the key to the Convention's success in addressing newly-identified POPs and expanding its scope from 12 to 30 substances. This expansion is not uncomplicated, however, as many parties connected the obligations arising from the listing of new POPs to the urgent need for increased and more easily accessible financial resources to support implementation.

### ***Competing for a piece of the pie***

It is not uncommon for practitioners and policymakers to express frustration with the challenges of raising awareness about the importance of chemicals and waste issues, particularly in comparison with the publicly resonant threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. Indeed, as parties concluded their work on Friday, Stockholm Convention COP10 President Silvija Nora Kalnins spoke passionately about issues “near and dear to [delegates] hearts” being overlooked in favor of other environmental issues, whether locally or globally.

The ongoing negotiations of the eighth replenishment of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), which serves as the Stockholm Convention's financial mechanism, were seen by most as a valuable opportunity for parties to send a strong message about the extent of their funding needs. Long-held frustrations about the difficulty of accessing GEF funding were foregrounded at this meeting, as parties debated what action they could take to ensure an appropriate, and sufficient, allocation of GEF resources to support implementation of the Stockholm Convention. Many parties underscored the urgency of access to improved funding, especially for addressing PCBs ahead of the looming target dates for elimination of use of these industrial chemicals and management of PCB waste, as set out in the Convention.

Many delegates saw the two reports as a viable means of conveying both the scale of needs and the importance of improved modalities for countries to access resources to the GEF and its donor countries. The BRS Secretariat oversaw the preparation of these reports: a review of the Convention's financial mechanism and a needs assessment for 2022-2026. But without a decision to forward these reports to the GEF, many parties worried the extensive work carried out would be in vain and could result in the chemicals and waste issue area getting an even smaller piece of the GEF pie during GEF-8.

Consideration of this item required consultations throughout the week, and also pushed the Friday plenary session long beyond its allotted interpretation time. To some extent, concerns raised by delegates echoed the same arguments that have played out since the Stockholm Convention's inaugural COP in 2005, when the GEF was recognized “on an interim basis, as the principal entity entrusted with the operations of the financial mechanism in accordance with Article 14 of the Convention” (Decision SC1/9). Recipient parties have long voiced their preference for a dedicated mechanism akin to the Multilateral Fund, the financial mechanism for the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. In contrast, donor countries have long favored relying on the GEF, including for administrative efficiencies and for the more holistic view it can take on environmental needs.

One party adamantly opposed adopting the proposed decision on the financial mechanism at this online segment, calling for a full consideration of the review of the financial mechanism before taking any decision. Emphasizing that his country had long been unable to access GEF funding for what he asserted were political reasons,

he stressed the need for the Convention to provide a universally accessible financial mechanism that would not discriminate against recipient countries. In the extensive and heated discussion of this issue, many developing countries expressed similar frustrations with the GEF, but stressing that time was of the essence to make headway on critical projects to protect human health and the environment from POPs pollution, most strongly supported trying to influence GEF-8 in hopes of securing funding comparatively quickly. Several underscored the challenges of negotiating such an important and complex issue in an abbreviated virtual meeting, and called for further discussions at the face-to-face segment. Ultimately, with time running short, the decision was adopted, with the assurance that the party's concerns would be discussed at the face-to-face segment of COP10.

### ***Can you hear me now?***

As has been the case in many other virtual meetings over the past fifteen months, technical challenges were an unwanted feature of the 2021 COPs. These challenges slowed participants' work and prevented some participants from fully engaging in the meeting. Some—including the Executive Secretaries—were unable to take the floor to deliver their statements, while others who were trying to follow the “audience stream” of the platform were often unable to hear the simultaneous interpretation of discussions, or hear anything at all.

The BRS Secretariat offered several work-arounds to facilitate engagement, but the comparative advantages of meeting face-to-face were clear. For example, while delegates who experienced connection difficulties could upload their comments in writing, according to the rules of procedure only oral interventions would be reflected in the meetings' reports. Over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, this points to some of the enduring challenges with applying procedures that were agreed long before online or hybrid meetings were envisioned. Many delegates called for the resumption of in-person meetings as soon as possible and strongly objected to any prospect of holding virtual meetings to negotiate the substantive issues remaining on the agenda.

Nevertheless, there were some accessibility and transparency gains from the online format, which allowed a wider audience to join the negotiations without the time commitment or travel expense. Budget Contact Group Co-Chair Reginald Hernaus noted that over 300 delegates joined the party-only deliberations on the programmes of work and budgets, a number that far exceeded the levels of participation in previous, face-to-face meetings of the COPs.

Universal participation in global environmental agreements is essential to their success, and technological innovations may someday provide a solution that enhances access to people around the world while also saving valuable time, money, and environmental resources. If the risks of travel are not mitigated soon, virtual meeting technology—with all of its limitations—may also be the best means of achieving equitable, global participation in negotiations.

### ***Business as unusual?***

Despite the challenges of this virtual meeting, delegates successfully concluded every item on the agenda. They ensured that the work of these essential conventions will continue, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that parties and stakeholders will be able to continue their work, locally and globally, to mitigate the threats to human health and the environment

posed by chemical pollution and hazardous wastes. Growing awareness of some of these challenges, such as plastic pollution and personal protective equipment waste, have raised public awareness about the critical issues being addressed under these conventions. Increasing recognition of links among pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change present an opportunity for momentum in setting public policy that addresses the complexity and systemic nature of these interconnected problems.

## Upcoming Meetings

### Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic

**Pollution:** Ecuador, Germany, Ghana and Vietnam are jointly organizing a Ministerial Conference to build momentum and political will to advance a coherent global strategy to end marine litter and plastic pollution with an aim to ensuring a future with clean seas. The Ministerial Conference will seek to provide a platform for informal consultations in the lead-up to the in-person part of 5th meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), building on mandates (UNEA 3/7 and 4/6) from the 3rd and 4th session of UNEA related to tackling marine litter and microplastics. **dates:** 1-2 September 2021 **location:** online **www:** [bmu.de/en/pressrelease/upcoming-international-ministerial-conference-to-build-a-global-vision-to-tackle-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution](http://bmu.de/en/pressrelease/upcoming-international-ministerial-conference-to-build-a-global-vision-to-tackle-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution)

**Seventeenth meeting of the Chemical Review Committee to the Rotterdam Convention (CRC17):** At this virtual meeting, the CRC will consider notifications of final regulatory action on carbaryl, chlorfenvinphos, iprodione, methidathion, methyl parathion, terbufos, and thiodicarb. The CRC will also review notifications of final regulatory action on amitrole, carbon tetrachloride, methyl bromide, mirex, and paraquat. **dates:** 20-24 September 2021 **location:** online **www:** [pic.int/TheConvention/ChemicalReviewCommittee/Meetings/CRC17/Overview/tabid/8605/language/en-US/Default.aspx](http://pic.int/TheConvention/ChemicalReviewCommittee/Meetings/CRC17/Overview/tabid/8605/language/en-US/Default.aspx)

**Fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention (COP4):** Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Bureau of the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury decided to organize COP4 in two segments: the first segment will be conducted online in 2021 and a second segment will be conducted in-person in the first quarter of 2022 in Bali, Indonesia. COP4 is expected to review the Convention's Annexes A and B and financial mechanism, and conduct an effectiveness review of the Convention. **dates:** 1-5 November 2021 **location:** online **www:** [mercuryconvention.org/Meetings/COP4](http://mercuryconvention.org/Meetings/COP4)

**61st meeting of the GEF Council:** The Council, the GEF's main governing body, meets twice annually to develop, adopt and evaluate the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. It also reviews and approves the work program (projects submitted for approval). **dates:** 7-9 December 2021 **location:** Washington, D.C., US **www:** [thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-61st-council-meeting](http://thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-61st-council-meeting)

### Seventeenth meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee to the Stockholm Convention (POPRC17):

At this meeting the POPRC will consider, *inter alia*, a draft risk management evaluation on methoxychlor and draft risk profiles on Dechlorane Plus and UV-328. The Committee will also consider proposals for the inclusion in Annexes A, B and/ or C to the Convention of chlorpyrifos, chlorinated paraffins with carbon chain lengths in the range C14-17 and chlorination levels at or exceeding 45% chlorine by weight, and long-chain

perfluorocarboxylic acids, their salts and related compounds. This meeting will either be held in Geneva on 24-28 January 2022 or online for a total of 9 days between 17 and 28 January 2022. **dates:** January 2022 **location:** TBC **www:** [chm.pops.int/TheConvention/POPsReviewCommittee/Meetings/POPRC17/Overview/tabid/8900/Default.aspx](http://chm.pops.int/TheConvention/POPsReviewCommittee/Meetings/POPRC17/Overview/tabid/8900/Default.aspx)

### 5th Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA):

The second part of UNEA-5 will take place under the theme "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals." Its aim will be to connect and consolidate environmental actions within the context of sustainable development and motivate the sharing and implementation of successful approaches. The in-person meeting of UNEA-5 will be followed by a Special Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-SS), to be held 3-4 March 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP in 1972. **date:** 28 February-2 March 2021 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5](http://environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5)

**2022 meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions:** The resumed session of the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions is scheduled to be held face-to-face and will address those substantive agenda items that were not prioritized for action at the online segment. The theme of the meetings will be "Global Agreements for a Healthy Planet: Sound management of chemicals and waste." **date:** 6-17 June 2022 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** [brsmeas.org/2021COPs/Overview](http://brsmeas.org/2021COPs/Overview)

For additional meetings, see [sdg.iisd.org/](http://sdg.iisd.org/)

## Glossary

BC	Basel Convention
BRS	Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRC	Chemical Review Committee
CRP	Conference room paper
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GRULAC	Latin American and Caribbean Group
OEWG	Open-ended Working Group
PCBs	Polychlorinated biphenyls
POPRC	POPs Review Committee
POPs	Persistent organic pollutants
RC	Rotterdam Convention
SC	Stockholm Convention
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme