Sub-Committees of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (TDG) and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS)

Substantive inputs to the 2022 HLPF on its review of the above SDGs and the theme
(Letter of 3 December 2021 from His Excellency Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of ECOSOC)

The Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals is an ECOSOC subsidiary body dealing with the development and update of recommendations to ensure the safe transport and handling of hazardous chemicals to protect human life and the environment. The Committee has two sub-committees.

The recommendations developed under the auspices of the Committee provide a globally harmonised framework addressing classification and labelling of chemicals (developed by the GHS Sub-Committee) as well as the transport of dangerous goods (developed by the TDG Sub-Committee). The Committee also developed the Manual of Tests and Criteria which contains criteria, test methods and procedures to be used for the classification of dangerous goods according to the provisions of the Model Regulations, as well as of chemicals presenting physical hazards according to the GHS. The Manual therefore supplements national or international regulations which are derived from the Model Regulations or the GHS.

The recommendations are used as a model for international agreements or convention on the international transport of dangerous goods. Furthermore, many countries also use these recommendations as a model for their national regulatory instruments, to ensure harmonisation with rules already applicable at international level. When implementing these recommendations, countries provide workers and consumers with consistent information on the hazards (i.e. health, physical and environmental hazards) of the chemicals they import, produce, handle, transport or use, as well as on how to transport and handle them safely.

With harmonized rules in use worldwide for transport of dangerous goods by all modes (i.e. air, maritime and land), carriers, consignors and inspecting authorities benefit from increased safety and simplified transport, handling and control. Similarly, the worldwide harmonization of the classification criteria and hazard communication elements for hazardous chemicals, eases the work and trade barriers for companies involved in international trade.

Updates of these recommendations are issued by the Committee every two years. These updates are subsequently implemented in the national and international instruments that use these recommendations as a basis for their national or regional regulations, thus ensuring that best practices are widely disseminated and that harmonization between countries is maintained.

The Committee provided a quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating the global supply chain of COVID-19 vaccines. The TDG Sub-Committee confirmed in December 2020 that such vaccines authorized for use, including those in clinical trials, are not subject to the UN Model Regulations as currently written. In 2021, the TDG Sub-Committee further clarified and adopted an amendment to the Model Regulations to also exclude pharmaceutical products containing genetically modified microorganisms, noting this would facilitate the transport of new drugs that were being developed to alleviate COVID-19 symptoms.

By nature, the work of the Committee and its two sub-committees builds on best practices, sound science, data, evidence, technical expert analysis and on the interlinkages across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It supports the implementation of the 2030 agenda and is aligned with

SDG goals and targets, in particular Goal 3 (Good health and well-being: targets 3.4 and 3.9), Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation: target 6.3), Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth: targets 8.1, 8.2, 8.4 and 8.8), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production: targets 12.4, 12.6 and 12.A), Goal 13 (Climate change: targets 13.1 and 13.2) and Goal 14 (Live below water: target 14.1). For further details on the interlinkages of both Sub-Committees with the SDGs, please refer to informal documents:

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/UN-SCETDG-59-INF31r1e_0.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/UN-SCEGHS-41-INF05e.pdf

On Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, the main related target 14.1 is to prevent and significantly reduce by 2025 marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

Land-based activities involving chemicals may have a significant impact on marine pollution when these chemicals are released into the environment. Some are deliberately dumped into the sea, others are found downstream from their sources. These may include for instance, chemicals coming from industrial or mining sites, inorganic chemical pollution resulting from agricultural pesticides use, or toxic metals release.

The GHS provides criteria to identify chemicals hazardous throughout the entire life cycle, which includes hazards for the aquatic environment. This includes guidance for classification of complex and “difficult to test” substances such as petroleum distillate fractions, polymers, metals, and metal compounds, etc. Implementing the GHS allows policy makers to identify the chemicals at stake and take sound decisions about the measures to regulate them and control, eliminate or minimise their dumping and release into the environment.

The Sub-Committees on TDG and GHS agreed to insert new items on their agenda to further discuss in 2022 actions on how to build back better from the COVID-19 disease together with contributions to SDGs under review such as Goals 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land). The Sub-Committees reiterated their commitments to continue working towards the achievement of SDGs and related targets in the areas under their responsibility. Both Sub-Committees will continue to keep the Council informed of any contributions that may be identified as relevant to the 2022 theme, as appropriate.

Leaving no one behind, the Model Regulations may be implemented by emerging economies who have limited resources to independently develop their own national safety program for the transport of dangerous goods. Furthermore, the GHS is drafted in a way that can be used by countries worldwide to enact legislation for the classification and labelling of hazardous chemicals in accordance with its internationally agreed provisions. This ensures knowledge sharing and enables countries with no or limited capacity to develop chemicals’ management systems on their own to build on the knowledge and experience from the international community.

On the collaboration with other bodies and the impact on partnerships for the Goals, the Committee and its two sub-committees cooperate with a wide range of organisations dealing with all aspects related to chemical safety and the safe and secure transport of dangerous goods, such as: WHO, IAEA, ICAO, IMO, FAO, OECD, UNECE, ILO, UNITAR etc. which participate on a regular basis in the sessions.

As a key message for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF, it is important to reaffirm the important work done by the Committee and its TDG and GHS Sub-Committees, and to

recognize the global relevance of the Model Regulations, Manual of Tests and Criteria and the GHS. Interested Governments, regional commissions, specialized agencies, and international organizations concerned are invited to consider the recommendations of the Committee when developing or updating appropriate codes and regulations. The recommendations in these publications may also be implemented by emerging economies lacking the framework or resources to independently develop their own national safety program. This work enhances both safety as well as economic growth by providing a regulatory platform critical to engaging in global trade and transport.

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