

**2020 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and
Economic and Social Council
“Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the
decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”**

7-16 July 2020

**Input by the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam
Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous
Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade**

Instruction

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the General Assembly (“SDG Summit”) resulted in the adoption of a Political Declaration that proclaimed a decade for action and delivery for sustainable development and outlined ten crosscutting areas for accelerated action for the achievement of the SDGs. The General Assembly decided in November 2019 that the theme for the 2020 session of the HLPF and the Economic and Social Council will be “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

Input from the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade should highlight the views on how best to accelerate action and achieve transformative pathways so as to realize the decade of action and delivery for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The input should focus on the area of responsibility of the COP, as the governing body of the Rotterdam Convention but also reflect the interrelations with other SDGs and targets. It could also highlight how the COP is contributing to accelerating SDG progress. It would be very useful if this input could identify four or five action points that the HLPF could address in its ministerial declaration.

1. Introduction to the Rotterdam Convention

The Rotterdam Convention on the **Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade** was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2004. As at February 2020, it has 161 Parties and thus its coverage is global. The main objective of the Convention is to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm and to contribute to their environmentally sound use.

Its key provisions include (1) a Prior Informed Consent procedure which provides for a national decision-making process on import of hazardous chemicals listed under the Convention and seeks to ensure compliance with these decisions by exporting Parties and (2) exchange of information on a broad range of potentially hazardous chemicals.

The Rotterdam Convention serves as a first line of protection for Parties against the unwanted import of potentially harmful hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals. The Convention covers 53 pesticides and industrial chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted for health or environmental reasons by Parties and which have been notified by Parties for inclusion in the Prior Informed Consent procedure.

The Rotterdam Convention is a living convention as Parties have a possibility to add new chemicals that satisfy specific requirements of the Convention.

2. Critical issues and challenges

Many insecticides, herbicides and fungicides are widely used in agriculture, protecting food and other crops from excessive damage by pests and diseases, and protecting human and livestock health from vector-borne diseases. However, pesticides can affect a wide variety of non-target organisms, including beneficial soil microorganisms, decreasing ecosystem resilience and reducing soil fertility, thereby undermining food security. Depending on their specific characteristics, pesticides can accumulate in soil, sediments and non-target organisms, including humans, with adverse long-term effects. They might be transported via run-off and air to remote areas and negatively affect biodiversity. By contaminating groundwater, lakes, rivers and other bodies of water, pesticides pollute drinking supplies, fish and other resources that are vital for human wellbeing. Under certain conditions of use, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, they pose unacceptable risks to farmers at work, their families and children. Although developing countries use only 25% of the world pesticide production, they experience 99% of deaths due to pesticide exposure¹. Studies show that poorest nations use the riskiest pesticides and particularly children who are poor are most likely to work, and to work in the most hazardous conditions.² In addition, they mostly have no access to personal protective equipment. Often, farmers can't afford adult labor, child labor is common, and thus nearly 2 million children are exposed through their work in agricultural activities with adverse effects on their health and development.

In 2013, globally 3.3 million cases of human poisonings were reported, almost the same as those injured from assaults with firearms (3.6 million)³. On a yearly basis, it is estimated that excessive

¹ Jeyaratnam, J. (1990) "Acute pesticide poisoning: a major global health problem" *World health statistics quarterly*. Volume:43 Issue:3 Pages:139-44. More recent data for some countries can be found at WHO (2008) „Acute pesticide poisoning: a proposed classification tool“ *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, vol 86:3..

² World Bank (2002): *The Impact of Toxic Substances On the Poor in Developing Countries*

³ Global Burden of Disease Study 2013 Collaborators (2015) "Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 301 Acute and chronic diseases and injuries in 188 countries, 1990-2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013" *The Lancet*, Vol. 386, No. 9995, p743–800 (<http://www.thelancet.com/global-burden-of-disease>).

exposure to and inappropriate use of pesticides contribute to poisoning a minimum of 3 million people, especially impoverished rural workers⁴.

Industrial chemicals are essential to contribute in numerous ways to establish and/or preserve an elevated standard of living in countries at all stages of development. They play an important part in different fields such as healthcare, food production and telecommunications. Under certain conditions, the large-scale production and use of certain chemicals may result in the degradation of our environment and adverse impact to human health and wildlife. Furthermore, many developing countries and countries with economies in transition have understaffed and underresourced review and regulatory programmes for pesticides, and they lack similar programmes for industrial chemicals completely, resulting in difficulties for these countries to take informed decisions about the import of industrial chemicals.

The Rotterdam Convention requires Parties to take actions on country level to reach its objectives, and plays an important role for striving toward empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality. The world's poorest 3.5 billion people largely directly rely on the environment for their basic services (water, food, shelter etc.). Small holder farmers produce a substantial portion of all food and their health and wellbeing is of utmost importance for the livelihood of many. The Rotterdam Convention Secretariat provides technical assistance to Parties to increase their capacity in informed decision making, to reduce risks to human health and the environment from the harmful effects of pesticides and industrial chemicals.

In terms of its implementation, according to the data collected for the period 2015-2019 and reported under indicator 12.4.1 of the global indicator framework for SDGs, over 75 % of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention appear to have at least minimum institutional capacity to implement this Multilateral Environment Agreement (MEA). Among the key challenges linked to the transmission of information under the Rotterdam Convention are the lack of availability of data and information, lack of resources, inadequate legal and institutional frameworks, lack of capacity, lack of understanding of the usefulness of the information reported, lack of knowledge related to consequences in case of the non-transmission of information, and low political priority of the issues at hand.

3. COP contribution to accelerated action and transformative pathways for the decade of action and delivery for achieving the 2030 Agenda within its area of responsibility

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Rotterdam Convention is the decision-making body of the Convention which meets every two years to review and evaluate the implementation of the Convention. It considers and adopts, as required, amendments to the Convention and its annexes, and promotes the harmonization of appropriate policies, strategies and measures for minimizing harm to human health and the environment by hazardous chemicals and pesticides. It also adopts the programme of work and budget of the Convention for each biennium.

⁴ Jeyaratnam, J. (1990).

At the ninth meeting of the Conference to the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in 2019 a number of important decisions were adopted to strengthen the Convention.

Two chemicals, the pesticide phorate and the industrial chemical hexabromocyclododecane were added to Annex III of the Convention, making them subject to the Prior Informed Consent procedure, through which countries can decide on future imports of these chemicals.

A further decision, to approve procedures and mechanisms on compliance with the Rotterdam Convention – seen as a crucial step for further improving implementation of this key convention - was adopted. The new Annex VII to the Convention, which sets out those procedures, will come into force on 6 November 2020. The Parties also adopted a number of measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Rotterdam Convention, which aim at improving information exchange mechanisms and the dissemination and use of available information, tools and guidance

Actions under the Rotterdam Conventions are closely coordinated with actions under the Basel and Stockholm Conventions. To enhance cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) conventions, their respective conferences of the Parties have taken a series of decisions. This so-called ten years long "synergies process" which started in 2007 aimed to strengthen the implementation of the three conventions at the national, regional and global levels by providing coherent policy guidance, enhancing efficiency in the provision of support to Parties to the conventions, reducing their administrative burden and maximizing the effective and efficient use of resources at all levels, while maintaining the legal autonomy of these three multilateral environmental agreements. This unique approach is a successful example to other parts of the global environmental agenda and demonstrates how to enhance international environmental governance through coordination and cooperation.

In addition to reforms to the secretariats of the three conventions on an administrative as well as operational level, this process has changed the way in which the implementation of the conventions was undertaken at the national and regional levels. Parties to the conventions and entities supporting countries in the implementation of the conventions, such as regional centres, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, also undertook efforts to increase coherence in the implementation of the conventions.

Over the years, through a series of decisions on international cooperation and coordination, the COPs to the BRS conventions have called on enhancing cooperation with international bodies on issues of common interest. As a result, increased linkages have been made, for instance, between actions mandated by the COPs of each of the conventions and the UN Environment Assembly thereby strengthening the implementation of coherent international environmental law and international environmental governance at all levels. For issues of common interest, such as chemicals/wastes management, management of used lead-acid batteries, SDGs, marine pollution, environmental governance addressed in UNEA ministerial declaration and resolutions and COPs decisions, the Secretariat of the BRS conventions cooperates with UN Environment Programme.

The BRS conventions provide an important contribution to the achievement of a broad range of goals, including goal 2 “Zero hunger”, goal 3 “Good health and well-being”, goal 5 “Gender equality”, goal 6 “Clean water and sanitation”, goal 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”, goal

14 “Life below water” goal 12 “Responsible production and consumption” and goal 17 “Partnerships”. The BRS Conventions also actively contribute to the reporting on indicator 12.4.1 by providing data on the transmission by Parties information to meet their obligations under the conventions.

It is my expectation that the BRS Conventions and their respective COPs will bring concrete measures and actions on chemicals and hazardous wastes in the upcoming decade. Taking into account that all chemicals as well as products at some point become wastes, sound management of chemicals and waste addressed by the BRS conventions is a must. In the upcoming decade, it will be critical to support Parties in the implementation of the obligations under the conventions and to raise profile and visibility of chemicals and waste on the national level so that required outcomes can be achieved.

4. Action points that the HLPF could address in its ministerial declaration

There are a number of actions within the mandate of the Rotterdam Convention, which will support Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in accelerating progress for those affected by toxic chemicals. In light of enhancing coordination and cooperation of the implementation between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, some of the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To call for States to increase their efforts on the implementation of global treaties on chemicals and hazardous wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, with the purpose of protecting human health and the environment and in support of circular economy and resource efficiency.
- 2) To increase efforts of governments and stakeholders towards the coordinated implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions including through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms.
- 3) Given the cross-cutting nature of chemicals and waste in our lives, to promote an integrated approach to chemicals and waste management by mainstreaming chemicals and wastes issues into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors.
- 4) To encourage States and other to invest into research related to alternatives to highly hazardous pesticides and toxic industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 5) To develop policies for integrated pest management and integrated vector management in national agricultural and public health strategies.
- 6) To develop policies to protect the poorest and most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including children and women, from unacceptable risks of pesticides, industrial chemicals and their wastes.