

2021 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and Economic and Social Council

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”

6-16 July 2021

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 that the theme for the 2021 session of the HLPF and the Economic and Social Council will be “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

The HLPF in 2021 will also discuss Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. The Forum will consider the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs.

Input from the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants could showcase the views and guidance of your intergovernmental bodies on those aspects of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various measures and types of international cooperation that can control the pandemic and its impacts and put the world back on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, within the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development and highlight the views in line with the six areas below.

Introduction

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 March 2021, 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 persistent organic pollutants (POPs). These are 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 proposal for listing a new chemical to be listed in Annexes A, B and/or C to the Convention. The scientific subsidiary body, the POPs Review Committee, evaluates the proposals and makes recommendations to the Conference of the Parties on such listing.

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

Eliminating production and use (Annex A). Most of the intentionally produced POPs are targeted for elimination with certain exemptions. 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 (Annex B). 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.

Reducing and ultimately eliminating unintentional production (Annex C). The Convention promotes the use of the best available techniques and best environmental practices to reduce and ultimately eliminate the releases of unintentional POPs such as dioxins and furans into the environment.

Ensuring that stockpiles and wastes consisting of, containing or contaminated with 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. It also channels resources into cleaning up the existing stockpiles and dumps of POPs that litter the world's landscapes.

Targeting additional POPs. The Convention is dynamic and has mechanisms to identify other POPs chemicals that require action. This is achieved through a scientifically rigorous process and lack of full scientific certainty does not prevent a proposal from proceeding.

Monitoring and effectiveness evaluation. The Convention includes provisions for the collection of comparable monitoring data on the presence of POPs in the environment and in human populations,

in order to identify trends in levels over time, and for evaluating whether the Convention is effective in achieving its objective to protect human health and the environment from POPs.

Developing a plan to implement the Stockholm Convention. Each Party to the Stockholm Convention is required to develop and to implement a plan within two years of entry into force of the Convention for it; and to keep reviewing and updating, as appropriate, its plan as specified by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

The Stockholm Convention also provides for the establishment of arrangements for the purpose of providing technical assistance and promoting the transfer of technology to developing country parties and parties with economies in transition. Currently the Convention has a network of 16 regional and subregional centres for capacity building and the transfer of technology to developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition. These autonomous institutions operate under the authority of the Conference of the Parties.

(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs

There has been a significant impact - on societies, on education, on the global economy, and indeed on most aspects of daily life. The pandemic has given rise to significant issues for the sound management of chemicals and wastes, and for issues which fall within the scope of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

In light of the recent experience from the COVID-19 pandemic and reflecting on the past involvement in responding to emergencies, the Secretariat has prepared a technical paper on the role of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions in supporting Parties in Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.

With regard to the implementation of the Stockholm Convention at the national and regional levels, economic processes, including certain manufacturing and use of chemicals and waste management processes or facilities have been interrupted or altered due to lockdowns. Any disruption to established supply chains may have more than a temporary effect – some national authorities have determined to become more self-reliant in their supplies of chemicals.

Governments have experienced reduced capacities for the implementation of the Convention, including environmental controls, customs controls, and other enforcement measures. A number of national regulatory authorities have sought to ease the procedures of regulation to enable products such as disinfectants or hand sanitizers to get into the market quickly, or to seek to moderate the economic damage caused by the pandemic and the lockdown measures necessary to control it.

International trade of chemicals was also impacted. There were some temporary relaxation or delays to facilitate safer ways of working or shopping at the height of the pandemic.

In regard to intergovernmental processes, including in relation to the Stockholm Convention, face-to-face meetings were postponed, and some were replaced with online sessions which overall

slowed down the progress in the implementation of the programme of work of the Stockholm Convention.

(b) Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body

Under the Stockholm Convention there are a number of areas which are being addressed by the Convention as these represent significant environmental challenges around the world and require urgent attention. Such areas receive policy guidance from Parties, call upon Parties and others to take measures, and may be subject to technical assistance and partnerships by the Secretariat.

Directly relevant to the goal 12 “Sustainable consumption and production”, with relevance to goal 3 “Good health and well-being”, goal 6 “Clean water and sanitation”, goal 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”, goal 14 “Life below water” and goal 17 “Partnerships”, some of these areas are presented below:

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stockholm Convention

According to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stockholm Convention conducted in 2017, 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. Since its entry into force, the Convention has triggered changes in countries’ attitudes and general practices toward environmentally sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes, in particular POPs. Institutional settings built under the Convention have the potential to impact other chemicals in a way that countries are using chemicals, not just POPs, in a better-informed environment and with more precaution. Decreasing trends in POPs concentrations measured in countries which adopted measures preceding the adoption of the Convention are proving that those regulatory actions have the desired impact¹. The information submitted by Parties in their national reporting every four years plays an important role in evaluating the progress in the effectiveness of the Stockholm Convention as well as the achievement of relevant SDGs.

Interlinkages between the Stockholm Convention and the Basel Convention

The Stockholm Convention provides that the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention cooperates closely with the appropriate bodies of the [Basel](#) Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal on the implementation of the environmentally sound management of POPs wastes.

An extensive range of technical guidelines and other guidance documents has been prepared and adopted by the conferences of the Parties to the Basel and the Stockholm conventions. These relate for example to the management of the different categories of hazardous and other wastes falling within the scope of the Basel Convention, and best available techniques and best environmental practices for reducing releases of the chemicals regulated by the Stockholm Convention.

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

Science-policy interface

One mechanism that the Stockholm Convention is equipped with to protect human health and the environment from POPs using the latest scientific evidence is listing new chemicals which meet the criteria under the Convention to be classed as POPs. The Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) conducts rigorous scientific reviews of chemicals proposed for listing and makes recommendations to the Conference of the Parties, acting as key science-policy interface of the Stockholm Convention. Thus, at its ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention in 2019, Parties decided to eliminate two toxic chemical groups, which together total about 4,000 chemicals, listed in Annex A to the Stockholm Convention, namely dicofol and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and its salts and PFOA-related compounds. 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 surfactants in textiles, carpets, paper, paints and fire-fighting foams. The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention will consider the listing of perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS), its salts and PFHxS-related compounds in Annex A to the Stockholm Convention. Similar to PFOA, its salts and PFOA-related compounds as well as perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), its salts and perfluorooctane sulfonyl fluoride (PFOSF) listed in Annex B to the Convention, PFHxS, its salts and PFHxS-related compounds belong to a group of chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, many of which have high resistance to friction, heat and chemical agents and are used as water, grease, oil and soil repellents. They are widely utilized in a variety of consumer goods such as carpets, leather, apparel, textiles, firefighting foam, papermaking, printing inks, sealants, non-stick cookware.

Across the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the conferences of the Parties have recognized the importance of the science-policy interface for the effectiveness of the conventions and the need for greater access to scientific understanding in developing countries to enhance informed decision-making on the implementation of the conventions. Under the programme “From Science to Action”, capacity building to enhance interaction between scientists, policymakers and other actors for science-based action has been carried out.

Technical assistance

Another way that the Conference of the Parties 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 to deal with POPs already listed under the Convention which are to be either eliminated or restricted. A number 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. This included 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. A network of 16 Stockholm Convention regional and subregional centres serves Parties by providing technical assistance and promoting the transfer of technology to developing country Parties and Parties with economies.

National Implementation Plans

The process of developing National Implementation Plans (NIPs) calls for the establishment of institutional arrangements, such as national coordination committees, which require the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders at various levels not only during the preparation but also in the implementation of NIPs. NIPs are endorsed by the Governments as an integral part of the sustainable development strategy. The NIP development process also calls for the requirements of other multilateral environmental agreements on chemicals to be taken into account.

Challenges with the implementation of the Stockholm Convention

With regard to the implementation of the Stockholm Convention, over 50 % of the Parties appear to have at least minimum institutional capacity to implement the convention according to the data collected for reporting under SDG indicator 12.4.1. Among the key challenges linked to the transmission of information under the Stockholm Convention are the lack of availability of data and information, inadequate legal and institutional frameworks, lack of capacity, lack of understanding of the usefulness of the information reported, lack of consequences in case of the non-transmission of information, and low political priority of the issues at hand.

Cooperation and coordination between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions

Cooperation and coordination among the three conventions has become a standard manner of conducting business under the three conventions, through a series of decisions adopted by each of the respective conferences of the Parties to the conventions. This so-called "synergies process" aims 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.

This process has changed the way in which the implementation of the conventions is 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.

There are linkages between actions mandated by the COP of each of the conventions and the UN Environment Assembly which sets priorities for global environmental policies. The Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions cooperates with the United Nations Environment Programme on issues of common interest, such as chemicals and waste management, SDGs implementation and reporting, marine pollution, environmental governance, as mandated by UNEA ministerial declaration and resolutions and COPs decisions.

It is my expectation that the Stockholm Convention and its Conference of the Parties will bring concrete measures and actions on POPs in the upcoming decade. Taking into account that the use

of chemicals are critical in the modern life through manufacturing of goods, use in industrial processes, agriculture, public health, as well as the fact that all chemicals as well as products at some point become wastes, the sound management of chemicals and wastes addressed by the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions is a must. To support Parties in the implementation of the obligations under the Stockholm Convention, raising the profile and visibility of POPs on the national level will be critical in the upcoming decade.

(c) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels against of background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by your intergovernmental bodies

Gender issues related to implementation of the conventions have been discussed and taken into account by the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, particularly the impact of poor management of hazardous chemicals and wastes on vulnerable groups such as women and young children.

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.

Given the 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.

(d) Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

There are a number of actions and policy recommendations² within the mandate of the Stockholm Convention which will support Parties to the Stockholm Convention in accelerating progress for those affected by hazardous chemicals. In light of enhanced coordination and cooperation of the implementation between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To call for Parties to increase their efforts on the implementation of 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 Please see reports and decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention: <http://chm.pops.int/TheConvention/ConferenceoftheParties/ReportsandDecisions/tabid/208/Default.aspx>

- 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 hazardous 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 provide priority attention to developing, enforcing and/or strengthening national legislation and/or regulations implementing the Stockholm Convention.
- 5) To promote the adoption of best practices on the sound management of hazardous chemical 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.
- 6) To encourage Parties and others to invest in research related to alternatives for hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 7) To provide safe and decent jobs involving hazardous chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and production, including resources recovery and recycling.
- 8) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including POPs in products through labeling and other methods, for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.
- 9) 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.
- 10) To encourage Parties 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.
- 11) To encourage efforts of Parties to promote gender equality to ensure that women and men from all Parties are equally involved in the implementation of the three conventions and are represented in their bodies and processes and thus inform and participate in decision-making on gender-responsive hazardous chemicals and wastes policies.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2021 HLPF

- 1) To recognize the importance of multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and their critical role in the overarching architecture of environmental governance in building post-COVID-19 a resilient path to achieve the Agenda 2030.
- 2) To accelerate efforts of Parties to implement their obligations under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to protect human health and the environment from adverse impacts of chemicals and hazardous and other wastes.
- 3) To mainstream the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors and in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.
- 4) To emphasize the importance of data transmission in accordance with the obligations under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to avoid non-reporting, incomplete reporting or late reporting and add value to the global indicator framework for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 5) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes for better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.