

2022 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and Economic and Social Council

Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5-7 and 11-15 July 2022

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 “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The HLPF in 2022 will review progress toward SDGs 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The Forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across these SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.

Input from the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention could showcase the views, findings, research, data and policy recommendations on specific aspects of an SDG-driven response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the SDGs under review.

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 February 2022, it has 185 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 and 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 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. PCB are the most notable exception. Production has been stopped but their use in existing equipment is allowed until 2025 and PCB wastes are to be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner by 2028.

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 in an environmentally sound manner in line with the Basel Convention to reduce or eliminate POPs releases from these sources. It also channels resources into cleaning up the existing stockpiles and dumps of POPs that litter the world's landscapes, identify sites contaminated by POPs and remediate in an environmentally sound manner.

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. Lack of full scientific certainty does not prevent a proposal by a Party for listing a new chemical to be listed in Annexes A, B and/or C to the Convention 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. The Parties to the Stockholm Convention are 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.

The Stockholm Convention is equipped with a mechanism to protect human health and the environment from POPs using the latest scientific evidence by 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 by Parties 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 in 2019, the COP to the Stockholm Convention decided to eliminate one pesticide and one group of toxic chemicals, 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. In June 2022, the face-to-face segment of the tenth meeting of the COP to the Stockholm Convention will consider listing 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 (PFAS), 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.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

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.

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 purchasing at the height of the pandemic.

As some of POPs addressed by the Stockholm Convention are pesticides, COVID-19 impacted global plant health and crop protection with the resulting effect on global food security and safety. This includes various factors such as disruption or limited supply and/or availability of plant protection products, lack of timely crop protection interventions due to shortage of labor and spray operators and lack of timely crop protection interventions due to equipment shortage

In regard to intergovernmental processes, including in relation to the Stockholm Convention, they continued online albeit with adapted and scaled-down agendas and decision-making processes. Some face-to-face meetings were postponed, and some were replaced with online sessions governed by the applicable rules of procedure.

Delegates and experts have shown incredible flexibility and cooperation in adopting new ways of working. Much has been done despite the difficulties, but even so there have been limits to what can be achieved. It is difficult to conduct negotiations in virtual meetings, particularly on complex or sensitive issues.

Despite some challenges, such as a reluctance among certain regions to discuss policy or substantive questions online unless considered essential and/or urgent, technology and time zone differences to ensure equal participation and inclusiveness among Parties, limited access to Internet, lack of stable/sufficient connectivity and/or saturation of platforms/networks, a number of steps were taken to address such concerns to the extent possible. This includes the possibility of provision of communication allowance to participants from developing countries to ensure access to a reliable Internet connection, effective use of available technologies for complex meetings with interpretations, reducing meeting hours to take into account time zone differences and prioritization of agenda items taken up during online meetings.

SDG 4 on quality education

Numerous activities under the Stockholm Convention contribute to SDG 4 by helping to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, education, outreach, training and awareness-raising activities are increasingly being delivered through hybrid and online means, such as webinars and

online trainings. For example, the interactive online course on ‘National Implementation Plans and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants’ provides a ‘one-stop-shop’ for Focal Points, Competent Authorities and other stakeholders who want to gain a comprehensive understanding of the steps needed and the tools and guidance available to ensure the implementation of the Stockholm Convention. Another example is related to the Earth Day in April 2020, the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions supported the launch of the “Earth School”, providing kids, parents and teachers around the world with engaging nature-focused content to stay connected to nature during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an analysis of degree of engagement shows, face to face learning remains as relevant as always. This has been evident in relation to the training activities, in particular for the African region, whereby participation and even more so interactivity with and among participants have been somewhat limited. This is supported by expression of preference from developing countries for the face-to-face format of training activities.

SDG 5 on gender equality

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on gender equality, with the World Economic Forum estimating that women’s full equality with men is now 136, as opposed to 99, years in the future.¹ The pandemic has affected women and men differently due to their distinctive roles in global economies and societies: this is profoundly the case in the chemicals and waste management sector. The pandemic thus has had concerning health, livelihood and economic impacts on women. The Stockholm Convention is promoting gender equality and mainstreaming in the chemicals management sector through targeted activities aimed at improving understanding of the gender and chemicals nexus in different developmental settings and developing specific country-context recommendations for improvements. Such recommendations will promote improved awareness of gender equality in the context of management of hazardous chemicals and wastes, and integrating gender considerations into the policies, legislation/regulation, and practices for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention. Additionally, training workshops on how to better integrate gender-equality targets and tools into national chemical and waste plans, and their implementation through gender-responsive methodologies and institutional development, are being conducted for authorities and decision-makers. Such activities have thus far been carried out in Bolivia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and are currently underway in Kenya and Tunisia.

SDG 14 on life below water

Marine plastic and microplastics is an issue that requires urgent global action by the international community. Plastic waste and its burgeoning impact on human health, the environment and economic systems presents a big challenge. The problem is multidimensional, including the widespread disposal of single-use plastics and other items as litter and marine biodiversity.

The Stockholm Convention controls various POPs which have been used in plastics as additives, flame retardants, plasticizers or in the manufacture of fluoropolymers. Of the 30 POPs listed under the Stockholm Convention, 15 are either plastic additives or by-products.

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/04/136-years-is-the-estimated-journey-time-to-gender-equality/>

The POPs listed in Annexes A, B, or C to the Stockholm Convention that are relevant in relation to plastic waste, inter alia as additives, processing aids or unintentional contaminants, are:

- (a) The following polybromodiphenyl ethers: decabromodiphenyl ether (BDE-209) present in commercial decabromodiphenyl ether (decaBDE), hexabromodiphenyl ether (hexaBDE) and heptabromodiphenyl ether (heptaBDE), tetrabromodiphenyl ether (tetraBDE) and pentabromodiphenylether (pentaBDE);
- (b) Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD);
- (c) Short-chain chlorinated paraffins (SCCP);
- (d) Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), its salts and perfluorooctane sulfonyl fluoride (PFOSF);
- (e) Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts, and PFOA-related compounds;
- (f) Unintentionally produced POPs.

In the environment, plastics are known to adsorb POPs such as PCB and those are frequently detected in marine plastics. In addition to the detrimental consequences that ingestion of plastics by marine biota may entail, worrying environmental consequences of marine litter also stem from microplastics (less than 5 mm in diameter) and nanoplastics (less than 100 nm in at least one of its dimensions), which could potentially affect marine biota both from their physical nature if ingested and by transfer of chemicals associated with them, including POPs and endocrine disruptor chemicals. Mid-ocean islands close to gyres and the small island developing States, are particularly concerned, as in addition to the challenge of marine litter, these States face serious deficiencies in basic waste management capabilities, due mainly to small and sparse populations with limited potential economies of scale.²

The Global Environment Facility, which operates the financial mechanism of the Stockholm Convention ad interim, has explicitly included the work on plastics in its programming directions, including for the chemicals and waste focal area, since the seventh replenishment of the Facility's trust fund.

The Stockholm Convention Article 6 makes cross-reference to provisions of the Basel Convention in relation to POPs wastes including e.g., definition, thresholds, guidelines for the environmentally sound management, storage, and transboundary movements.

SDG 15 on life on land

The effective implementation of the Stockholm Convention contributes to progress for the implementation of the SDG 15 on life on land as adverse effects of POPs can cause severe environmental degradation through the pollution of water, soil, flora and fauna. Toxic substances and hazardous wastes require due attention and they can include, but are not limited to, nanoparticles, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, estrogen-like compounds, flame retardants, detergents, and some industrial chemicals (including those in products and packaging) with potential significant impact on human health and aquatic life. Electronic waste is of great concern

² Gallo F., Fossi C., Weber R., Santillo D., Sousa J., Ingram I., Nadal A., and Romano D. (2018) "Marine litter plastics and microplastics and their toxic chemicals components: the need for urgent preventive measures", *Environ Sci Eur.* 2018; 30(1): 13.

given the increasing volumes generated each year, the hazardous nature of some of the components³.

SDG 17 on partnerships

There are currently no partnerships established by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Stockholm Convention, however there are initiatives and partnerships that support the implementation of the Stockholm Convention.

The Global Alliance on alternatives to DDT was established by the COP to the Stockholm Convention in 2009 at its fourth meeting. Following decision SC-5/6, adopted at the fifth meeting of the COP, the leadership of the Global Alliance was transferred to UNEP. The Global Alliance adds unique value to existing efforts by harnessing the strength of collective action to enhance the development and deployment of alternatives to DDT and to focus on objectives that could not be achieved without the involvement of diverse stakeholders. Through the support of the Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm Convention, the Global Alliance is able to directly access Parties, and promote the understanding and the reduction of constraints that might hinder the deployment of alternatives to DDT⁴.

Another example of the partnership related to the Stockholm Convention is the PCB Elimination Network (PEN)⁵ established by the COP to the Stockholm Convention at its fourth meeting in 2009. It was transferred from the Secretariat of the Stockholm convention to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2011. The Secretariat of this network works in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. The PEN has been developing and implementing a new awareness raising strategy to put PCB back on the international agenda, including videos, website, webinars and fact sheets. Other activities include supporting activities on PCB in open applications, preparations for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Conferences of the Parties and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and coordinating the meetings of the Advisory Committee.

(b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body

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, behavioural patterns, age, biological effect (e.g., endocrine disruption), geographical location, nutritional status and co-exposure to other chemicals. POPs can build up to dangerous

³ See the report on Status of the World's Soil Resources, FAO, 2015.

⁴ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/persistent-organic-pollutants/ddt-global-alliance>

⁵ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/persistent-organic-pollutants/pcb-elimination-network>

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 long-range environmental 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.

Activities to promote the sound management of chemicals and waste under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, particularly those in relation to gender (see section (a) above), are undertaken to promote countries' technical capacities in the management of waste, including COVID-19 waste, and to promote information exchange to ensure women and other vulnerable groups can access appropriate information about how to apply precautionary practices such the use of Personal Protective Equipment and the management of infectious waste as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review

There are a number of measures and policy recommendations⁶ within the mandate of the Basel Convention which will support Parties in accelerating progress for those affected by hazardous and other wastes, with focus on SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15, and 17. 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 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.
- 2) Emphasizing the important role that the Stockholm Convention plays in addressing the additives in plastics, to urge States to commit themselves to support efforts to eliminate or restrict their production and use as required by the Convention.
- 3) To encourage efforts of Parties and stakeholders to actively contribute to the activities of existing or propose new partnerships promoting the implementation of the Stockholm Convention.

⁶Please see reports and decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention:
<http://www.basel.int/TheConvention/ConferenceoftheParties/ReportsandDecisions/tabid/3303/Default.aspx>

(d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

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 hazardous chemicals. In light of enhancing coordination and cooperation of the implementation between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To call for States to increase their efforts on the implementation of global treaties on hazardous chemicals and 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 a 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 provide safe and decent jobs involving chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and productions, including resources recovery and recycling.
- 5) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- 6) To promote the adoption of best practices for the sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout the value chain, including extended producer responsibility, circular economy, publicly available information about chemical hazards and risks, green design, best available techniques and best environmental practices, and monitoring of contamination of air, water and land by hazardous chemicals and wastes.
- 7) 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.
- 8) 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.
- 9) To provide priority attention to developing, enforcing and/or strengthening national legislation and/or regulations implementing the Convention.

- 10) 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.
- 11) To increase cooperation at the national, regional and global level between the entities within the law enforcement chain to identify, prevent and combat illegal trade in chemicals taking place in contravention of the obligations of the Stockholm Convention.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF

- 1) To recognize the importance of multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and its evolving 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 multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste to protect human health and the environment from adverse impacts of chemicals and hazardous and other waste.
- 3) To mainstream Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in light of raising profile and visibility of chemicals and waste on the national level.
- 4) To emphasize the importance of data transmission in accordance with the obligations of the multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste, including the Stockholm Convention to avoid non-reporting, incomplete reporting or late reporting as there is the close link between the core obligations of the Convention and the obligation to transmit national reports in accordance with the SDGs and its monitoring framework.
- 5) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- 6) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.