

Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

Opening remarks on the occasion of the Global Symposium on soil Pollution

By Mr. Carlos Martin-Novella, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Basel,
Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

Good Morning,

Excellencies,

H.E. Ms. María Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General of Climate and Natural Resources at FAO

H.E. Mr. Illar Lemetti, Deputy Minister of Rural Affairs of Estonia;

H.E. Mr. Niu Dun, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to FAO;

Ms. Astrid Schomaker, Director of Global Sustainable Development, European Commission;

Mr. Rene Castro Salazar, Assistant Director General FAO;

Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Director, Land and Water Division at FAO;

Good morning,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Secretariat, it is an honour and a pleasure for me, to be here with you at this opening of the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution.

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions are milestones in the areas of prevention, minimization, and risk assessment of chemicals and wastes.

They share a common objective to protect human health and the environment, from the adverse effects of chemicals and wastes.

They provide a framework for the life cycle management of chemicals, covering elements of the “cradle-to-grave” approach.

For example, most of the persistent organic pollutants covered by the Stockholm Convention are also subject to the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions.

As wastes, all the chemicals listed under the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions fall under the scope of the Basel Convention.

Within this framework, the Stockholm Convention requires Parties, to endeavour to develop, appropriate strategies for identifying sites contaminated by Persistent Organic Pollutants, and calls for remediation of contaminated sites to be performed in an environmentally sound manner.

Further, the Basel Convention calls for the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, which is essential to prevent and reduce the contamination of soil from a broad range of activities across all economic sectors.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Releases of hazardous chemicals resulting from their production and use and the unsound disposal of wastes, constitute one of the main sources of soil pollution.

In the nineties, it was already estimated that 22 million hectares of land were affected by soil pollution.

Ladies and Gentleman,

To give you an indication of the scale of the problem that overall pollution poses:

Estimates from the World Health Organization indicate that in 2012, at least 12.6 million people died, as a result of living or working in an unhealthy environment, primarily from environmental risk factors, such as air, water and soil pollution, chemical exposures, climate change, and ultraviolet radiation.

More recently, the Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health, in its report released last year in October, found that “Pollution is the largest environmental cause of disease and premature death in the world today. Diseases caused by pollution were responsible for an estimated 9 million premature deaths in 2015—that is, 16% of all deaths worldwide— three times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined, and 15 times more than from all wars and other forms of violence.”

These figures are of great concern, we live in a fast-changing world, with a population that is expected to continue to rise over the next decades. We are surrounded with potential environmental threats, that affect us and our future generations on a daily-basis.

By the middle of this century 9000 million human beings are expected to generate over 13000 tons of waste, that is about 20 percent more than that generated a decade ago.

If not properly managed, a large proportion of this waste may increase risks of soil pollution!

Chemicals and waste issues have been underplayed in the environmental agenda in the past. However, thanks to concerted international action, this trend is shifting.

The achievement of the sustainable management of chemicals and waste is now recognized as a fundamental cornerstone of the objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

By target 12.4., the international community committed to "by 2030, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals, and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment".

Ladies and Gentleman,

To conclude, I would like to highlight that the commitment, of member states that are Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, to protecting human health and the environment from the harm posed by hazardous chemicals and wastes, can contribute significantly to managing soil pollution.

In closing, I take the opportunity to express, on behalf of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, our sincere appreciation to the Food and Agriculture Organization for having invited to co-organize this important event and I wish you all fruitful discussions over the next 3 days.

Thank you!