



ASIA-EUROPE ENVIRONMENT FORUM 4TH ROUNDTABLE
“Combine or Combust! Co-operating on
Chemicals and Hazardous Substances
Management”

30 November-1 December | Brussels, Belgium

CONCEPT PAPER

SUMMARY

A roundtable discussion among **50 specially-invited participants from 38 countries of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** will be held over 2 days in Brussels, Belgium. The topics focus on the following issues relevant to the management of chemicals and hazardous substances:

1. What has been done by Asian and European governments with respect to the management of chemicals? How are they incorporating the chemicals portfolio into their current policies?
2. How can Asian and European governments build on their experiences in the management of chemicals prior to the adoption of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) to forge further co-operation and narrow the capacity gap between the two regions?
3. What kind of **overall practical framework** can Asia and Europe work together to create in the management of chemicals and hazardous substances?

This roundtable will be **the first in the second phase of the Asia-Europe Environment Forum**, co-organised by the ASEF, the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), the Institute for Global Environment Strategies (IGES) the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Swedish Environmental Secretariat in Asia (SENSA).

BACKGROUND

Chemicals and Hazardous Substances

Chemicals of various types are a pervasive presence in modern societies. Production of, trade in and use of chemicals have nothing less than exploded over the past decades. The chemical industry has become increasingly globalised and more countries, including developing ones, are becoming major producers for the world. The business is highly research-intensive, resulting in an ever-increasing number of new substances entering the market.

Certainly, this phenomenon has contributed to economic growth and better living standards the world over. Nevertheless, the gap between developed and developing countries is still widening with regard to sustainable chemicals management which of course undermines development, health and poverty alleviation investments. The increasing occurrence of allergies, cancer and other chronic toxic effects are examples of possible negative consequences of the use of chemicals. Furthermore, irresponsible production and use of chemicals may cause serious trans-boundary problems, spreading through water, soil and air.

International Agreements

The cross-cutting impact of unsound chemicals and hazardous substances management and its potential to undermine the achievement of development goals suggest a need to ensure that the chemicals issue is integrated into sustainable development strategies on the part of both national governments and the international donor community. Chemical management and safety is already part of several complementary multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) and processes, among them:

- International Programme on Chemical Safety (established in 1980).
- Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer (adopted in 1987; entry into force in 1989).
- Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (adopted in 1989; entry into force in 1992).
- Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (adopted in 1998, entry into force in 2005).
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (adopted in 2001, entry into force in 2005).
- The Kiev Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (adopted in 2003; not yet entered into force).

However, the real starting point for a common global approach in chemicals management was the seven programme areas agreed in chapter 19 of the **Agenda 21** on the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals which resulted from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Following that was the **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation**, one of the goals being that, **by 2020, chemicals are produced and used in ways that minimise significant adverse impacts on human health and the environment**. The chemicals agenda is now coming the forefront with newly concluded agreement on a **Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM – adopted internationally since 6 February 2006)** that will provide a policy framework for the chemicals agenda. In this respect, implementing tools such as the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) are very pertinent especially given that the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety has decided to have GHS operational by 2008, as also targeted in Johannesburg.

Asia and Europe in Context

The Asia-Europe Environment Forum is the main platform for multistakeholder policy dialogue on sustainable development issues between Asia and Europe that has steadily gained recognition among civil society (which is its primary constituency), the business community as well as among governments particularly through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process.

ASEM is a political process of dialogue and co-operation between the European Union (EU) and East Asia¹, along three pillars: political (the inter-governmental, official dialogue); economic (trade, investment, involving the business sector) and socio cultural (which includes the Asia-Europe Foundation as the process's outreach to civil society).

The landmark conference “**1/3 of Our Planet: What Can Asia and Europe Do for Sustainable Development**” was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 23-25 November 2005, successfully concluding the first phase of the Asia-Europe Environment Forum. The event, which was attended by close to 350 high-level participants from throughout Asia and Europe, produced the “The Jakarta 12: Agendas for Sustainable Development”. In this statement, **the issue of the management of hazardous chemicals was aptly identified as one of the most important environmental policy issues for the two regions.**

Building on this momentum, **the Asia-Europe Environment Forum 4th Roundtable will discuss the management of chemicals and toxic substances as a policy issue that may be meaningfully advanced through the ASEM framework as well as other relevant regional, cross-regional and international fora**, timely scheduled just before the regional consultation in Asia-Pacific by the SAICM Secretariat in December 2006. It is also significant that the meeting will be held in Brussels while the European Parliament enters into the second reading of the REACH agreement.

OBJECTIVES

The roundtable aims to contribute to the current global policy dialogue on chemicals management by promoting transparency, capacity building and knowledge transfer between Asia and Europe. **More specifically, the meeting expects to propose an overall practical framework for future stronger Asia Europe co-operation in chemicals management.**

It will bring together all key stakeholders from Asia and Europe with an interest in chemicals safety to discuss results and implications of various

¹ ASEM member are: Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Myanmar, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Vietnam and the European Commission.

international chemicals management policies prior to SAICM and brainstorm on the possibility of developing more efficient and effective approaches, thus strengthening the multi-stakeholder consultative process. To this end, an elaboration of certain national and regional case studies which address strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of chemicals managements from the perspectives of the different stakeholders should be made.

The practical framework that the roundtable will be proposing should address the multiple co-operation dimensions to accelerate new policy design, facilitate policy application and enforcement, the exchange and dissemination of best practices, research and development, the exchange of experience and know-how, education, private sector participation in decision-making and services, good governance, and others.

The roundtable could also act as a high profile platform for other networks, enabling them to disseminate their expertise, interest or results beyond their constituencies.

The findings of this meeting could then be tailored to feed into the proposed SAICM and other international or regional meetings on chemicals management in 2006-2007.

PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 50 high-level participants and speakers representing all 38 ASEM countries from the **research/academia, civil society, industries and governments** involved in various aspects of the management of chemicals and hazardous substances will be invited, particularly those involved in the following activities:

a. Research/Academia

- Training programmes for updates on recent alternative technology on chemicals.
- Developing special capacities on environmentally-sound treatments/disposal of hazardous waste.
- Technology transfer on hazardous substances and chemicals.
- Developing guidelines on environmentally-sound treatment of chemicals.

b. Civil Society

- Undertaking independent research, monitoring and evaluation concerning environmental issues and safety especially in workplaces.
- Informing the industry and government of any issues of concern.
- Ensuring transparency and communities' right to know: working toward better disaster management.
- Supporting citizens who need assistance in dealing with problems arising from the use of chemicals.
- The protection and rights of the consumer.

- Increasing consumers' awareness, participation, advocacy and capacity building on hazardous and toxic chemicals to the public.

c. Industry

- Those responsible in ensuring that information known about the potential risk of chemicals is sufficient so that users are able to develop risk management strategies.
- Associations or units focusing on health, labour and other economic impacts, access to information, development of alternatives, manufacturing and trade.
- Companies that have demonstrated best available technologies/best environmental practices.
- Those developing guidelines or assisting in formulation of legislations on environmentally-sound treatment of chemicals.
- Those involved in "responsible care" and product stewardship initiatives.
- Those involved in the life-cycle approach in chemicals management.
- Those involved in partnership approaches to improve chemical safety globally.

d. Government

- Developing capacities for chemicals management.
- Drafting relevant policies and legislations (e.g. labelling requirements).
- Developing national strategies for sustainable development, MDG strategies, and other similar instruments.

CO-ORGANISERS, DATE AND VENUE

Co-organisers

Asia-Europe Foundation
 Hanns Seidel Foundation
 Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
 United Nations Environment Programme
 Swedish Environmental Secretariat in Asia

With

European Commission DG Environment

Date, Venue

30 November-1 December
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