

Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG-3 Highlights: Thursday, 20 June 2024

Delegates focused squarely on the foundational document, particularly during informal consultations on institutional arrangements. In the afternoon, a plenary met to hear reports from the Co-Facilitators, but most of the discussion was on the panel's name and whether to seek information on a possible joint United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/World Health Organization (WHO) secretariat, before the intergovernmental meeting.

Plenary

Chair Alkemade reported on the status of accreditation, noting that 140 states and the EU have duly submitted their accreditations. Delegates accepted the report on accreditation, as reviewed by the Bureau.

Reports from Co-Facilitators: Foundational document:

Co-Facilitator Judith Torres (Uruguay) reported that delegates exchanged views on several parts of the foundational document and convened in informal settings to identify “bridging” language on institutional arrangements, facilitated by Miguel Ruiz (Colombia), and on operating principles, facilitated by Itsuki Kuroda (Japan).

IRAN noted that his input to the capacity-building function had not been reflected in the group's status of work, with Chair Alkemade noting that discussions on this function were ongoing.

Work programme and deliverables: Co-Facilitator Moleboheng Juliet Petlane (Lesotho) said delegates' views diverged on submission eligibility, with some preferring governments, including through MEAs, and others adding stakeholders. She added that delegates agreed to require two categories of accompanying information, one mandatory and the other optional.

Rules, procedures, policies: Co-Facilitator Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) reported delegates made progress in considering the conflict of interest (CoI) policy and disclosure form, but many brackets remain and said that an updated document on the rules of procedure (RoP), prepared by the Secretariat, had largely been discussed and many brackets were resolved.

Recommendations to the UNEP Executive Director: Safiya Sawney (Grenada) reported that the contact group did not meet since Monday and, therefore, there is no additional update to provide.

Name of the Panel: Chair Alkemade informed the plenary that the African Region submitted a conference room paper (CRP) on the name of the future science-policy panel.

Kenya, for the AFRICAN REGION, introduced the CRP ([CRP.2](#)) saying that the group's rationale was to reflect on existing practice and mandate for the panel to address the third dimension of the triple planetary crisis. The name suggested was the Intergovernmental Panel on Chemicals and Waste and to Prevent Pollution, to be abbreviated IPCWP.

After Chair Alkemade opened the floor for comments, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the name is too long, suggesting Intergovernmental Panel on Chemicals. Antigua and Barbuda, for the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), announced that they will continue to engage with the African Region on this discussion. The US stated that it is interested in maintaining a science-policy aspect, suggesting Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Pollution, abbreviated as SPP to build upon already created momentum, which PAKISTAN later suggested to abbreviate as ISPP.

The GLOBAL ALLIANCE ON HEALTH AND POLLUTION welcomed proposals by the African Region and the US, noting that pollution can be physical, not only chemical. She suggested naming the panel the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Pollution, abbreviated as ISP.

The INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK and INTERNATIONAL PANEL ON CHEMICAL POLLUTION supported the name proposed by the African Region.

BASEL CONVENTION REGIONAL CENTRE-CHINA noted that the third dimension of the triple planetary crisis is often called waste, pollution, or waste and pollution and the Intergovernmental Panel on Waste Pollution would be an appropriate name.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP, on behalf of several non-governmental organizations, called on delegates to ensure the inclusion of non-governmental participants in the interdisciplinary expert committee (IEC). She stressed this will offer broad multidisciplinary technical and scientific expertise and facilitate integration of different knowledge systems.

Chair Alkemade suggested that the name for the future panel be discussed informally among interested delegations and later addressed in the contact group on the foundational document.

Proposal for a Joint UNEP/WHO Secretariat: Chair Alkemade reminded delegates about the CRP on joint secretariat services provided by UNEP and WHO ([CRP.1/Rev.1](#)) and invited the OEWG to request that UNEP and WHO provide more background information on the possibility of a joint secretariat, including its legal and budgetary implications, to the intergovernmental meeting and include a draft decision in this submission.

SAUDI ARABIA observed that clarifications on CRPs have to be submitted and discussed within the course of the meeting they have been submitted to, and since the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) is running out of time, that is not possible. He also stressed that decisions have to be negotiated in the OEWG.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION supported SAUDI ARABIA and added, with PAKISTAN, that their capitals did not provide the mandate to discuss this matter. IRAN noted it is not ready to discuss the matter.

Upon a clarification question from the Chair, SAUDI ARABIA reiterated its position and “rejected the CRP,” which was supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, BAHRAIN, STATE OF PALESTINE, and IRAQ. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION underlined that the possibility of a joint secretariat is not within

the OEWG's mandate. The STATE OF PALESTINE stated that while it is not generally opposed to the cooperation between the two organizations on the secretariat, they recognize time restrictions at this OEWG.

SWITZERLAND noted the value of the joint proposal from UNEP and WHO, stressing that the decision does not have to be taken at this meeting, but it is useful to start the discussion here. Recognizing the variety of options for secretariat services, including one organization hosting while partnering with others through a memorandum of understanding, he welcomed addressing information gaps on these possibilities.

The EU noted they cannot support any specific proposals at this point but agreed to request additional information as engaging WHO in the panel is within the mandate given by UN Environment Assembly Resolution 5/8.

Chair Alkemade withdrew her proposal in its entirety. She then reported that, based on the progress made during the evening, the Bureau will decide on Friday morning the way forward regarding other issues. Responding to an inquiry from CHILE, Alkemade informed that the Bureau will decide on the way forward, considering that the RoP are important for some parties to finalize.

Foundational Document

Co-Facilitators Sofia Tingstorp (Sweden) and Torres explained the organization of work, including that an informal group on institutional arrangements, apart from strategic partnerships, will run in parallel to the contact group. Some delegates voiced their concern about discussing the foundational document in two different groups simultaneously, noting coordination challenges for small delegations and calling for a clear timetable for the day. Tingstorp reassured delegates that this contact group would review any text from the informal group.

On strategic partnerships, delegates noted that stakeholders should be "relevant"; the governing body should decide on partnerships, with the secretariat and bureau able to propose but not launch partnerships; WHO partnership policies should be added; the list of considerations for formalizing partnerships should be removed, while some suggested a reference to capacity building should be added; and CoI should be taken into account. An observer highlighted the importance of transparency when engaging in strategic partnerships.

Evaluation of the Operational Effectiveness and Impact of the Panel: Delegates agreed that the review and evaluation should happen independently. While most delegates also preferred the external review and evaluation, one delegation objected. Recognizing that deciding on the review process is already an agreed function of the panel, delegates agreed to remove a sentence detailing this process.

Functions: On the capacity-building function, Tingstorp invited delegates to address the remaining brackets around gender-balanced, -inclusive, or -responsive participation.

A delegate suggested adding language on encouraging access to "producing, analyzing, and processing of data." Several delegates appealed against reopening the text, stressing it has been extensively and exhaustively negotiated to reach compromise. They urged flexibility and suggested focusing on the remaining brackets to reach consensus. A delegate withdrew the suggestion on gender-inclusivity.

Operating Principles: Some delegates suggested focusing on one operating principle per paragraph, emphasizing that the provisions need clustering and streamlining. They urged moving discussions to an informal setting to make progress through a well-structured deliberation, noting that remaining time is limited.

A delegate underscored that the panel should not only focus on prevention but also address current challenges. A couple of delegates opposed listing the precautionary principle as a standalone principle. One stressed that if some Rio principles are singled out, they would suggest including additional ones. Another highlighted that the section addresses operating principles, not

general ones, adding that a discussion on which Rio principles to add would be never-ending.

A delegate said that the paragraphs should be addressed separately as currently included in the text, not supporting clustering.

Co-Facilitator Kuroda then led an informal group to streamline the text on operating principles.

Delegates agreed to unite the elements on deliverables under a single paragraph, including that they need to be ethical, scientifically sound and robust; unbiased; accessible; policy relevant without being policy prescriptive; and prevention focused.

They further noted, in bracketed provisions, that the panel needs to: be scientifically independent, ensuring credibility and legitimacy; ensure impartiality, transparency, and accountability, including through addressing potential CoIs and scientific uncertainties; and uphold consensus in all decision-making processes, including in the elaboration, approval, and adoption of its deliverables.

A lengthy discussion took place on a provision on having sectorial, geographical, regional, language, and gender balance in all relevant aspects of the panel's work, in particular on the reference to "sectorial" balance, without reaching consensus.

Institutional Arrangements: An informal group met throughout the day, clearing many of the brackets throughout the document. The group cleared most of the text on the governing body's functions. On the bureau's role and functions, delegates discussed giving the bureau a policy function to advise the IEC, which some observers objected to. Roles in financial oversight and fundraising were moved to the section on the secretariat.

On the IEC, a procedural debate ensued on whether the foundational document could be amended if the panel wanted to change the number of members. One country requested including additional members nominated by Major Groups. Noting discussions on the role of observers in another contact group, some hesitated to "import" those discussions to this document.

The group then broke for the plenary session and later continued discussing the IEC, other subsidiary bodies, and the remaining issues into the night.

In the Corridors

With one day left, many observed a sharp quickening in the pace of work. The foundational document group split in two, doubling its work rate, and, according to a few delegates, its efficiency in clearing the text. Institutional arrangements discussions fell to a windowless basement room with observers sitting on the floor. They welcomed the transparency of the informal groups and their ability to speak within them, although they left upset that the bureau had been given a role to input policy advice to the IEC. For a scientist: "it's completely inappropriate for an administrative bureau to have a say in scientific priorities and deciding what topics scientists would pursue in the panel."

The optimism in the hallways starkly contrasted with the recurring calls for more time during reporting from contact groups in plenary. Despite these calls from the Co-Facilitators, delegates engaged in a lengthy discussion on the panel's name with several putting forward and justifying their preferences. It's the type of topic where all want to engage, followed by many, some sharp, views on the Chair's proposal on the joint WHO/UNEP secretariat offer.

After all this, picking up on the soured mood, a delegate returned to the basement room frustrated at the two-hour plenary. As time dwindled, a negotiator reminded colleagues that "our task for today and tomorrow is just to get this panel going," hinting that not all the details must be perfect or fully agreed in Geneva.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of OEWG-3 will be available on Monday, 24 June 2024 at bit.ly/oewg3-spp