



SAICM PREPCOM1 HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2003

On the inaugural day of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the Development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM PrepCom1), delegates heard opening statements, elected the Bureau, and addressed organizational matters, focusing on rules of procedure. Delegates were also briefed on existing work related to the SAICM, and began expressing their views on its further development.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

In his opening address, Prapat Panyachatraska, Thailand's Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, stressed that chemical safety requires cooperation among all stakeholders. He called for further action on the harmonization of classification and labeling of chemicals and on illegal traffic in toxic and dangerous products, and expressed hope that the SAICM will address gaps in these and other chemicals management priorities.

Kim Hak-Su, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), emphasized the need to link chemicals-related conventions to sustainable development, and highlighted initiatives undertaken by UNESCAP to this end.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, said the SAICM is a truly multi-sectoral endeavor, which requires multi-stakeholder cooperation and leadership. Commending the achievement of the WSSD target concerning the ratification of the Rotterdam Convention and the progress made on the development of a globally harmonized system for the classification and labeling of chemicals, he said these successes reflect the feasibility of the WSSD chemicals-related goals. He said the SAICM should contribute to reaching the WSSD goal of achieving 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, and suggested that the SAICM address: issues that have received insufficient attention; new issues; and the life-cycle concept. Thanking the donors who have made SAICM PrepCom1 possible, Töpfer urged provision of financial resources for the future and suggested the creation of a "SAICM Club" of donors. In closing, he said SAICM achievements could include: mobilization of resources; integration of chemicals management into the wider sustainable development agenda; and increased funding for capacity building, waste disposal, and clean-up operations.

Zoltan Csizer, IOMC Chair, emphasized the need for financial and technical support for the SAICM, and urged building upon existing international agreements and national actions and initiatives. He urged recognition of the contribution of the chemical

industry, noting the need for corporate social responsibility, and called for approaches that reduce risks for all, rather than transferring risks to those least able to address them.

Suwit Wibulpolprasert, President of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), highlighted that the multi-stakeholder approach of the IFCS helps mobilize the political, financial, social and spiritual contribution of all stakeholders involved in chemicals management. He stressed the need to: involve stakeholders at all stages in efforts toward chemical safety; act collectively on issues that affect the most vulnerable groups, particularly children; and radically rethink current practices and behavior in both the public and private sectors.

ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

Following Regional Group consultations, delegates elected the Bureau by acclamation. Halldor Thorgeirsson (Iceland) was elected Chair of the SAICM preparatory process. The elected Vice Chairs were: Nigeria for the African Group; Croatia for the Central and Eastern Europe Group; Thailand for the Asia and the Pacific Group; and Uruguay for the Latin America and the Caribbean Group.

Chair Thorgeirsson highlighted the broad support that the SAICM process has received from international organizations, and noted the high level of participation and the diversity of countries and sectors represented at the meeting. While recognizing that no one yet knows what the SAICM is, he highlighted that the process is intended to contribute to the achievement of the WSSD chemicals-related targets.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Following adoption of the *Provisional Agenda* (SAICM/ PREPCOM.1/1), Chair Thorgeirsson highlighted the *Scenario Note for the First Session of the PrepCom* (INF/2). The Secretariat outlined the *draft Rules of Procedure* (3), which he noted had been prepared in consultation with the inter-organization SAICM Steering Committee. The Secretariat said the draft rules took as a starting point the rules of procedure of the UNEP Governing Council (UNEP GC) and the IFCS terms of reference, and drew attention to three areas where their rules diverged: stakeholder participation; bureau composition; and voting requirements.

ECUADOR questioned the need for new rules of procedure, and suggested adhering to existing UN rules. The Secretariat clarified the differences between UN General Assembly and UNEP GC rules, and said that the proposed draft rules were based on UNEP GC rules. NIGERIA supported multi-stakeholder participation in the SAICM process. AUSTRALIA expressed concern that



new rules could set a precedent for future processes, and suggested a reference clarifying that the new rules would be confined to this process.

Highlighting the UNEP GC decision that the SAICM process is to entail an "open-ended consultative meeting involving representatives of all stakeholder groups," ARGENTINA stressed the need for civil society engagement. Chair Thorgeirsson suggested establishing a contact or working group to consider this matter.

REPORT ON EXISTING WORK RELATED TO THE SAICM

The Secretariat presented its note on the *Background and Mandate for the Development of a SAICM* (2). William Sanders (US) presented the *Forum IV Thought Starter Report to PrepCom I* (INF/10), highlighting the Forum's decisions on children and chemical safety, occupational safety and health, and addressing the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF A SAICM

The Secretariat introduced a number of documents concerning the further development of a SAICM: *Tabular Compilation of Main Points in Submissions Concerning Possible Draft Elements for a SAICM* (4); *Thematic Summary of the Main Points in Submissions Concerning Possible Draft Elements for a SAICM* (5); *Proposed Structure of the SAICM Report for Consideration by the Preparatory Committee* (6); and *Compilation of Original Submissions Concerning Possible Draft Elements for a SAICM* (INF/4). Comments focused on the possible draft elements of a SAICM and the proposed structure of the SAICM report.

WHO noted the World Health Assembly's SAICM Resolution, which urges Member States to take full account of the health aspects of chemical safety in the development of the SAICM.

AUSTRALIA opposed the idea of developing new international instruments, underscoring the importance of addressing the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies. He identified the need to mainstream chemical safety into policy development, and stated that setting priorities was the most important task of the SAICM. Supported by the US, he cautioned against unduly narrowing the scope of the SAICM, as well as expanding it unnecessarily.

SWITZERLAND recommended that the SAICM: have a large scope; be ambitious; and provide a comprehensive politically binding framework. He supported a three-tier format for the SAICM comprising a global programme of action with targets and timetables, an overarching policy strategy, and a ministerial declaration.

IRAN recommended that the SAICM be built on the outcomes of the IFCS, and that the proposed ministerial declaration be adopted at the highest political level. He underscored the need for practical implementation mechanisms, and requested that SAICM address: the migration of polluting industries to developing countries; emergency response to chemical accidents; and chemical releases resulting from war.

EGYPT stressed the need for a clear definition of the SAICM. He recommended that the SAICM's components include: a description of the current situation; a decision on a legislative framework; definition of the SAICM's scope and goals; sources of the financing; short- and long-term action plans; and a monitoring mechanism.

PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK recommended full stakeholder participation in the SAICM process, and adherence to the precautionary principle. He also called for: corporate liability and accountability; information on the intrinsic properties of chemi-

icals; and provision of financial and technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition in order to ensure a shift toward cleaner production.

NORWAY stressed the need to significantly reduce global chemicals risks, particularly in relation to persistent organic pollutants, and increase knowledge about the intrinsic properties, risks and environmental effects of chemicals. He called for addressing the widening gap among countries, and identified the need to integrate chemicals into other policy areas. He noted that the SAICM should be the "roadmap" to achieving the WSSD 2020 target, and incorporate guiding principles such as the precautionary principle, substitution, corporate responsibility, multi-stakeholder involvement, and public right to know.

JAPAN stressed the need for a concrete time schedule, and said that the SAICM should be conducted in a transparent manner, with participation of all stakeholders. She noted the need to address current gaps, prioritize issues, and base decisions on science-based risk assessments, considering the precautionary approach.

LEBANON highlighted the need to avoid fragmentation of international efforts on chemicals management, and urged the creation of an effective mechanism within the SAICM to give support to, and build capacity of, developing countries.

ISRAEL identified the need to monitor exposures from chemical releases, and proposed that the SAICM construct a working group to define criteria and indicators for chemical exposure and its effects on human health.

The US recommended that the output of the SAICM process include a plan of action linking IFCS work and the WSSD 2020 goal. He proposed focusing on addressing the widening gap among countries in sound chemical management, and integrating chemicals into the broader sustainable development agenda.

ARGENTINA cautioned against duplicating the efforts of other international processes, and called for greater synergies among multilateral environmental agreements.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Voicing their positions for the first time on the possible shape and scope of the SAICM, the international community displayed its diversity of views on how such an approach should be developed. As participants proceed to construct what one delegate describes as the "SAICM house," they will need to consider who its architects will be, what its blueprints will look like, what it will be founded upon, and how it will be furnished. A few delegates seemed keen on having an innovative design and moving beyond the scope of current agreements in the international chemicals arena, while others were more focused on spring cleaning the current multi-complex of chemicals-related structures.

While a number of delegations are calling for innovative rules of procedure that allow for multi-stakeholder participation on an equal footing with governments, the issue was not discussed comprehensively in Plenary. One NGO delegate, noting that more conservative positions exist among a few delegations, expressed concern over the possible outcomes of the working group that is being created to discuss this matter.

Many are still uncertain over what exactly the SAICM will be, and at this stage, the outcome is anybody's guess.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates will convene at 9:00 am in the ESCAP Hall to continue commenting on the further development of a SAICM. Chair Thorgeirsson is expected to inform participants on how deliberations on the rules of procedure will proceed.