

## Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG 2 Highlights: Monday, 11 December 2023

Delegates attending the second meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (OEWG-2 SPP) met throughout the day, listening to opening statements, addressing organizational matters, and discussing the preparation of proposals for the establishment of the SPP. In the evening, they held a first round of contact group discussions.

### Opening of the Meeting

OEWG SPP Chair Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) opened the meeting, drawing attention to the 114 states and 59 observer organizations registered. She stressed that the discussions at this meeting will be critical to set the course of work for 2024, and encouraged delegates to be efficient and productive.

As host of the meeting, Mohammed Khashashneh, Secretary General, Ministry of Environment, Jordan, reiterated his country's commitment to establish the SPP. Highlighting that "we do not need to reinvent the wheel," he said the SPP should be based on the views of all stakeholders and be informed by other international agreements.

Sheila Aggarwal-Khan, Director, Economy Division, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), proposed that the SPP: build strong policy links which translate to action; create transformational pathways towards sustainable development; and build inclusive partnerships, including with Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), and industry.

Suggesting that the SPP could tackle interdisciplinary questions, Lesley Onyon, Head, Chemical Safety and Health Unit, World Health Organization (WHO), pointed to WHO's guidelines, including on air quality and chemical safety. She urged delegates to work with national health units to define WHO's role in the SPP process.

### Election of Officers

Chair Alkemade recalled the current composition of the Bureau, noting that Judith Torres (Uruguay) replaced Valentina Sierra (Uruguay) as representative of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) through a silence procedure. On the two vacant seats for the Group of Eastern European States (EEG), GEORGIA reported on consultations held prior to OEWG 2, highlighting lack of consensus, and highlighted that an informal roll call vote showed support for the candidates from Romania and Ukraine. In a point of order, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted that Georgia lacked the authority to speak on behalf of the EEG group and called for holding a secret ballot later in the week to allow delegations to consult with their capitals.

SAUDI ARABIA, JORDAN, and SUDAN supported postponing the elections to the end of the week. UKRAINE, CZECHIA, ROMANIA, the US, and NORTH MACEDONIA called for electing the remaining Bureau members immediately to enable proper work on substantial matters. Chair Alkemade suggested, and delegates agreed on, holding elections by secret ballot on Tuesday morning.

### Organizational Matters

Delegates adopted the [provisional agenda](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/1) and the [scenario note for the second session](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/1/Rev.1). Chair Alkemade suggested that contact groups or informal groups be established as necessary to consider clusters of topics.

## Preparation of Proposals for the Establishment of a Science-Policy Panel

Chair Alkemade opened the floor for general regional statements. Nigeria, for the AFRICAN GROUP, drew attention to existing SPPs, stressing the need to finetune relevant modalities to attain shared objectives. He suggested including disciplinary measures related to conflict of interest (CoI) provisions.

Argentina, for GRULAC, highlighted key guiding principles, including promotion and protection of human rights as a cross-cutting issue. He emphasized the importance of independence, solidarity, and interdisciplinarity, as well as effective policies to prevent CoI.

Georgia, for EEG, underscored the interdependence between science and policy, urging a collaborative approach on the management of chemicals, waste, and pollution prevention to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and policy implementation.

The EU stressed that a CoI policy is essential to guarantee the SPP's credibility, further highlighting the importance of discussing relationships with relevant stakeholders.

China, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, called for a broad scope for the SPP and a clear understanding of institutional arrangements, stressing that work prioritization should be member-driven. Calling for transcending political differences and territorial disputes, he highlighted the need for inclusive science-based solutions for the sound management of chemicals, waste, and pollution, taking into account national circumstances.

The AFRICAN GROUP, GRULAC, and the EEG, called for broad participation of observers, and geographically- and gender-balanced expert representation in the work of the SPP, and emphasized the importance of considering Indigenous and local knowledge.

The AFRICAN GROUP, GRULAC, the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, and the EEG highlighted the need for a solid and coherent capacity building approach, in particular facilitating technology transfer to developing countries and ensuring adequate financing, to promote the full and effective participation of developing countries. The EU noted that more discussions will be needed to finalize the provisions on capacity building.

Chair Alkemade introduced the [Skeleton Outline for proposals for the establishment of an SPP](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/2), and the [draft text for proposals to establish an SPP](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/10), noting that the latter contains textual suggestions that may be considered as the basis of discussions towards the development of proposals.

The Secretariat presented the two documents. She highlighted consideration of the work of other science-policy interfaces, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). She said the main text of the Skeleton Outline has been revised and contains elements including: the scope, objectives, and functions; operating principles; institutional arrangements; and evaluation of the operational effectiveness and impact of the panel. She noted that the annexes containing elements to be addressed by the SPP cover: rules of procedure; financial rules and procedures; the process for determining the work programme, including prioritization; procedures for the preparation and clearance of panel deliverables; and a CoI policy.

The EU, the AFRICAN GROUP, and SAUDI ARABIA supported using the Skeleton Outline and the draft text as the basis for OEWG-2 deliberations. Delegates tentatively accepted SAUDI ARABIA's suggestion to move discussion on evaluation and performance on operational effectiveness and impact of the SPP to the annex.

On [scope, objective, functions, and operating principles](#), the Secretariat presented the document (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/3) and relevant information documents, including a CoI for the SPP (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/10/Add.1).

The EU expressed preference for a short yet broad scope, calling for precise and clear operating principles. The FARMERS MAJOR GROUP, on behalf of the WOMEN MAJOR GROUP, the SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY MAJOR GROUP, and the INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP, called for a broad and extensive scope, and expressed concern about the non-inclusion of the polluter pays principle among the guiding principles. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP underscored the importance of inclusivity across gender, geographies, and disciplines. The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP emphasized that effective stakeholder engagement will be fundamental for the panel's success, highlighting the need to consider Indigenous and local knowledge.

Chair Alkemade suggested, and delegates agreed on, establishing a contact group, co-facilitated by Itsuki Kuroda (Japan) and Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana), to further discuss scope and functions, operating principles, and CoI.

On [institutional arrangements and relationships with relevant key stakeholders](#), the Secretariat introduced documents (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/4 and UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/5) and relevant information documents. The EU called for not re-inventing the wheel given the good examples of IPCC and IPBES.

JAPAN prioritized the establishment of a scientific committee as well as an additional structure to facilitate policymaking. SAUDI ARABIA underscored the importance of form following function, calling on delegates to first address the substantive parts of the SPP.

JORDAN urged drawing inspiration from the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) under the Stockholm Convention, among other bodies, and proposed drawing on regional scientific knowledge and data through UNEP, WHO, and others.

SWITZERLAND noted the need for a transparent and impartial panel which addresses issues related to CoI, and called on delegations to consider examples and lessons learned from IPCC and IPBES.

The WOMEN MAJOR GROUP, also on behalf of FARMERS, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, called for: solutions-oriented research; stakeholder learning for assessing impacts; inclusion of vulnerable stakeholders and Agenda 21-recognized major groups in nomination processes; and responsible private sector engagement avoiding potential CoI.

The Caribbean Poison Information Network (CARPIN), for the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN), called for: transparency in decision making; ensuring that lack of full scientific certainty does not hinder implementation; and robust CoI policies.

The Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP), highlighted the new Global Framework on Chemicals' governance model, incorporating full engagement of major groups and stakeholders.

Chair Alkemade suggested, and delegates agreed on, establishing a contact group, co-facilitated by Sofia Tingstorp (Sweden) and Judith Torres (Uruguay), to further discuss institutional arrangements.

On the [overview of work-related processes and procedures](#), the Secretariat introduced the document (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/6) and relevant information documents, including the [summary and analysis of submissions received on needs and questions the panel may handle](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/9) and the [proposal for a conflict-of-interest policy for the panel](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/10/Add.1).

The EU noted that the processes and work procedures under IPCC

and IPBES could serve as models for the new SPP and prioritized the development of CoI policies and procedures.

Chair Alkemade then proposed, and delegates agreed, to establish a contact group, co-facilitated by Katerina Sebková (Czechia) and Moleboheng Juliet Petlane (Lesotho), to further address work-related processes and procedures.

### ***Options for the Timetable and Organization of the Future Work of the OEWG***

The Secretariat introduced the [update on work undertaken in the period between the first and second sessions, budget and expenditure, and the provisional workplan](#) (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/7). She also presented the budget and expenditure to the end of October 2023, noting the current funding gap of USD 2,597,699. The EU noted that the programme of work and budget could benefit from more transparency.

Chair Alkemade proposed, and delegates agreed, to conduct informal discussions on the budget, facilitated by Jinhui Li (China). They also established a contact group to consider intersessional work and budget, co-facilitated by Ana Berejiani (Georgia), and Toks Akinseye (UK).

After a brief discussion, delegates agreed to request all contact groups to also identify potential intersessional work, with Chair Alkemade noting that more time would be allocated for contact groups discussing substantive elements.

### ***Contact Group on Scope, Objectives, Functions, Operating Principles, and CoI***

Co-Facilitator Kuroda introduced the group's mandate related to the scope, functions, operating principles, and conflict of interest, noting that they would also identify potential intersessional work. She outlined that the first part of the discussion would address operating principles. Delegates based their discussions on the relevant section of the draft text for proposals to establish an SPP. Some called for the inclusion of a specific principle on gender, while other prioritized principles related to ethical considerations, capacity building, and use of data from all sources, among others. Other delegations called to delete the precautionary approach from the list, noting that it was not necessary at this point. Many drew attention to the IPBES principles as a guide. Discussions continued into the evening, addressing CoI.

### ***Contact Group on Institutional Arrangements***

Co-facilitators Tingstorp and Torres outlined the group's work, including: finalizing the proposal on institutional arrangements; addressing the panel's operational effectiveness and impact, including stakeholder engagement and strategic partnerships; and identifying possible intersessional work.

Delegates agreed on the structure of the discussions that will focus on provisions on: plenary; bureau; committees and subsidiary bodies; the secretariat; financial arrangements; and strategic partnerships. They initiated deliberations on provisions on plenary, which continued into the evening.

### ***In the Breezeways***

As delegates gathered for the first day of OEWG-2 towards a new SPP, expectations were high for the session. They came to some agreement on the sticky issue of electing two bureau members from Eastern Europe, by kicking the can slightly down the road to Tuesday morning, before embarking on the substance of the meeting. "We need to get this right!" served as the clarion call in the opening plenary, and delegates swiftly began discussions on what "getting it right" means for them. For some, this will involve coming to an understanding of where the work of the OEWG on preparing proposals for the SPP ends, and where the SPP takes over when it is eventually established.

For others, "getting it right" also means "not reinventing the wheel" of the science-policy process, with a number recalling the work under established panels, such as the IPCC and IPBES. Tempting as this may be, several were adamant that this new SPP should rely on science relevant to chemicals, waste, and pollution, and perhaps more innovative ways of assessing it. With delegates spending the evening in contact groups, it is clear that they will have their work cut out for them this week.