



## FOURTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY: 1-7 NOVEMBER 2003

The fourth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS FORUM IV) opened on Saturday, 1 November 2003, at the United Nations Conference Center in Bangkok, Thailand and will continue until 7 November 2003. Convening under the theme "Chemical Safety in a Vulnerable World," FORUM IV is expected to take stock of the progress achieved on the commitments and recommendations made at FORUM III, including identifying and suggesting remedies for gaps in the Bahia Declaration and Priorities for Action Beyond 2000. Throughout the Forum, delegates will focus on topics relating to: children and chemical safety; occupational safety and health; hazard data generation and availability; risk management and the reduction of acutely toxic pesticides; and capacity building. In response to decisions SS.VII/3 and 22/4 IV of the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council (UNEP GC), FORUM IV will also review and discuss the further development of a strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM), and present the outcome of its deliberations to the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the development of a SAICM, which will take place from 9-13 November 2003 in Bangkok. The PrepCom is expected to culminate in an International Conference on Chemicals Management to be held in 2005.

### 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) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, when the UNCED PrepCom identified the collaborative efforts of UNEP, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), within the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS), as the nucleus for international cooperation on the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals. The PrepCom invited the IPCS to identify possible intergovernmental mechanisms for risk assessment and chemicals management. In response, UNEP, ILO and WHO convened an expert meeting in London, UK, in December 1991 to consider priority areas for an international strategy and 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 that was forwarded to UNCED.

At UNCED, delegates adopted Agenda 21, a programme of action for sustainable development. Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 addresses the "Environmentally Sound Management of Toxic Chemicals Including Prevention of Illegal International Traffic in Toxic and Dangerous Products," and 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 labeling of chemicals; information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks; establishment of risk reduction programmes; strengthening of national capabilities and capacities for management of chemicals; and prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products. Chapter 19 also calls 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 first meeting of the Forum (FORUM I). The Conference adopted a resolution with detailed recommendations on Priorities for Action in implementing Agenda 21, and the Terms of Reference for the IFCS, establishing it as a mechanism for cooperation among governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to promote chemical risk assessment and the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

**FORUM II:** FORUM II, held in February 1997 in Ottawa, Canada, made recommendations on the Programme Areas identified in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, and on emerging issues such as endocrine disrupting chemicals and pollutant 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 for responding to new developments and advising on preparations for future meetings.

**FORUM III:** FORUM III was held from 15-20 October 2000, in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil under the theme "In Partnership for Global Chemical Safety." Delegates reviewed the IFCS, assessed progress made on implementing Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, reached agreement on the Priorities for Action Beyond 2000, and issued the Bahia Declaration on Chemical Safety. The Bahia Declaration lists six priorities for review at future Forums, as well as key goals with target dates for their achievement. The Priorities for Action Beyond 2000 include recommendations that are linked to these goals and organized according to the six Programme Areas set forth in Agenda 21. FORUM III also considered: the prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products; barriers to information exchange; information exchange for chemical production decision making; PRTRs and emissions inventories; a capacity building network for the sound management of chemicals; awareness raising and the prioritization of chemicals management capacity building issues at the political level; and the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS).

### INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**FSC WORKING GROUPS:** Established in view of FORUM III recommendations, FSC working groups met during the intersessional period to: consider occupational safety and health in the context of chemical safety; review assistance given to countries to support capacity building for the sound management of chemicals; address the issue of consistency and collaboration in

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hazard data generation and availability; and provide initial input regarding the problem of acutely toxic pesticides. Working groups were also formed to address the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies, and to consider the issue of children and chemical safety.

**WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WSSD):** The WSSD convened from 26 August to 4 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and adopted, among other outcomes, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), a framework for action to implement the UNCED commitments that includes a number of new commitments. The issue of chemicals management is addressed primarily in Chapter III on Changing Unsustainable Patterns of Production and Consumption, which reflects a renewed commitment to the sound management of chemicals. Chemicals-related targets contained in the JPOI include: the aim to achieve, by 2020, the use and production of chemicals in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment; the development, by 2005, of a SAICM based on the Bahia Declaration and IFCS Priorities for Action beyond 2000; and the national implementation of the new GHS, with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008.

**UNEP GC RESOLUTIONS:** At its 21st session in 2001, the UNEP GC adopted decision 21/7, which requests the UNEP Executive Director, in consultation with governments, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), IFCS and others, to examine the need for a SAICM.

In February 2002, at its seventh Special Session/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the UNEP GC agreed in decision SS.VII/3 that a SAICM was needed, and requested its Executive Director to develop a SAICM with the IFCS Bahia Declaration and Priorities for Action Beyond 2000 as its foundation. This process was to entail an "open-ended consultative meeting involving representatives of all stakeholder groups" jointly convened by UNEP, IFCS and IOMC.

The 22nd session of the UNEP GC, held in February 2003, reached agreement on a number of chemicals-related issues, including decisions on lead, the SAICM, the Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and the Global Mercury Assessment. On the SAICM, the decision endorses the concept of an international conference, with preparatory meetings, as the basis for developing the SAICM.

**ROTTERDAM CONVENTION:** The 1998 Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade was adopted in September 1998. To date, the Convention, which requires ratification by 50 States for entry into force, has been ratified by 49 States and the European Community.

**BASEL CONVENTION:** The sixth Conference of the Parties (COP-6) to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal met from 9-14 December 2002, in Geneva, Switzerland. COP-6 agreed on a compliance mechanism for the Convention, adopted a Strategic Plan, and finalized the Framework Agreement on the legal establishment of the Regional Centers for Training and Technology Transfer.

**STOCKHOLM CONVENTION:** The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) was adopted and opened for signature on 22 May 2001. The seventh Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-7) for an International Legally Binding Instrument for Implementing International Action on Certain POPs convened from 14-18 July 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland. Forty States have ratified the Convention thus far, and there are indications that the required number of 50 instruments of ratification will be met in 2004. INC-7 succeeded in laying the groundwork for the administration of the Convention, but left some of the most contentious issues for future consideration by the COP.

## IFCS FORUM IV OPENING SESSION

On Saturday afternoon, 1 November, delegates to FORUM IV heard welcoming statements, an honorary address, and a panel discussion on Chemical Safety in a Vulnerable World. IFCS awards were also presented and a video on chemical safety was screened.

**OPENING CEREMONY:** Participants heard welcoming statements from Henrique Cavalcanti, IFCS President, Keiko Okaido, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, and Sudarat Keyuraphan, Thailand's Minister for Public Health. HRH Chulabhorn, Princess of Thailand, officially opened FORUM IV and presented the IFCS Award of Merit to György Ungváry, IFCS Vice President for Central and Eastern Europe, and the IFCS Special Recognition Award to the International POPs Elimination Network.

**HONORARY ADDRESS:** HRH Chulabhorn presented on chemical safety in Southeast Asia, noting progress achieved and the contribution of the Chulabhorn Research Institute. She stressed that much remains to be done and called for developing human resources and capacity building to address toxicology in developing countries.

**PANEL DISCUSSION:** In his keynote address, Carl Djerassi, Stanford University, proposed the establishment of "technical social service corps" that would entail young chemistry experts from industrialized countries voluntarily working on chemical remediation and detection projects in developing countries in cooperation with local populations.

Recalling the 1984 Bhopal chemical disaster, Satinath Sarangi, Sambhavna Trust, called for international civil and criminal liability regimes and compensation mechanisms to address the consequences of chemical accidents. Omara Amuko, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, called upon the Forum to help agricultural workers protect themselves from chemical poisoning. Lauraine Lotter, South African Chemical and Allied Industries' Association, called for actions to: provide technical and financial support for capacity building; implement the GHS; and disseminate information on chemicals use. Guilherme Santana, Brazilian National Oil Agency, called for new approaches to crisis management and capacity building to address organizational failures leading to crises. Yun-Joo Lee, UN University, stressed the need for a shift in attitude away from economic valuation of the environment toward an approach where human dignity is recognized. She identified links between political corruption and pollution.

Following the panel presentations, panelists discussed issues relating to the Bhopal incident and agricultural workers. Some panelists highlighted, *inter alia*, the "polluter pays principle" and the need to educate leaders. Participants also discussed ways to empower the powerless, through, amongst others, information and awareness-raising. One panelist noted that information does not equal empowerment and urged developing mechanisms for implementation and enforcement.

## THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**PLENARY:** FORUM IV delegates will gather in the ESCAP Hall from 8:00-11:00 am to address organizational matters and administrative items, hear the President's Progress Report and a report on PRTRs/emission inventories, and discuss the issue of children and chemical safety.

**REGIONAL GROUPS:** Regional Groups will meet from 1:00-4:00 pm to prepare input to impending discussions on: hazard data generation and availability; acutely toxic pesticides; capacity building assistance; and ways to address the widening gap among countries.

**GHS WORKSHOP:** A dinner workshop on the opportunities and challenges of implementing the GHS will take place from 4:30-9:00 pm in Conference Room 1.