



Information sheet: Geneva Geneva: an environmental centre

Leading environmental centre. Along with Nairobi, Geneva is one of the leading centres for international environmental policy. The city is the seat of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe (UNEP/ROE), and the region is home to numerous other organizations that are either exclusively concerned with “green” issues or are involved in environmental projects. These various groups have combined to form a network (see “GEN” below).

Focal point for chemicals (and waste). Geneva is unquestionably an international centre in the fields of chemicals and waste: the Interim Secretariats for the PIC and POPs Conventions (see Factsheet 2) are located at the International Environment House (IEH), under the same roof as the UNEP Chemicals programme and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. These organizations collaborate closely with numerous other Geneva-based international bodies (e.g. UNEP, WHO, WTO, ILO) and also with NGOs (e.g. WWF, IUCN, Green Cross International). Switzerland is keen to preserve the concentration of expertise in this region and to exploit the synergies that arise from co-location.

Permanent home. Switzerland is therefore seeking to host the Permanent Secretariats of the Stockholm (POPs) and Rotterdam (PIC) Conventions at the IEH in Geneva. This reflects Switzerland’s support for the MEA coordination process initiated at the 7th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) held on 15 February 2002. The aim of this process is to enhance synergies between and the coherence of multilateral environmental agreements, with a pilot project to be undertaken in the chemicals field.

As well as pursuing environmental goals, it is important for Switzerland – as a leading chemical producer and exporter – to disseminate its expertise worldwide, thereby promoting the appropriate use and management of chemicals and their environmentally sound disposal.

General support. Switzerland is seeking to provide general support for Geneva’s role as an international centre for environmental policy by:

- strengthening the organizations based in the region and exploiting synergies
- actively promoting the establishment of new organizations in Geneva, including the Secretariat of the Environmental Management Group (EMG), as well as those of the PIC and POPs Conventions
- supporting the organization of international seminars, conferences and other international events in Geneva
- fostering the Geneva Environment Network.

Geneva Environment Network

IEH hub. Since 1999, numerous environmental bodies have joined forces within the Geneva Environment Network (GEN): this partnership of like-minded institutions aims to promote the interests of the environment by enhancing cooperation between the various participants. The network’s 42 members include NGOs as well as UN organizations and Secretariats. The GEN has its headquarters at the IEH in Châtelaine.

Working together for the environment. The GEN provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and for the development of synergies between projects. Another prime concern is to raise public awareness of global environmental problems and highlight measures that can be taken by individuals to protect the

environment. Since its establishment, the network has focused on the development of an effective communication infrastructure, with initiatives such as the following:

- **Networking of libraries:** A comprehensive catalogue of environmental literature and information is being prepared by a team of librarians. A documentation centre on the ground floor of the International Environment House includes materials relating to chemicals, hazardous wastes, international agreements and much else. The next step will involve efforts to strengthen links between the various partners' libraries and to establish a so-called cybrary on the Internet.
- **Website development:** In order to enhance the profile of the GEN, a joint website has been created (<http://www.environmenthouse.ch>), which includes useful links to collections of environmental information, as well as details of the network's activities.
- **Publication of a newsletter:** International environmental circles receive regular updates on the activities of GEN and its members. The newsletter, available online, contains news and opinion pieces on emerging environmental issues of concern globally and locally.
- **Launching of joint projects:** As the network expands, increasing importance is being attached to joint activities, which will enable the various organizations to pool their resources and work towards common goals. A number of UN committees and NGOs have already joined forces to tackle the complex issue of trade and the environment.

Key areas covered by environmental organizations

- **Chemicals and waste:**
 - UNEP Chemicals
 - Basel Convention Secretariat
 - Secretariats of PIC and POPs Conventions
- **Trade and environment:**
 - UNEP/ETU (Economic & Trade Unit)
 - UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development)
 - UN/ECE (UN Economic Commission for Europe)
 - WTO (World Trade Organization)
 - ITC (International Trade Centre)
 - WBCSD (World Business Council for Sustainable Development)
 - ICTSD (International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development)
- **Education and capacity building:**
 - UNITAR (UN Institute for Training and Research)
 - GIAN (Geneva International Academic Network)
 - CIEL (Center for International Environmental Law)
 - ITC (International Trade Centre)
- **Habitats and biodiversity:**
 - Ramsar Convention on wetlands
 - IUCN (World Conservation Union)
- CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)
- WWF (World-Wide Fund for Nature)
- WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization)
- UN/ECE (UN Economic Commission for Europe): four Secretariats for Conventions on transboundary matters (watercourses, air pollution, environmental impact assessment, industrial accidents) and the Aarhus Convention Secretariat (access to environmental information)
- UN-GEF Project on Development of National Biosafety Frameworks
- **Climate/climate change:**
 - IPCC Secretariat (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)
 - UNCCD (UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Liaison Office)
 - WMO (World Meteorological Organization)
- **Environmental monitoring:**
 - UNEP/GRID (Global Resource Information Database-Geneva)
 - UN System-wide Earthwatch

Further information:

Christine Richard, SAEFL, International Affairs Division,
Tel. +41 (0)31 322 93 03; +41 (0)79 293 71 61