

Summary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution: 2-6 February 2026

Science continues to illuminate the dangers of pollution. A 2026 European Commission study estimated that current levels of "forever chemical" pollution could cost the European Union approximately EUR 440 billion by 2050 in health and clean-up costs. The Lancet estimates the global burden and cost of IQ loss and cardiovascular disease mortality from lead exposure at USD 6 trillion, nearly matching the World Bank's estimates of the health costs associated with air pollution, which sit at USD 8 trillion. These studies are estimates because of the uncertainties involved, underscoring the clear need for an interface between experts and policymakers on chemicals, waste and pollution.

This is a dynamic area of knowledge production and real-world production and consumption patterns. The United Nations estimates that producers create new substances at a rate of 1.4 per second, a figure expected to increase as the sector adopts artificial intelligence. Little or no safety data is available for most of the 350,000 chemicals in use. Global production is expected to double by 2030. Waste streams continue to diversify as more complex products are discarded, especially electrical and electronic waste. Policymakers face an uphill challenge in understanding the risks posed by various forms of pollution, which many hope the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) could help address.

Yet, at its first Plenary session, there was no celebratory tone to welcome the newest science-policy panel. As one Panel Member underscored, this meeting was a "stark reminder that a science-policy panel does not exist in a vacuum." The meeting ended without fully completing any of its expected deliverables. The Plenary elected a Chair and 80% of its Bureau. But since the Panel could not agree on the rules of procedure (RoP), the meeting remained mired in procedural debates. As a result, it did:

- not adopt an agenda;
• not agree to the physical location of the Panel's Secretariat;
• not consider intersessional work;
• not agree to establish a trust fund;
• not agree to the dates and venue of the next session; and
• not adopt its report.

The ISP-CWP Plenary convened from 2-6 February 2026 in Geneva, Switzerland, with over 700 participants, from 127 Panel Members, 232 observer organizations, 11 states not Members of the Panel, one regional economic integration organization, and 10 UN entities and Secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

A Brief History of the ISP-CWP

Chemicals, waste, and pollution are permanent features of our daily lives, posing direct and indirect threats to the environment and human health. With this in mind, in 2022 the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted resolution 5/8, which calls for establishing a new science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution.

UNEA decided to convene an Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to prepare proposals for the panel, aiming to complete its work before the end of 2024. In the end, the OEWG held five sessions across three meetings, completing the foundational document for the Panel in June 2025, which was then adopted immediately by an Intergovernmental meeting.

In this Issue

A Brief History of the ISP-CWP... 1
ISP-CWP Plenary Report... 2
Election of the Bureau... 2
Draft Rules of Procedure... 2
Motion to use the UNEA Rules of Procedure... 3
Financial and Budgetary Arrangements for the Panel... 4
Provisional Agenda, Dates and Venue... 4
Report of the Session... 4
Adjournment of the Session... 4
A Brief Analysis of the Meeting... 5
Upcoming Meetings... 6
Glossary... 6

OEWG 1: A hybrid session held 6 October 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, and online, focused on organizational matters to kickstart the OEWG's work. A resumed session (30 January-3 February 2023, Bangkok, Thailand), elected Gudi Akemade (the Netherlands) as OEWG Chair. Delegates focused on the scope and functions of the panel, and agreed to add a capacity-building function.

OEWG 2: The second meeting (9-15 December 2023, Nairobi, Kenya) advanced work, which was captured in six conference room papers on: institutional arrangements; operating principles; conflict of interest; scope, objective, and functions; intersessional work; and the provisional agenda for OEWG 3.

OEWG 3: There were two sessions of this meeting because the OEWG was unable to reach agreement on the foundational document when it met from 17 to 21 June 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates reconvened in Punte del Este, Uruguay, from 15 to 20 June 2025. There, they finalized the foundational document that outlines the Panel's basic structure, its draft rules of procedure, as well as arrangements for the interim period before the new Panel holds its first session. They named the panel the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP).

Intergovernmental Meeting: An intergovernmental meeting, held on 20 June 2025, formally established the ISP-CWP. It recommended the draft rules of procedure for possible adoption at the Panel's first meeting and decided on arrangements for the interim period, including financial arrangements. It also forwarded draft procedures for determining the work programme, the preparation and clearance of panel deliverables, and a draft conflict of interest policy for further consideration at the Panel's first session.

ISP-CWP Plenary Report

On [Monday](#), 2 February, delegates were welcomed to the first-ever ISP-CWP Plenary with an aliphorn performance and remarks from Inger Andersen, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, and Katrin Schneeberger, Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland.

Presiding over the opening of the meeting, Andersen facilitated a lengthy debate on whether to provisionally apply the UNEA rules of procedure (RoP), given that the Panel's rules were not yet finalized or adopted. The Plenary ultimately decided to use UNEA rule 18.1 (elections) solely for the purpose of electing the Chair, on the understanding that the Chair would immediately set up a contact group to take up the Panel's draft RoP, and hold a plenary meeting on Wednesday morning to continue the formal session.

Osvaldo Álvarez Pérez (Chile) was elected ISP-CWP Chair and established the RoP contact group.

The ISP-CWP Plenary was not able to agree on its draft rules of procedure and, as such, could not formally open the meeting or adopt its agenda. Throughout the meeting, there was a lack of clarity on the way forward. These questions ranged from reaching a shared understanding of the Chair's powers and mandate to identify acceptable facilitators for contact groups.

Election of the Bureau

On [Wednesday](#), the Plenary spent the morning debating whether to elect some Bureau members using UNEA rule 18.1 (elections). Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, called for focusing on the election of Bureau members from those regions with

uncontested nominations. CHINA observed that the foundational document already outlines the Bureau's functions and, with the US, said that electing members by acclamation would then allow the Bureau to begin work.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION highlighted a lack of consensus on Bureau nominations in the Eastern European Group and proposed electing the Group's Bureau members after adoption of the RoP.

Delegates agreed, under UNEA rule 18.1, to elect by acclamation the Vice-Chairs of the Plenary for those groups with uncontested nominations for a two-year term, unless otherwise agreed in the RoP.

The Plenary elected Jean Marie Bope Bope Lapwong (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Linda Kosgei (Kenya) for the African States; Chen Haijun (China) and Amal Albawardi (Saudi Arabia) for the Asia-Pacific States; José Isabel López Arroyo (Mexico) for the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC); and Bart Rymen (Belgium) and Helena Richards (UK), who was also elected rapporteur, for the Western European and other States.

Draft Rules of Procedure

Work on the Panel's draft RoP proceeded in a contact group. On Thursday an informal group took up work in parallel to the contact group, and on Friday only the contact group met. Chair Álvarez Pérez chaired the contact group, and on Thursday and Friday Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) facilitated. The Secretariat provided background for the draft RoP ([UNEP/ISP-CWP.1/3](#)), highlighting that the document had been transmitted from the Intergovernmental Meeting, where rules 35 (consensus on substantive matters), 36 (voting on procedural matters), and 49 (consensus to amend the RoP) had been agreed upon. Members worked from a draft that had been revised to align with the foundational document.

Panel Members completed the first reading on Tuesday. During the second reading, Members agreed to 12 of the 50 rules by Friday. They agreed to discuss the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC), a scientific body in the Panel, at the end of the second reading but ultimately did not take it up.

On Friday, Facilitator Alkemade reported on the Contact Group's work, noting that, despite constructive discussions, the group had not completed its task. She highlighted progress on definitions, members, representation, membership and operation of the Bureau, and decision-making. She pointed to divergent views on the frequency of Plenary meetings, the need for extraordinary meetings, issuance of credentials, proxy participation, replacement of Bureau members, modalities for Plenary, Bureau, and subsidiary body meetings, and decision-making when votes are equally split. She reported that there was insufficient time to consider some definitions, the agenda, the IEC and other subsidiary bodies, and languages during a second reading.

On Friday, the updated draft RoP was captured in a conference room paper, which the Plenary agreed to use as a basis of work for consideration at a later date.

Definitions: This was discussed on [Monday](#) and [Tuesday](#), when the debate centered on the definition of Observers, particularly regarding reference to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Members did not resolve the issue of whether to equate Indigenous Peoples and local communities, or to recognize the differences. Many noted that this text was also bracketed in the foundational document.

Scope: Discussed on [Tuesday](#), there was debate if the scope of the RoP would include the meetings of the subsidiary bodies as well, with some noting the rules that the RoP applies *mutatis mutandis* to the subsidiary bodies. Some Panel Members highlighted problems with expanding the scope beyond Plenary sessions, noting this would lock in potentially impracticable rules for the conduct of subsidiary body meetings.

Representation, credentials, and accreditation: Mostly discussed on Friday, delegates agreed to provisions allowing the Bureau to examine credentials and to provisional participation by members pending a decision on their acceptance. On disallowing “participation of members by using proxy procedure,” some delegates proposed moving this provision to the section on voting. One delegation said proxy participation is not only about voting but also about speaking on behalf of others in their absence and called for disallowing such practice. Without agreement, the text was kept in brackets.

More discussion was required, however, on who, at the national level, issues the credentials. One delegation called for referring to the Head of State or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or an appropriate national government authority. Various delegations noted that, given that the ISP-CWP is a science-policy panel, a signature by the Head of State or Minister of Foreign Affairs is too high a level of authority to issue credentials, although one Member State supported this idea. The paragraph was left bracketed.

Observers: The discussion on observers’ participation was on [Wednesday](#), during which Panel Members debated how elaborate the processes to allow observers to become accredited and to speak during sessions should be. A couple of Panel Members requested procedures involving approvals by states. Others preferred streamlined procedures, as used in other forums, for practical reasons and to uphold transparency.

Bureau: The membership and operation of the Bureau was discussed on [Wednesday](#), [Thursday](#), and Friday in the contact group and informal group. After most Bureau members were elected on Wednesday, a main point of contention was whether the Plenary could elect the Bureau, particularly in regions with contested nominations. Some Plenary Members supported a role for the Plenary to vote to elect Bureau members from regions that nominated more candidates than available seats. For a few Plenary Members, this was unacceptable.

Some Plenary Members supported empowering the Bureau to invite representatives of intergovernmental and other relevant bodies to participate as observers at Bureau meetings, particularly given the many bodies working on related issues. A few delegates preferred only inviting the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies.

The rules related to the nomination of Bureau members and the operation of the Bureau were agreed. There was no agreement on the role of the Plenary to elect Bureau members by consensus or by a vote.

Decision-Making: Taken up on [Tuesday](#) and [Wednesday](#), the contact group’s discussions focused on how to vote, by a roll-call, a show of hands, or a secret vote. One Panel Member suggested a rule to decide the Secretariat’s location by a simple majority vote, which was opposed by others. These rules remained bracketed. The decision-making rules regarding voting on matters

of substance by consensus (rule 35) and procedural matters by vote (rule 36) remained unchanged since they were agreed upon in the foundational document in 2025.

Venue and dates: The contact group debated the frequency of Plenary sessions and whether to allow extraordinary sessions on [Monday](#), [Tuesday](#), and Friday.

On the frequency of ordinary sessions of the Plenary, views diverged on whether to set the default to an annual or biennial rhythm. Those supporting annual meetings highlighted the need to regularly progress the Panel’s work, especially in its initial years. A couple of Panel Members preferred meeting every second year to allow more time for intersessional work and noted that several chemicals and wastes MEAs also meet biennially.

A small group of countries was tasked with resolving this and other paragraphs regarding the frequency of meetings. After several hours, the group reported that, while there seemed to be common agreement that the Plenary could meet annually at the beginning, there was no consensus on what would trigger a change in frequency or on the need for a default frequency, so the rules remain bracketed.

Many delegates supported allowing the Plenary to decide whether to hold extraordinary sessions in addition to ordinary meetings. This was opposed by two Panel Members who did not see a need for such meetings, while others highlighted the need for this option given unforeseeable circumstances, and called for keeping the draft rules as presented.

Regarding notification to members and observers of the dates and venue of any session, there was some agreement that extraordinary sessions would require a different deadline than ordinary sessions given the need for secretariat arrangements and visa issues. One delegation, supported by others, proposed language to separate them and refer to notification “as soon as practicable” in the case of extraordinary sessions. But delegations objecting to having extraordinary sessions opposed, and the paragraph was not agreed.

Conduct of Business: On Friday, disagreements emerged over whether Plenary and subsidiary body sessions should be held in public. Two delegations proposed including the possibility of holding these meetings in private, or not specifying that subsidiary bodies could be held in public. This was opposed by other delegations and observers, who noted that this is standard language across relevant processes and stressed the importance of civil society being able to follow-up on the proceedings. Some noted that the ISP-CWP is a scientific forum, not a political one that drafts legally binding legislation, and recalled the ISP-CWP’s principles of accountability, impartiality, and transparency.

There were also disagreements over a rule on participation by “electronic means.” Two delegations stressed that participation in Plenary and subsidiary bodies meetings could only be in person, while others preferred to allow for flexibility in case of unforeseen circumstances. Both paragraphs remain in brackets.

Motion to use the UNEA Rules of Procedure

On [Thursday](#), COLOMBIA proposed a “procedural motion” for the Plenary to decide “on an extraordinary basis and for the exclusive purposes of the first session of the Plenary, to provisionally apply UNEA’s RoP *mutatis mutandis* until the first session is adjourned or the RoP are adopted, whichever comes first.” They suggested that, if the motion is declined, it should be

submitted to a vote in accordance with the foundational document and agreed-upon decision-making rules (35, 36, and 49). This proposal was supported by a large number of Panel Members who said using the UNEA RoP would allow for decisions on key issues, including the establishment of the Trust Fund, the date and venue of the next session, the location of the Secretariat, and the mandate for intersessional work.

Saudi Arabia, for the ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, BELARUS, AZERBAIJAN, VENEZUELA, LIBYA, and MAURITIUS, opposed the motion and proposed continuing the Contact Group's work.

Chair Álvarez Pérez ruled that the Plenary would consider the motion. In response, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT, BRAZIL, KENYA, COLOMBIA, and the US raised points of order. Some were related to belated or bypassed recognition of requests for the floor. Some of the points of order were raised loudly and resulted in heated debate. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION and SAUDI ARABIA did not question the Chair's ruling, but, with EGYPT, questioned the Chair's mandate. MEXICO, COLOMBIA, and others appealed for all Members to abide by the UN System Code of Conduct and show respect.

On Friday, the State of Palestine, on behalf of the ARAB COUNTRIES, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, urged adherence to the UN System Code of Conduct and said it was the "failure of the Chair and members of the interim Secretariat" not to allow the floor to an Arab delegate who was requesting to speak on a point of order. Urging the Panel to address "every moment of discrimination," BRAZIL called for promoting the full participation of women delegates in the Panel's work.

The interim Secretariat read out the purpose of the UN System Code of Conduct for harassment-free meetings, highlighting that the UN does not tolerate discrimination and sexual harassment in any of its activities.

Chair Álvarez Pérez reported regret that, after two rounds of informal consultations, there was no agreement on the way forward. COLOMBIA proposed, and the Plenary agreed, to take time for "huddle" discussions on the way to take forward decisions from this meeting. These discussions, however, did not lead to an agreement.

COLOMBIA said they would temporarily suspend their motion to allow the Plenary to decide on the way forward.

Financial and Budgetary Arrangements for the Panel

On Friday, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION proposed a contact group to establish the trust fund. Chair Álvarez Pérez proposed Přemysl Štěpánek (Czechia) as the group's Facilitator. In response to a request by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the Chair proposed, and the panel agreed, to add María del Mar Solano (Costa Rica) as a Co-Facilitator from a developing country.

Co-Facilitator Štěpánek presented a draft decision text that requests UNEP to establish a trust fund, invites contributions, and asks the Secretariat to report on expenditures. Several delegations supported a proposal for a simple decision that requests UNEP to establish the fund, while others preferred retaining the other elements.

A regional group, supported by others, proposed specifying that the fund is established "in accordance with the relevant financial arrangements in the foundational document, specifically paragraphs 23-24." The paragraph was agreed.

Following several requests for clarification about the financial rules and procedures used for operationalizing the fund, the Secretariat clarified that, based on UNEP rules, contributions to the fund can be spent and expenditures are reported to Plenary. Rejecting the use of UNEP rules, some delegations urged adherence to financial arrangements, specifically a provision on non-conditionality, enshrined in the foundational document, with one delegate expressing concern that conditionalities could undermine the scientific independence of the Panel. One delegate noted that some rules need to apply in the absence of the Panel's own financial rules.

In plenary, Co-Facilitators Štěpánek and Solano reported a lack of consensus. Chair Álvarez Pérez asked whether the Panel could agree to a decision with one paragraph simply establishing the Trust Fund, with references to paragraphs in the foundational document. Noting that the Fund would then have to be adopted under UNEA RoP, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SAUDI ARABIA, and INDIA expressed concern with the lack of clarity and transparency and said they could not agree.

The draft decision was forwarded to the resumed Plenary as a conference room paper.

Provisional Agenda, Dates and Venue

On Friday, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION proposed the contact group on financial arrangement also address this issue.

In the contact group, Co-Facilitator Solano presented a draft decision on the second session of the Plenary. One Panel Member voiced support for hosting the meeting at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi and another preferred to keep it open and refer to "a location to be determined."

Noting that several foundational tasks foreseen for the first session have not been completed, several delegates proposed convening a resumed first session. One delegate suggested convening an open-ended working group during the intersessional period to finalize the draft RoP for adoption at first Plenary meeting of the second session of the Panel.

In plenary, Co-Facilitators Štěpánek and Solano reported a lack of consensus.

KENYA asked to have recorded in the meeting report their view that a resumed session of the Panel should be held at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the ASIA PACIFIC GROUP, also asked to have it recorded that adopting the RoP is the priority of the Panel.

The draft decision was forwarded to the resumed Plenary as a conference room paper.

Report of the Session

Rapporteur Helena Richards (UK) introduced the report (UNEP/ISP-CWP.1/L.1) of the meeting. After concerns raised by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, Chair Álvarez Pérez proposed, and Members agreed, that the report could be adopted at the resumed session.

Adjournment of the Session

In response to questions from the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and SAUDI ARABIA on the way forward, Chair Álvarez Pérez and the UNEP Legal Officer explained that the Plenary can, through the

Bureau, decide on a way forward. Chair Álvarez Pérez proposed that the Plenary request the Bureau, in consultation with Panel Members, to determine the date and venue of the resumed first session.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION requested an additional three or four days before the resumed session to finalize the RoP.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA and ZIMBABWE supported the proposal and said that the existing rules and a resumed session will be sufficient to complete the work.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION queried what type of credentials would be required to participate in the resumed session.

ANGOLA requested that the meeting be suspended. The US underscored their support for the Chair's proposal and characterized the time until the resumed session as "an extended coffee break," therefore, nothing else is required. She asked the Chair to adjourn the meeting.

Chair Álvarez Pérez adjourned the meeting at 8:44 pm.

A Brief Analysis of the Meeting

"The way of progress is neither swift nor easy." Marie Curie learned this from her first steps in experimental chemistry. Many years later, experts in fields ranging from chemistry to ecotoxicology, from waste managers to Indigenous Peoples, are warning of the negative impacts of chemicals, waste and pollution on human health and the environment. Besides their existing knowledge, there is a constant increase in new chemicals entering our lives with yet unknown implications.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) was established in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in June 2025 to help bridge the gap between knowledge holders and policymakers. It is expected to raise awareness, assist developing countries in accessing this knowledge, and scan the horizon for emerging issues of concern.

At its first Plenary, Panel Members were expected to turn the promise imprinted in the foundational document into an operational body ready to serve as the international community's newest science-policy interface. But several tasks lay ahead. The minimum expectations were to elect a Chair and a Bureau, adopt the Panel's rules of procedure, choose a location for the Secretariat, establish a trust fund, and mandate intersessional work.

Despite stated agreement on the necessity of these steps, by the end of the week none were achieved. In fact, several appealed to the Chair to close the meeting without adopting any decisions to avoid spending any more time in "unfruitful discussions."

This brief analysis explains how the seemingly simple task of adopting rules of procedure proved insurmountable, and could shape the Panel for years to come.

No Process without Rules

If the first Plenary showed anything, it is that rules of procedure are essential, particularly when trust among delegates is lacking. Coming into the meeting, the ISP-CWP's rules of procedure were still a set of bracketed draft provisions developed by the Open-ended Working Group tasked with establishing the Panel. The only agreed-upon rules were that decision-making on matters of substance would be by consensus, and votes would be possible on procedural matters. That agreement provided important comfort in Punta del Este, but proved useless in Geneva. Neither rule was used during the meeting.

Without agreed rules of procedure, the meeting was mired in procedural debate from the outset. Using the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) rules of procedure was not viable as a fallback option. The meeting's scenario note suggested UNEA rules and proponents argued this would provide legal clarity. Opponents said it is paramount to place the Panel on its own feet and called for finalization of its own rules before taking other steps towards operationalization.

A meeting without rules raised questions big and small. Views differed if points of order are even possible without rules on the conduct of meetings. Some delegations asked how to close the meeting, since it never officially opened. After all, the powers of the Chair to gavel a meeting open were in the yet-to-be-agreed rules of procedure.

Importantly, UNEA rules of procedure would allow for a vote to elect all of the Vice-Chairs. The Plenary did agree to use one UNEA rule to elect the Chair and, later, Vice-Chairs from four of the five regions. These seats were all uncontested. The Eastern European Region's nominations, however, were contested. The Russian Federation was dead set against a vote that could go against their nominee. As a result, the Panel's rules of procedure had to be first agreed, before any other progress was possible.

Different Visions for the Panel

Most rules of procedure are common to intergovernmental settings, such as how to conduct business and accept credentials. Thus, there was palpable frustration with the lengthy debates on such issues. In particular, suggestions that Heads of State sign credentials, or that two-thirds of Panel Members agree before an observer could speak, stretched the limits of some delegates' credulity.

Some of the rules of procedure may need to be adapted to the needs of a science-policy body linking knowledge on chemicals, waste and pollution. Of these, the operation and membership of the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC) is paramount. The IEC is envisioned as the heart of the "science" part of the science-policy panel, helping inform the Bureau and Plenary in their tasks. The rules of procedure could establish or undermine its scientific independence and authority. But it was not even discussed beyond a general exchange of views.

When debating other rules, Panel Members revealed very different visions for the newest science-policy panel. There was a sharp division on how often the Panel would convene ordinary meetings—annually or biennially—and if extraordinary sessions should even be possible. Given the innovation and dynamism of chemicals, waste, and pollution science, as well as production and consumption patterns, many sought to increase the Panel's flexibility. This meant annual meetings and, when needed, extraordinary sessions. Annual meetings would also, some delegates noted, allow the Panel to align its work with the various timelines of the relevant multilateral environmental agreements' (MEAs) Conferences of the Parties, as well as meetings of the Global Framework on Chemicals.

The biennial pattern of some of the MEAs led some Panel members to prefer the same rhythm for the ISP-CWP. Others highlighted the difference between the ISP-CWP and an MEA, saying an annual rhythm is appropriate for the Panel's pace of work, especially at the beginning of its existence. Looking at its

sister Panel, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a science-policy expert highlighted that the scheduling of meetings is as much driven by the programme of work and resource constraints. The discussion left some wondering how long it will take the ISP-CWP to deliver its first assessments; even with annual meetings, one observer thought it could “very ambitiously” be in 2030.

Another topic of divergence was whether meetings of the Plenary, subsidiary bodies, and the Bureau would be held in public or private. Again, views diverged, with some preferring to keep the option of private sessions, particularly for subsidiary bodies. Since the latter might include expert bodies, this was unacceptable to many, given the Panel’s scientific nature and its core principles of transparency and integrity.

Finally, there was another “either-or” question of location. A proposal to include a rule allowing a vote on the Secretariat location by simple majority was rejected. Some wondered how, other than through voting, the Panel could decide on its Secretariat’s location, with both Kenya and Switzerland providing compelling arguments. Nairobi, the home of the UN Environment Programme, already hosts the interim secretariat and can offer cost savings, which is particularly attractive at a time when the UN is facing a financial crisis. Geneva would embed the Panel with the existing chemicals policy cluster and other relevant agencies and associated experts, including the World Health Organization. It could help maximize the policy relevance of the Panel, while avoiding duplication. In the final hours of the meeting, the Member from Kenya sought to ensure the resumed session would be held in Nairobi, but the decision was left to the Bureau.

What Now?

Some delegates likened the meeting to a funeral. Others, a circus. Several left the venue quickly, some just shook their head, saying “that was a tough one.” Political positions proved inflexible and simply too far apart. It was unclear where to apportion blame: geopolitical headwinds, entrenched economic interests, or a desire to dampen pollution science. At least, delegates agreed to continue discussions.

The meeting was merely adjourned. It is now up to the elected Bureau to decide on the date and venue of the next meeting, when this first session of the Panel will resume. The resumed Plenary will have the same to-do list could likely operate in the same procedural limbo.

For those waiting for the Panel to take up scientific matters and for scientists looking forward to contributing to this work, it was clear that it is going to take longer than hoped for. Seeing that it would not be prudent to wait, some observers present at the meeting used the time to organize among themselves, hoping to build bridges across the many academic disciplines and expert communities working on pollution issues. Perhaps when the rules of procedure are finally agreed, at least the scientific communities will be ready to hit the ground running.

Upcoming Meetings

15th Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention (OEWG-15): OEWG 15 will meet to review and update many technical guidelines for the sound management of wastes, including for persistent organic pollutants (POPs), waste lead-acid batteries, used and waste pneumatic tyres and mercury. The OEWG will also work to improve the functioning of the prior informed consent procedure. **dates:** 23–26 June 2026 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** basel.int

5th High-Level Ministerial Conference on Anti-Microbial Resistance: This conference will serve as a global platform for high-level dialogue, progress review, and renewed political commitment. **dates:** 28–30 June 2026 **location:** Abuja, Nigeria **www:** 5thhighlevelministerialng.com

48th meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Montreal Protocol: OEWG 48 will meet to consider reports from the Scientific Assessment Panel (SAP), the Environmental Effects Assessment Panel (EEAP), and the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP), and conduct other work. **dates:** 13–17 July 2026 **location:** Bangkok, Thailand **www:** ozone.unep.org

22nd Meeting of the Chemical Review Committee: The Rotterdam Convention’s CRC will meet to review notifications of final regulatory action on several chemicals and proposals for severely hazardous pesticide formulations. **dates:** 14–18 September 2026 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** pic.int

22nd Meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Committee: The Stockholm Convention’s Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) will consider the draft risk profile to list polyhalogenated dibenzo-p-dioxins and dibenzofurans (PXDD/PXDF) in Annex C to the Convention. **dates:** 21–25 September 2026 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** pops.int

38th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol: MOP 38 will review issues related the implementation of the Protocol, commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Kigali Amendment, and adopt the 2027–2029 replenishment of the Multilateral Fund. **dates:** 2–6 November 2026 **location:** Kigali, Rwanda **www:** ozone.unep.org

First International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals: The first GFC International Conference will feature a high-level segment and multi-stakeholder dialogue on the GFC’s five strategic objectives and 28 targets. **dates:** 16–20 November 2026 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** unep.org/global-framework-chemicals

For additional meetings, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

ISP-CWP	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
OEWG	Open-ended Working Group
RoP	Rules of procedure
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme