



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة
联合国环境规划署



Speech by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants 4-8 May

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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, please accept my apologies for not being able to deliver this address in person.

But rest assured that I attach the highest importance to your deliberations and am being kept up-to-date on your discussions.

I will join you tomorrow for the final deliberations and decisions to be taken at this fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chemicals and Health

The safe management, use and trade in chemicals are among a range of issues that are rising rapidly up the international agenda.

The Stockholm Convention alongside the Rotterdam and Basel conventions represents a central part of the international response to these opportunities but also the persistent and emerging challenges presented by the industrial age.

Less than two weeks ago, I attended the G8 environment ministers meeting in Italy. At this meeting, climate change and biodiversity formed key parts of the debate. But so did chemicals.

The governments of Japan and the United States presented papers, which formed part of the final communiqué, on environment and health.

The focus was on children, with the impact of chemicals being a central theme including the question of endocrine disruptors.



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Endocrine disruptors have perhaps slipped off the public stage in recent years, but it looks like they will be re-emerging as an important theme.

POPs, and also their breakdown products such as those linked with the use of DDT, can mimic the female hormone estrogen or block the male hormone androgen.

Perhaps it is time for the Stockholm Convention to begin assisting the international community in unraveling the science and the health impacts of such breakdown products on the health—including reproductive and hormonal health—of vulnerable groups like children and the unborn.

Chemicals and Biodiversity

There is also a link to the Convention on Biological Diversity, with evidence that the POP Polychlorinated Bi-Phenyl (PCBs) among others can impact on the sexual health of for example, polar bear cubs in the Arctic.

Other studies show the link between POPs and the impact on reptiles and fish and of course birds.

Chemicals and Climate

In the area of climate change there are also synergies. During UNEP's last Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Nairobi, we released our annual Year Book 2009.

Some POPs and climate-related findings were:-

- Hazardous substances, deposited from the atmosphere and locked away in glaciers, are now being re-released.
- The pesticide - DDT - is turning up in unanticipated amounts in Adelie penguins that live in parts of the Antarctic coastline.
- Organic pollutants are being carried back into the environment from melting glaciers in the Rocky Mountains of North America.
- Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) can be found downstream of European glaciers.

Chemicals in the Green Economy

There are those who, from time to time, argue that the environment is a luxury and only affordable during economically-prosperous times.

But all too often the economies of scale and the real cost-benefit analysis of addressing one environmental issue and the way it can assist in resolving another, are rarely factored-in.



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This is one of the reasons why I attach great importance to one of the decisions before you this week—namely the decision on enhanced cooperation and coordination among the three Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions -- what we also call synergies.

In line with the synergies decision, partnerships are essential and productive if they are cooperatively and sensibly managed. Therefore, I welcome the Stockholm Convention's plan to work with the World Bank on POPs and climate change as an important new direction.

Indeed in a world of multiple challenges and indeed crises—fuel, food and economic up to climate change and the emerging one of natural resource scarcity—joined up thinking, creative market mechanisms and integrated approaches are urgently needed.

Needed urgently across ministries, the private sector, civil society and intergovernmental organizations if we are to realize a low carbon, innovation-led, resource efficient, healthy and truly sustainable global economy in the 21st century.

This is a key point of departure for UNEP's new Green Economy initiative: the Stockholm Convention and its sister conventions, are very much part of this.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

Priority-Setting and the Programme of Work

A meeting like this is also very much about forward-looking house-keeping issues.

Let me say at the outset that the Stockholm Convention is your tool, your instrument to achieve the sustainability and the poverty-related targets set out in commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals.

I would urge you to use it to maximum effect.

Let me add a few other short points. All too often in the multilateral arena everything can seem a priority.

I would hope that this week delegates can identify and set three or four central directions and give guidance not least to the Convention's financial mechanism, the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

I believe this would assist the GEF as much as the Stockholm Convention and its Secretariat and staff.



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Again, in respect to utilizing this Convention to its maximum potential, I would urge you to consider very carefully the Programme of Work and its ambition.

There may be those who consider the funding envelope proposed for the voluntary trust funds—an increase of some \$3 million-- over-ambitious.

But this Convention has always managed to raise the necessary resources and I can assure you that as UNEP Executive Director we will be strongly supporting the required resource mobilization effort.

I am confident that the ambitious fund raising target proposed can be achieved and would like to thank those Parties who already have indicated to the Secretariat their intention to increase their voluntary contribution to the Convention.

Keeping Science at the Centre in Respect to DDT and Nine Proposed Chemicals

Finally, let me emphasize a central theme for UNEP across its work and for the chemical-related conventions in particular.

The Stockholm Convention is at its heart a science-based instrument and while politics is inseparable from decision-making, I think it is important to keep that decision-making fundamentally scientific.

Science guided the establishment of this Convention and the listing of the first twelve chemicals—it should also guide your decisions in respect to the nine other POPs up for listing here.

Flexibility needs to be shown—there will always be countries with special circumstances that may need particular support. However, we must move at the pace of the majority not the few.

And as with for example chemicals used in inhalers or the pesticide methyl bromide—both of which are controlled under the mature Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer—exemptions need to be put on a clear downward path with clear time-frames.

That must also be the case for DDT, an old chemical that reflects the technological solutions from an earlier century.

It needs a firm and real 'sell by date'. I think we are now getting there and in partnership with the World Health Organization.



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Indeed let me add how delighted I am with the joint work of UNEP, the WHO; the Pan American Health Organization and the countries and communities concerned in respect to promoting alternative methods of mosquito control.

The project in Mesoamerica, funded by the GEF whose findings have been presented jointly here, is underlining that new, practical and inspirational DDT- free approaches are indeed possible.

And I am pleased to learn that the work is to be taken foreword in Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean and Central Asia--again with GEF backing and in the absolute understanding that the priority is to both save lives from malaria while supporting the agreements under Stockholm.

Only by setting a clear vision of a DDT-free world, will the necessary financing and innovation flow for alternative substances and management methods.

It the same argument that secured a green light to negotiate a legally-binding instrument on the toxic heavy metal mercury at UNEP's recent GC.

And one that needs to prevail at the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management meeting in respect to, for example lead which is being organized by UNEP and taking place here in Geneva next week.

It needs to be the same, science-based catalyst behind your decisions this week not least on the nine new chemicals before you.

Thank you,