

FOURTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE STOCKHOLM CONVENTION: 4-8 MAY 2009

The fourth Conference of the Parties (COP-4) to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) begins today at the Geneva International Conference Centre, in Geneva, Switzerland.

COP-4 will address several important issues including: a non-compliance mechanism; the recommendation of the *Ad Hoc* Joint Working Group (AHJWG) on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Rotterdam, Basel and Stockholm Conventions; effectiveness evaluation; financial resources; and recommendations from the POPs Review Committee (POPRC) to schedule nine additional chemicals under the Convention. COP-4's theme "Meeting the challenges of a POPs-free future" will be the focus of the high level segment scheduled to convene on 7 and 8 May.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STOCKHOLM CONVENTION

During the 1960s and 1970s, the use of chemicals and pesticides in industry and agriculture increased dramatically. In particular, a category of chemicals known as POPs attracted international attention due to a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that exposure to very low doses of POPs can lead to cancer, damage to the central and peripheral nervous systems, diseases of the immune system, reproductive disorders and interference with normal infant and child development. POPs are chemical substances that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in living organisms, and can cause adverse effects to human health and the environment. With further evidence of the long-range transport of these substances to regions where they have never been used or produced, and the consequent threats they pose to the global environment, the international community called for urgent global action to reduce and eliminate their release into the environment.

In March 1995, the United Nations Environment Programme's Governing Council (UNEP GC) adopted Decision 18/32 inviting the Inter-Organization Programme on the Sound Management of Chemicals, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the International Programme on Chemical Safety to initiate an assessment process regarding a list of 12 POPs. The IFCS *Ad Hoc* Working Group on POPs concluded that sufficient information existed to demonstrate the need for international action to minimize risks from the 12 POPs, including a global legally-binding instrument. The meeting forwarded a recommendation to the UNEP GC and the World Health Assembly (WHA) that immediate international action be taken on these substances.

In February 1997, the UNEP GC adopted Decision 19/13C endorsing the conclusions and recommendations of the IFCS. The GC requested that UNEP, together with relevant international organizations, convene an intergovernmental negotiating committee with a mandate to develop, by the end of 2000, an international legally-binding instrument for implementing international action, beginning with the list of 12 POPs. In May 1997, the WHA endorsed the recommendations of the IFCS and requested that the World Health Organization participate actively in the negotiations.

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION: The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) met five times between June 1998 and December 2000 to elaborate the convention. The Conference of the Plenipotentiaries convened from 22-23 May 2001, in Stockholm, Sweden, where delegates adopted: the Stockholm Convention; resolutions addressing interim financial arrangements and issues related to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal; resolutions forwarded by the Preparatory Meeting; and the Final Act.

The Stockholm Convention calls for international action on 12 POPs grouped into three categories: 1) pesticides: aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, mirex and toxaphene; 2) industrial chemicals: hexachlorobenzene (HCB) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); and 3) unintentionally produced POPs: dioxins and furans. Governments are to promote best available techniques (BAT) and best environmental practices (BEP) for replacing existing POPs while preventing the development of new POPs. Provision was also made for a procedure to identify additional POPs and the criteria to be considered in doing so.

Key elements of the treaty include: the requirement that developed countries provide new and additional financial resources; measures to eliminate production and use of intentionally produced POPs, eliminate unintentionally produced POPs, where feasible, and manage and dispose of POPs wastes in an environmentally sound manner; and substitution involving the use of safer chemicals and processes to prevent unintentionally produced POPs. Precaution is exercised throughout the Stockholm Convention, with specific references in the preamble, the objective and the provision on identifying new POPs.

The Stockholm Convention entered into force on 17 May 2004, and currently has 163 parties, including the European Community.

COP-1: The first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) to the Stockholm Convention was held from 2-6 May 2005, in Punta del Este, Uruguay. To set the Convention's implementation in

motion, delegates adopted a broad range of decisions, which had been elaborated during two meetings of the INC in June 2002 and July 2003. These decisions related to: providing for the evaluation of the continued need for DDT use for disease vector control; establishing a review process for entries in the register of specific exemptions; adopting guidance for the financial mechanism; establishing a schedule for reporting; establishing arrangements for monitoring data on POPs; adopting rules of procedure and financial rules; adopting the budget for the Secretariat; and establishing the POPRC.

The POPRC was established to regularly consider additional candidates for the annexes to the Convention. The Committee's membership comprises 31 experts nominated by parties from the five UN regional groups. It reviews chemicals nominated by parties in three stages. The Committee first determines whether the substance fulfills POP screening criteria, as defined by the Convention in terms of its persistence, bioaccumulation, potential for long-range environmental transport (LRET), and toxicity. If a substance is deemed to fulfill these requirements, the Committee then drafts a risk profile to evaluate whether the substance is likely, as a result of its LRET, to lead to significant adverse human health and/or environmental effects and global action is therefore warranted. Finally, if the POPRC finds that global action is warranted, it develops a risk management evaluation reflecting socioeconomic considerations associated with possible control measures and, based on this, the POPRC decides to recommend that the COP list the substance under one or more of the annexes to the Convention.

POPRC-1: The first meeting of the POPRC (POPRC-1) was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 7-11 November 2005. The Committee considered five chemicals proposed for inclusion in the Convention and agreed that intersessional working groups would develop draft risk profiles on these chemicals, to be assessed by the Committee at its second meeting. POPRC-1 also reviewed its role and mandate, and took decisions on several operational issues, including developing procedures for handling confidential information, work plans for intersessional activities, and criteria and procedures for inviting additional experts.

COP-2: This meeting took place from 1-5 May 2006, in Geneva, Switzerland. COP-2 considered several reports on activities within the Convention's mandate, and adopted 18 decisions on, *inter alia*: DDT, exemptions, financial resources and mechanisms, information exchange, BAT/BEP, identification and quantification of releases, measures to reduce or eliminate releases from wastes, implementation plans, listing chemicals in Annexes A, B or C of the Convention, reporting, technical assistance, synergies, effectiveness evaluation, and non-compliance.

POPRC-2: POPRC-2 was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 6-10 November 2006. The Committee adopted the risk profiles for pentabromodiphenyl ether (pentaBDE), chlordecone, hexabromobiphenyl (HBB), lindane, and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and agreed that intersessional working groups would develop draft risk management evaluations for these chemicals to be assessed by POPRC-3. The Committee also agreed to consider five newly proposed chemicals for inclusion in the Convention: alpha hexachlorocyclohexane (alphaHCH), beta hexachlorocyclohexane (betaHCH), pentachlorobenzene (PeCB), commercial octabromodiphenyl ether (c-octaBDE) and short-chained chlorinated paraffins (SCCPs), and agreed that intersessional working groups would develop draft risk profiles on these chemicals to be assessed by the Committee at its third meeting.

COP-3: Stockholm Convention COP-3 was held from 30 April - 4 May 2007, in Dakar, Senegal. COP-3 considered several reports on activities within the Convention's mandate and adopted 22 decisions on, *inter alia*: a revised process for the review of entries in the register of specific exemptions; DDT;

measures to reduce or eliminate releases from wastes; guidelines on the standardized toolkit for identification and quantification of releases; guidelines on BAT and draft guidance on BEP; regional centers; listing chemicals in Annexes A, B or C of the Convention; reporting; effectiveness evaluation; national implementation plans; budget; financial resources; technical assistance; synergies; and non-compliance.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

POPRC-3: This meeting took place from 19-23 November 2007, in Geneva, Switzerland. The Committee approved the risk management evaluation for five chemicals, and recommended that COP-4 consider listing under Annexes A, B or C: lindane; chlordecone; HBB; pentaBDE; and PFOS, its salts and PFOS fluoride. Risk profiles were approved for four chemicals, and POPRC-3 adopted a work programme to prepare draft risk management evaluations for those chemicals, namely on: c-octaBDE, PeCB, and alphaHCH and betaHCH, and agreed that intersessional working groups would develop draft risk profiles on these chemicals to be assessed by the Committee at its fourth meeting. The Committee decided that a proposal by the European Community and its member states to consider endosulfan for inclusion in Annex A, B or C would be considered by POPRC-4.

BASEL CONVENTION COP-9: This meeting was held from 23-27 June 2008, in Bali, Indonesia. COP-9 adopted more than 30 decisions prepared by the Open-Ended Working Group on, *inter alia*: cooperation and coordination; the budget; legal matters; review of Basel Convention Regional Coordinating Centres; the Partnership Programme; the Strategic Plan; and technical matters. Key issues that occupied much of delegates' time included: adopting the recommendation of the AHJWG on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions; linking the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention with the new strategic framework beyond 2010 and, in this context, approving a suitable budget; and legal interpretation of Article 17(5), relating to the entry into force of the Ban Amendment.

POPRC-4: This meeting convened from 13-17 October 2008, in Geneva, Switzerland. POPRC-4 considered several operational issues, including conflict-of-interest procedures, toxic interactions between POPs, and activities undertaken for effective participation of parties in its work. The Committee approved the risk management evaluations for four chemicals, and recommended that COP-4 consider listing under Annexes A, B or C: c-octaBDE, PeCB, alphaHCH and betaHCH. A draft risk profile for SCCPs was discussed and the Committee agreed to forward it to POPRC-5 for further consideration. POPRC-4 also evaluated a proposal to list endosulfan under the Convention and agreed, by vote, that it met the criteria for listing and that a draft risk profile should be prepared for consideration by POPRC-5. POPRC-4 also began an exchange of views on a proposal to list hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD).

ROTTERDAM CONVENTION COP-4: The fourth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade convened from 27-31 October 2008, in Rome, Italy. COP-4 adopted 13 decisions, including the addition of tributyl tin compounds, pesticides used in antifouling paints for ship hulls that are toxic to fish, mollusks and other aquatic organisms, to Annex III of the Convention (Chemicals subject to the PIC procedure). The meeting also adopted the recommendation of the AHJWG on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. Issues unresolved and forwarded to COP-5 included those on: compliance; effective implementation; and listing of chrysotile asbestos, the most commonly used form of asbestos and cause of mesothelioma, and endosulfan, a pesticide widely used in cotton production, in Annex III.