

**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 Stockholm
Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants**

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 (COP) to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants 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 Stockholm Convention, but also reflect the interrelations with related 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 Stockholm Convention, its key policies and measures

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) was adopted on 22 May 2001 by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Stockholm, Sweden, and entered into force in 2004. As at February 2020, it has 184 Parties and thus its coverage is global. The overarching objective of the Stockholm Convention is to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods, become widely distributed geographically, accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife, and have harmful impacts on human health or on the environment.

The current scope of the Stockholm Convention is 30 POPs, which are pesticides, industrial chemicals and/or byproducts. Any Party may submit a proposal for listing a new chemical under the Convention. The scientific subsidiary body, the POPs Review Committee, evaluates the proposals and makes recommendations to the Conference of the Parties (COP) on such listing.

The provisions of the Convention center around the following principal aims:

Eliminating production and use. Most of the intentionally produced POPs are targeted for immediate elimination with very few exceptions. PCBs are the most notable exception. Production has been stopped but their use in existing equipment is allowed until 2025 to ensure that PCBs are disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

Restricting production and use. The Convention allows very limited and carefully controlled use of certain POPs while also seeking alternatives. For example, DDT is only allowed to be used to control disease vectors like the mosquitoes that carry malaria when locally safe, effective and affordable alternatives are not available.

Reducing unintentional production with the aim of elimination. The Convention promotes the use of the best available techniques and best environmental practices for preventing the release of POPs, such as dioxins and furans, from major sources into the environment.

Ensuring that stockpiles and wastes containing POPs are managed safely and in an environmentally sound manner. The Convention requires that such stockpiles and wastes be identified and managed to reduce or eliminate POPs releases from these sources. The Convention also recognizes that a special effort may sometimes be needed to phase out certain chemicals for specific uses and seeks to ensure that this effort is made. The Convention also requires that wastes containing POPs are transported across international boundaries taking into account relevant international rules, standards and guidelines.

Targeting additional POPs. The Convention is charged with identifying other POPs chemicals that are likely, as a result of their long-range environmental transport, to lead to significant adverse human health and/or environmental effects such that global action is warranted. This is achieved through a scientifically rigorous process and ensures that those chemicals are considered even if there is a lack of scientific certainty about the harm they cause.

The Stockholm Convention also provides for the establishment of a network of 16 regional and subregional centres to provide technical assistance and to promote the transfer of technology to developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition relating to the implementation of their obligations under the Convention. These autonomous institutions operate under the authority of the Conference of the Parties.

2. Critical issues and challenges

On the global level, the Stockholm Convention serves to protect its Parties from the harmful effects of POPs.

The adverse effects of chemicals on different groups of the population vary depending on the level of exposure, behavioral patterns, age, biological effect (e.g., endocrine disruption), geographical location, nutritional status and co-exposure to other chemicals. POPs can build up to dangerous levels in humans and wildlife causing adverse reproductive, developmental, immunological, hormonal, and carcinogenic effects with varied impacts on vulnerable groups. Children are particularly susceptible to the negative health impacts of chemicals due to their rapid growth and development and greater exposure relative to body weight. Breastfeeding can transfer further toxic chemicals from mother to child.

According to the latest evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stockholm Convention conducted in 2017¹, the Stockholm Convention provides an effective and dynamic framework to regulate POPs throughout their lifecycle, addressing the production, use, import, export, releases, and disposal of these chemicals worldwide. However, inadequate implementation is the key issue that has been identified in the evaluation. The evaluation also noted that mechanisms and processes required by the Convention to support Parties in meeting their obligations have all been put in place, with the exception of procedures and mechanisms on compliance. Regulations targeting POPs are succeeding in reducing levels of POPs in humans and the environment. For legacy POPs, concentrations measured in air and in human populations have declined and continue to decline or remain at low levels due to restrictions on POPs that predated the Stockholm Convention and are now incorporated in it. For the newly listed POPs, concentrations are beginning to show decreases, although in a few instances, increasing and/or stable levels are observed.

However, even though the majority of the production of POPs pesticides ceased before 2004 and exports and imports have been banned, legacy POPs pesticides are reported to exist as obsolete stocks. Several Parties indicated that obsolete stockpiles of such substances may be illegally used by farmers. Mislabeling or a lack of appropriate labels are cited as reasons for such illegal use. These illegal uses may result in an ongoing risk to human health and the environment. According to estimates, only a limited proportion of known POPs wastes and stockpiles upon becoming wastes, in particular POPs pesticides and PCB, have been eliminated to date.²

There are also challenges related to reporting and other obligations for transmitting information under the Stockholm Convention. 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 50 % of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention appear to have at least minimum capacity institutional capacity to implement this Multilateral Environment Agreement (MEA). Among the key challenges linked to the transmission of information under the Stockholm Convention that require strengthening in terms of availability of data and information are legal and institutional frameworks, understanding of the usefulness of the information reported, consequences in case of the non-transmission of information, and political priority of the issues at hand.

The Stockholm Convention and the [Basel](#) Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal have a joint mandate on POPs wastes and have agreed to cooperate closely on establishing levels of destruction and irreversible transformation necessary to ensure that POPs characteristics are not exhibited.

Given long range transport of POPs and legacy POPs stockpiles, no one government acting alone can protect its citizens or its environment from POPs and therefore the effective implementation of the Convention by all Parties supports the protection of all from these toxic chemicals.

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

¹ Report on the effectiveness evaluation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutant, UNEP/POPS/COP.8/INF/40

² Ibid.

The COP to the Stockholm 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 wastes and other wastes. It also adopts the programme of work and budget of the Convention for each biennium.

One mechanism that the Stockholm Convention is equipped with to protect human health and the environment from POPs using the latest scientific evidence is the listing of new chemicals which meet characteristics of POPs under the Convention. Thus, at its latest ninth meeting of the COP to the Stockholm Convention (SC COP-9), Parties decided to eliminate two toxic chemical groups, which together total about 4,000 chemicals, listed into Annex A of the Stockholm Convention, namely Dicofol (a pesticide) and Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) and its salts and PFOA-related compounds (an industrial chemical). The latter has till now been used in a wide variety of industrial and domestic applications including non-stick cookware and food processing equipment, as well as a surfactant in textiles, carpets, paper, paints and fire-fighting foams.

Another way that the COP supports the achievement of 2030 Agenda is the technical assistance which serves to assist Parties with the implementation of the obligations of the Stockholm Convention, including dealing with POPs already listed under the Convention which are to be either eliminated or restricted. A number of examples of capacity building activities and initiatives aiming to enhance the implementation of the Stockholm Convention took place, also with support from the UN agencies and financing from the Global Environment Facility. These activities focused on such issues as the development or updating of national implementation plans, identification of products and articles in use, remediation of contaminated sites, and management of wastes consisting of, containing or contaminated with POPs and implementation of best available techniques and best environmental practices.

Actions under the Stockholm Convention are closely coordinated with actions under the Basel and Rotterdam 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 declarations 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 of 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, the 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 Stockholm Convention which will support Parties to the Stockholm Convention in accelerating progress for those affected by toxic chemicals. In light of enhancing coordination and cooperation for 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 promote the adoption of best practices on the sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout the value chain, including extended producer responsibility, publicly available information about chemical hazards and risks, green design and best available techniques and best environmental practices, and monitoring of contamination of air, water and land by hazardous chemicals and wastes.
- 5) To provide safe and decent jobs involving chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and productions, including resources recovery and recycling.
- 6) To encourage States and other stakeholders to invest into research related to alternatives for the use of POPs listed in the Stockholm Convention and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 7) To provide priority attention to developing, enforcing and/or strengthening national legislation and/or regulations implementing the Convention.
- 8) To encourage the further development of national inventories among Parties to provide a mechanism for a quantitative global inventory of production, stocks and releases of POPs.