



THIRD SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY: 15–20 OCTOBER 2000

The third session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (FORUM III) meets from 15-20 October 2000 in Salvador, Brazil. The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) is a mechanism for cooperation among governments for promoting the environmentally sound management of chemicals. The IFCS seeks to provide policy guidance, develop coordinated and integrated strategies and foster an understanding of relevant issues. It has evolved to be the "over-arching framework" to develop and promote, through a consensus-building process, international strategies and partnerships among national governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the sound management of chemicals. The IFCS provides a mechanism for these partners to consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks with the goal of seeking consensus among these groups on implementing Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. The IFCS involves, encourages and supports relevant stakeholders so that they may make their appropriate contribution.

The theme of FORUM III is "In Partnership for Global Chemical Safety." FORUM III will conduct a full review of the IFCS and assess progress made on implementing Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, particularly regarding the Priorities for Action adopted by FORUM I in 1994. The meeting will also consider and decide on the future direction of the IFCS and Priorities for Action beyond 2000. Specific topics to be discussed include:

- * prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products;
- * barriers to information exchange;
- * information exchange for chemical production decision-making;
- * emission inventories;
- * a capacity building network for the sound management of chemicals;
- * raising the priority of chemicals management capacity building issues at political levels; and
- * the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IFCS

The concept of an intergovernmental forum to address chemical safety originated during preparations for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), when the UNCED Preparatory Committee identified the collaborative effort of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) within the Intergovernmental Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) as the nucleus for international cooperation on environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals. The Preparatory Committee invited the IPCS to identify possible intergovernmental mechanisms for risk assessment and management of chemicals. In response, UNEP, ILO and WHO convened an expert meeting in London in December 1991 to consider priority areas for an international strategy and possible proposals for an intergovernmental mechanism for the environmentally sound management of chemicals. The meeting resulted in a recommendation to establish an intergovernmental forum on chemical risk assessment and management. This recommendation was forwarded to UNCED.

At UNCED, delegates adopted the programme of action Agenda 21, which directly addresses the role of chemicals management in Chapter 19, "Environmentally Sound Management of Toxic Chemicals Including Prevention of Illegal International Traffic in Toxic and Dangerous Products." Agenda 21 also addresses the use of chemicals in a number of other chapters, including those on changing consumption patterns, the promotion of sustainable agriculture and rural development, and the protection of human health, oceans, freshwater and the atmosphere. Chapter 19 contains an international strategy for action on chemical safety with six priority Programme Areas: expanding and accelerating international assessment of chemical risks; harmonization of classification and labelling of chemicals; information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks; establishment of risk reduction programmes; strengthening of national capacity and capability for chemicals management; and prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products. Chapter 19 also called for the establishment of an intergovernmental forum on chemical safety.

FORUM I: In April 1994, UNEP, ILO and WHO convened the International Conference on Chemical Safety in Stockholm, Sweden. The Conference established the IFCS and constituted the

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first meeting of the Forum (FORUM I). The Conference adopted Terms of Reference which established the IFCS as a non-institutional arrangement through which government representatives would meet to consider issues, provide advice and make recommendations to governments, UN agencies, IGOs and NGOs involved in chemical safety. The role of the IFCS, as defined by the Terms of Reference, is to provide clear and consistent advice for cost-effective, integrated risk assessment and management of chemicals and to improve delineation and mutual understanding of roles, initiatives and activities both within and among governments and IGOs which have responsibility for chemical safety. FORUM I also took steps to provide financial and administrative arrangements for the IFCS and adopted a resolution containing detailed recommendations on priorities for action in implementing Agenda 21.

ISG-1 and 2: The IFCS Terms of Reference established the Intersessional Group (ISG) to meet between FORUM sessions in order to provide advice to the cooperating organizations of the IPCS. The ISG makes recommendations to the FORUM, studies special problems and advises on the implementation of strategies and programmes as approved by the FORUM. The ISG is comprised of the officers of the FORUM and not more than 26 government participants elected by the FORUM. The first meeting of the ISG (ISG-1) was held in Bruges, Belgium in March 1995. Participants recommended an inventory of programmes, activities and projects related to chemical safety carried out by IGOs, as well as an inventory of bilaterally supported initiatives in chemicals management. The second meeting (ISG-2), held from 5-8 March 1996 in Canberra, Australia, established an *Ad Hoc* Working Group for the Agenda of FORUM II and made a number of recommendations under each of the six priority Programme Areas.

FORUM II: At the second session of the IFCS (FORUM II), held from 10-14 February 1997 in Ottawa, Canada, delegates made recommendations on five of the six Programme Areas: expanding and accelerating international assessment of chemical risks; strengthening national capabilities and capacities for management of chemicals; harmonization of classification and labelling of chemicals; information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks; and establishment of risk reduction programmes, including the disposal of obsolete chemicals and pesticide risk reduction. FORUM II also made recommendations on emerging issues such as endocrine disrupting substances and on pollution release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Delegates reached agreement on a number of actions regarding the structure and function of the IFCS. The Forum Standing Committee (FSC) was established as a mechanism to respond to new developments and to give advice in preparing for future meetings. For a complete report, see *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 1 <<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/chemical/ifcs/enb1501e.txt>>.

ISG-3: The third meeting of the Intersessional Group (ISG-3) of the IFCS was held from 1-4 December 1998 in Yokohama, Japan. ISG-3 resulted in approximately 25 agreed action items and recommendations on risk assessment, obsolete chemicals and pesticides, capacity building, harmonization of classification and labelling, support for NGO participation in FORUM activities,

preparations for FORUM III, longer term issues, funding, and the year 2000 computer problem (Y2K). A report of this meeting is available at: <<http://www.iisd.ca/sd/isg3/sdvol20no1e.html>>.

PIC: The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade was adopted at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Rotterdam on 10 September 1998. The Convention was opened for signature at the signing ceremony in Rotterdam on 11 September 1998, and at UN Headquarters in New York from 12 September 1998 to 10 September 1999. To date, the Convention has been signed by 72 States and one regional economic integration organization, and ratified by nine States. It will enter into force once 50 instruments of ratification are deposited. The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-6) was held from 12-16 July 1999 in Rome. The first meeting since the adoption of the Rotterdam Convention, INC-6 gathered approximately 300 delegates from 121 countries to address arrangements for the interim period prior to entry into force of the Convention and for implementation of the interim PIC procedure. INC-6 resulted in the adoption of outline draft decisions on the definition and provisional adoption of PIC regions, the establishment of an Interim Chemical Review Committee (ICRC) and the adoption of draft decision guidance documents (DGDs) for already identified chemicals. For a full report, see *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 20 <<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/vol15/enb1520e.html>>. The seventh session of the INC will be held from 30 October to 3 November 2000 in Geneva.

POPS: The fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) for an International Legally Binding Instrument for Implementing International Action on Certain Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) met from 20-25 March 2000 in Bonn, Germany. Approximately 500 representatives from 121 countries, international organizations and NGOs participated in INC-4, and continued preparation of an international legally binding instrument for implementing international action on certain 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) unintended byproducts: dioxins and furans. For more information, see *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 34 <<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/vol15/enb1534e.html>>. INC-5 will take place from 4-9 December 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Conference of the Plenipotentiaries will be held in Stockholm, Sweden from 21-23 May 2001.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: FORUM III will begin at 2:30 pm in the Iris Room. Opening statements will be heard from Marco Maciel (Vice President of Brazil), Otto Alencar (Vice Governor of the State of Bahia), José Carlo Carvalho (Acting Minister of the Environment), Reinaldo Braga (President of the Legislative Assembly of Bahia), Luiz Carreira (State Secretary of Planning, Science and Technology), Mr. Roy Hickman (President of the IFCS), and other IFCS representatives. Dr. Michel Mercier will be presented with the second IFCS Award of Merit. The opening ceremony will be followed by a round-table session titled "In Partnership for Global Chemical Safety," moderated by Horst Otterstetter.