



IFCS IV HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2003

Forum IV delegates convened in the morning to address organizational matters and administrative items. Delegates also heard the President's Progress Report and a report on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)/emission inventories. Regional Groups met in the afternoon to prepare their inputs to discussions on: hazard data generation and availability; acutely toxic pesticides; capacity building assistance; addressing the widening gap among countries; and nominations for Vice Presidents and Forum Standing Committee (FSC) members.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

IFCS President Henrique Cavalcanti (Brazil) opened the Plenary, highlighting the *Conduct of Business in Plenary Sessions of the Forum, Regional Group Meetings, and ad hoc Working Groups* (IFCS/FORUM IV/8 INF). Following the designation of Miroslav Cikrt (Czech Republic) as Rapporteur, the Secretariat briefed delegates on the process of document preparations, noting that this was a collective and participatory process.

President Cavalcanti presented the documents relating to the proposed provisional agenda (01w, 02w, 03w and 04w), and requested the Forum to consider their adoption. Nigeria, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP and supported by THAILAND, BANGLADESH, many Latin American countries and the INTERNATIONAL POIS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN), called upon Forum IV to address the issue of illegal trafficking. The INTER-ORGANIZATION PROGRAMME FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS (IOMC) noted that more consultations with IOMC participating organizations were needed. President Cavalcanti suggested establishing an *ad hoc* working group and said meeting details would be announced on Monday, 3 November.

IFCS ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

President Cavalcanti outlined the proposed amendments to the *IFCS Guidelines and Procedures* (15w). Discussions focused on amendments to the Guidelines for National Focal Points. AUSTRALIA and SWEDEN said biannual reporting was burdensome for both the Secretariat and Focal Points, and IRAN, supported by several countries, suggested annual rather than biannual reporting. The PHILIPPINES said biannual reporting could facilitate the rapid identification of issues at the regional level. SWITZERLAND and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO said it was inappropriate to assign the identification of a Focal Point specifically to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and ARGENTINA stressed that this was a decision to be made by governments. EGYPT requested guidance regarding mechanisms

for information dissemination within countries, and BURUNDI requested further guidance on the functions of Focal Points. President Cavalcanti said a revised document will be discussed in Plenary later in the week.

The Secretariat outlined the *Guidelines and Criteria for Selection of Hosts* (05w). ARGENTINA requested broadening the conditions under which a Forum meeting could be cancelled, and BANGLADESH said such a decision should be taken in cooperation with the host country. SWITZERLAND opposed specifying the ministry responsible for communicating a proposal to host a Forum meeting. Following the referral of further discussion on host selection to the regional meetings, the Secretariat presented the *IFCS Financial Statement* (06w), highlighting the budget status and estimated budget requirements.

Vice President Ndiaye Cheikh Sylla (Senegal) presented the *Resources to Support Vice Presidents* (07w), which recognizes that many developing countries lack the ability to provide the necessary resources to support the Vice Presidents in their duties, and calls for bilateral assistance to cover secretariat, communications and travel expenses within respective regions. THAILAND suggested calling for support from donors, rather than bilateral assistance specifically. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION proposed including reference to countries with economies in transition. UGANDA and BURUNDI called for assistance to Focal Points. Delegates adopted the proposal with the amendments from the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and THAILAND.

President Cavalcanti then briefed participants on the process for electing Officers and FSC members, stating that any country can elect itself to the FSC, and adding that countries should consider their ability to effectively perform the necessary duties.

PRESIDENT'S PROGRESS REPORT

President Cavalcanti presented the President's Progress Report, briefly outlining the progress achieved in implementing the IFCS Priorities for Action Beyond 2000 adopted at Forum III. He suggested creating French and Spanish websites to enhance the dissemination and exchange of information, and stressed the importance of greater developing country participation, particularly in the establishment of risk reduction programmes and in the prevention of international illegal traffic in toxic and dangerous products. He presented proposals on the IFCS's contribution to the SAICM process contained in the report.

Discussions on Children and Chemical Safety were postponed to Tuesday morning, 4 November.

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REPORT ON PRTRS/EMISSION INVENTORIES

Georg Karlaganis, IOMC PRTR Coordinating Group, reported on progress in implementing Forum III's goals on PRTRs/emission inventories. He noted new national PRTRs in two regions and the establishment and upgrading of existing PRTRs. Karlaganis identified a legal framework requiring mandatory reporting as the most efficient way to organize work on PRTRs. He said the Coordinating Group proposes to continue raising PRTR awareness at the international level and to promote the establishment of a clearinghouse for PRTR support activities.

REGIONAL GROUP MEETINGS

AFRICA: The African Regional Group, chaired by Vice President Sylla, discussed illegal traffic in toxic and dangerous products, and the SAICM. Noting that the working group on illegal traffic established at Forum III had never met due to a lack of resources, participants considered the ongoing need for such a group. It was decided that representatives of the African Group would devise a common position on illegal traffic, and subsequently meet with the Group of Latin American and the Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) before taking the issue to the Forum.

Regarding the SAICM, IPEN underscored the goal agreed to at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to achieve, by 2020, the use and production of chemicals in ways that minimize adverse effects on human health and the environment. He recommended that governments use SAICM as a tool to achieve that goal, and called on African countries to embrace this idea at the upcoming SAICM PrepCom.

GRULAC: Participants of this meeting, chaired by Vice President Mercedes Bolaños (Ecuador), discussed the elaboration of GRULAC's final report, illegal traffic, Focal Points, and elections. On illegal traffic, some delegates supported the African Group's proposal to include this issue as an agenda item, while others supported ongoing work on illegal traffic.

Regarding hazard data generation, a delegate suggested that the proposed international repository on hazard information be free of charge to users. On acutely toxic pesticides, a delegate said non-chemical and safer alternatives may not be available. On the widening gap among countries, some delegates stressed that financial mechanisms are essential for implementing the measures required for bridging that gap.

ASIA PACIFIC: This meeting was chaired by Vice President Sadao Nakao (Japan). On acutely toxic pesticides, participants agreed to consider risk mitigation mechanisms such as establishing a surveillance and monitoring system on the use of acutely toxic pesticides and their impact on human and animal health and the environment. Participants also discussed the need to encourage and facilitate information sharing and technology transfer for risk reduction and mitigation, and to transfer technology to promote non-chemical alternatives. Delegates stressed the need to: cooperate to suppress banned or prohibited acutely toxic pesticides; prioritize the safe disposal of obsolete acutely toxic pesticides; and prevent the generation of stockpiles. On capacity building assistance, participants stressed the importance of developing national chemical management profiles. On the widening gap among countries, IRAN outlined causes of the gap and why it should be addressed, noting that chemical threats are transboundary and require international efforts. He stressed the need to strike a balance between developing further policies and helping countries that have lagged behind with regard to chemical safety policies, and proposed a systematic way forward on this issue.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: This meeting was chaired by Vice President György Ungváry (Hungary). On hazard data generation, participants discussed, *inter alia*, data generation costs versus health costs. A participant suggested focusing on substances with known hazardous qualities, and improving access to existing commercial databases on hazardous chemicals. On acutely toxic pesticides, participants noted that acute poisoning is less critical in the region than the issue of obsolete pesticide stockpiles, and underscored the need for regional solutions and increased funding. On capacity building assistance, many participants stressed the need to harmonize efforts for capacity building and improve inter-ministry cooperation. Participants supported the decision document on the widening gap among countries and discussed guidelines and procedures.

WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS: This meeting was chaired by Vice President Gunnar Bengtsson (Sweden). Regarding hazard data generation and availability, participants discussed an OECD suggestion for the development of a portal system linking available databases, including those of the EU and the US Environmental Protection Agency. A participant cautioned against the premature development of the OECD's role. Regarding acutely toxic pesticides, participants noted that developing countries may not have the capacity to implement risk mitigation, and referred to the Prior Informed Consent procedure of the Rotterdam Convention for the identification of problems arising from pesticide use in developing countries. Regarding capacity building assistance, delegates emphasized the need to integrate chemical safety into other environment and development issues in developing countries and bring chemical safety onto the agenda of donor agencies. On the widening gap among countries, participants highlighted the need for cooperation among neighboring countries and considered the potential for a pilot project in Southeast Asia.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The Forum commenced its substantive work today with an ambitious agenda to take decisions on a range of chemical safety issues. Some delegates noted the conspicuous presence of industry, seeking to prevent an outright ban on certain pesticides. During a lunch-time presentation, one industry group said that serious occupational injuries due to pesticide exposure are uncommon and concluded that a simple ban on acutely toxic pesticides will not result in significant improvements in occupational health - a comment that provoked strong reactions from some participants.

A number of developing country delegates expressed frustration that the working group on illegal traffic, established at Forum III, never convened, ostensibly due to a lack of funding. Some speculated that the actual reason was the low prioritization of this issue by donor countries. These delegates felt strongly that donors should seriously consider illegal traffic, since it is a top concern for developing countries. One African delegate said that African countries may source necessary funds from within the region if funding is not forthcoming, highlighting a possible role for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates will gather in the ESCAP Hall from 8:00-11:00 am to hear presentations on and discuss: hazard data generation and availability; acutely toxic pesticides; capacity building assistance; and the SAICM.

REGIONAL GROUPS: Regional Groups will meet from 1:00-4:00 pm to prepare input to discussions on occupational safety and health, and the SAICM.