

Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade

Opening speech of the session

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Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome

On behalf of the Swiss government, I have the privilege of am pleased to welcome you to Geneva, my hometown, for this first Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention. We are honoured to have you here.

Objectives of the PIC Convention

The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (or PIC Convention) is one of the three most important pillars upon which international policy and regulations on chemicals and waste policy and regulation rest. The other two pillars are the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and the Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes. The secretariats of both of these conventions are located in the International Environment House in Geneva. The PIC Convention is an important means of exchanging information between countries, since each country has to reveal its findings concerning positive and negative effects of specific, and PIC-listed chemicals. Based on the information provided, importing countries can profit benefit from another the exporting another country's experience and knowledge. This process of prior informed consent helps countries to decide which of the chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted in other countries they wish to agree to import into their country. This mechanism particularly allows developing countries to monitor more effectively the utilisation of potentially hazardous substances in their country. This obligation of shared responsibilities and co-operative efforts among all Parties

involved in the international trade of hazardous chemicals also encourages capacity building on the environmentally sound management of chemicals. Switzerland is convinced that only increasing awareness and information exchange between all stakeholders can reduce the inappropriate handling of hazardous industrial chemicals and pesticides. Switzerland takes very seriously the concerns of our partners from developing countries and countries with economies in transition about the sound management of chemicals. Therefore, my country supports political processes such as the African and the Latin-American regional meetings on the development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) PrepCons, and bilateral projects related to chemicals such as GHS and National Implementation Plan projects under the guidance of UNITAR. Furthermore, together with UNEP, we have organized a number of bilateral, regional and national workshops to raise awareness and to provide information on different aspects of the sound management of chemicals. My government will maintain this commitment to capacity building on chemicals in the future.

Present unwanted stocks of chemicals throughout the world are mainly the result of uncontrolled movements of hazardous chemicals. All countries and other stakeholders should have the strong commitment to fulfil their obligations in this regard, in order to leave future generations a world that it is worth living in. The establishment of private-public partnerships is of great importance in this context, and the Swiss government has co-operated very closely with the Swiss Society of Chemical Industries (SSCI) for successful implementation of the voluntary PIC procedure in our country.

The merit of environmental organisations

Fortunately, the global dimension of the chemicals and waste problem, which necessitates measures at all levels, is now universally recognised. In the past, primarily environmental non-governmental organisations were responsible for raising awareness, and I should like to take this opportunity to thank them for their commitment. It is also as a result of their work that, in 1998, the international community agreed on a global PIC Convention, and I am delighted that today, only six years after its adoption, the Rotterdam Convention is celebrating its first Meeting of the Parties. This positive development makes me very confident that the globally threatening problem of hazardous chemicals is given sufficient attention at the international policy level.

Tasks of COP 1 and ongoing work

I am convinced that the momentum and spirit, which have driven the negotiating delegations in recent years, will also be present for COP 1 in Geneva. This will help our work advance, providing the PIC Convention with the necessary rules and tools for effective implementation in the future. In this context, I should like to mention the following tasks that we all have to face during this week.

One of the most important tasks that we have will be deciding whether to include 13 new chemicals and pesticides and the first highly hazardous pesticide formulation in Annex III of the Convention.

I believe that the inclusion of new substances in Annex III (the so-called PIC list) is one of the most important mechanisms of the Rotterdam Convention, if not its most important mechanism. As you know, Annex III is not a static list, but one that we

Parties to the Convention have to update continuously, based on new scientific knowledge and on experience gained in the daily use of chemicals and pesticides under a variety of conditions. We must benefit from lessons learned and from past mistakes. Furthermore, we will have to ensure that industry takes the potential negative impacts of substances into consideration better, from the very start of research on new chemical products. Also, we must have the courage to halt the development of new substances and products with potentially catastrophic impacts on the environment or on human health.

My government therefore calls upon this meeting to include all substances in Annex III as prepared by the Interim Chemical Review Committee and INC.11. These substances include pesticides such as binapacryl, toxaphene and parathion, and industrial chemicals such as organic lead compounds.

As I already mentioned, the mandate to prepare the necessary technical and research work so that we as Parties can decide whether to include a new chemical in Annex III was given to the members of the interim Chemical Review Committee (ICRC) during the years of the interim PIC procedure. So I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate the members of the ICRC on the outstanding work that they have done.

Centres of competence (clustering)

Geneva is host to a large number of organisations that deal with the international aspects of environmental policy, working closely with the secretariats of the agreements on chemical products and wastes, including – to name just a few – the WHO, the WTO, the ILO, UNCTAD and UNITAR. This geographical concentration

favours synergies, efficiency, effectiveness and the reduction of costs for all parties. The International Environment House in Geneva accommodates (with more than 20 other international organisations) the Basel Convention Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention, the Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention and UNEP Chemicals. This concentration of the secretariats of conventions on chemicals and wastes under one roof greatly facilitates co-operation and promotes the strengthening and development of a “chemicals and wastes cluster”, as decided by the environment ministers attending the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Cartagena two years ago, and it is in the focus of the SAICM process.

Permanent Secretariat in Geneva and Rome

At this point I should like to express my gratitude to . Niek van der Graaf (FAO) and to Jim Willis (UNEP Chemicals), the two heads of the PIC Convention, and at the same time to thank all the staff of the secretariat for their outstanding work over the years. Switzerland is convinced that the interim PIC secretariat has done outstanding work.

This is not a coincidence, but the result of the wise decision of the experts during the negotiating process to place the PIC Secretariat in the hearts of the two key organisations needed for its correct, successful functioning; namely at the FAO in Rome for Pesticides and at UNEP Chemicals for Industrial Chemicals. In view of the excellent results obtained during the interim voluntary PIC procedure, which has now lasted for 15 years, Switzerland sees no reason to change this winning team. On the contrary, my country is convinced that due to the existing excellent framework in

Rome and Geneva the status quo must be maintained for the sake of the PIC Convention.

In the days to come you will make an important contribution to the success of the application of the PIC Convention, for which I thank you. We are confident that any remaining problem can be resolved.

I wish you a fruitful week of negotiations and a pleasant stay in Geneva.