

**2021 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and
Economic and Social Council**
**“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic
that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of
sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path
for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade
of action and delivery for sustainable development”**

6-16 July 2021

**Input by the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam
Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous
Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade**

Instruction

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the General Assembly (“SDG Summit”) resulted in the adoption of a Political Declaration that proclaimed a decade for action and delivery for sustainable development and outlined ten crosscutting areas for accelerated action for the achievement of the SDGs. The General Assembly decided that the theme for the 2021 session of the HLPF and the Economic and Social Council will be “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

The HLPF in 2021 will also discuss Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. The Forum will consider the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs.

Input from the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention could showcase the views and guidance of your intergovernmental bodies on those aspects of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various measures and types of international cooperation that can control the pandemic and its impacts and put the world back on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, within the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development and highlight the views in line with the six areas below.

Introduction

The Rotterdam Convention on the **Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade** was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2004. As at March 2021, it has 164 Parties and thus its coverage is global. The main objective of the Convention is to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm and to contribute to their environmentally sound use. It aims to contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, by providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export and by disseminating these decisions to Parties.

Its key provisions include (1) a Prior Informed Consent procedure which provides for a national decision-making process on import of hazardous chemicals listed under the Convention and seeks to ensure compliance with these decisions by exporting Parties and (2) exchange of information on a broad range of potentially hazardous chemicals.

The Rotterdam Convention serves as a first line of protection for Parties against the unwanted imports of hazardous pesticides, industrial chemicals and severely hazardous pesticide formulations. The Convention covers 53 pesticides, severely hazardous pesticide formulations and industrial chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted for health or environmental reasons by Parties and which have been notified by Parties for inclusion in the Prior Informed Consent procedure.

The Rotterdam Convention is a living convention as Parties have a possibility to add new chemicals that satisfy specific criteria. The scientific subsidiary body, the Chemical Review Committee, evaluates the proposals and makes recommendations to the Conference of the Parties on such listing.

Listing in Annex III to the Rotterdam Convention is important to ensure all stakeholders can access vital information on these chemicals and to make informed decisions about their import and export. The Rotterdam Convention Secretariat is collecting and making available on its website information from various sources regarding the impacts of listing of chemicals under the Convention¹.

(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs

¹ See the website of the Rotterdam Convention:
<http://www.pic.int/Implementation/EnhancingtheeffectivenessoftheConvention/Impactsoflicensingchemicals/tabid/7649/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

There has been a significant impact - on societies, on education, on the global economy, and indeed on most aspects of daily life. The pandemic has given rise to significant issues for the sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes, and for issues which fall within the scope of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

In light of the recent experience from the COVID-19 pandemic and reflecting on the past involvement in responding to emergencies, the Secretariat has prepared a technical paper on the role of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions in supporting Parties in Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.

With regard to the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention at the national and regional levels, economic processes, including certain manufacturing and use of chemicals and pesticides, were interrupted or altered due to lockdowns. The disruption to established supply chains may have more than a temporary effect – some national authorities have determined to become more self-reliant in their supplies of chemicals.

Governments experienced reduced capacities for the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention, including environmental regulations, customs controls, and other enforcement measures. A number of national regulatory authorities sought to ease the procedures of regulation to enable products such as disinfectants or hand-gels to come to the market quickly, or to seek to moderate the economic damage caused by the pandemic and the lockdown measures necessary to control it.

International trade of chemicals was also impacted. There were some temporary relaxation or delays to facilitate safer ways of working or shopping at the height of the pandemic. In response to sanitary and hygiene concerns, many regulators across the world have paused or delayed bans, taxes, or fees on plastic items as well as recycling initiatives. There is a risk that in the longer term, in order to address the need to re-start economies and make up for lost economic growth, some standards regarded as burdensome or restricting may be permanently abandoned, with a consequent increased risk to human health or the environment.

In regard to intergovernmental processes, including in relation to the Rotterdam Convention, face-to-face meetings were postponed, and some were replaced with online sessions which overall slowed down the progress in the implementation of the programme of work of the Rotterdam Convention.

(b) Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body

Under the Rotterdam Convention there is a number of areas which are being addressed by the Convention as these represent significant environmental challenges around the world and require urgent attention. Such areas receive policy guidance from Parties, calls upon Parties and others to take measures, and may be the subject to technical assistance and partnerships by the Secretariat. Directly relevant to the goal 12 “Sustainable consumption and production”, with relevance to goal 3 “Good health and well-being”, goal 6 “Clean water and sanitation”, goal 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”, goal 14 “Life below water” and goal 17 “Partnerships”, highlights of these areas are included below, but are not limited to the following:

Challenges with the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention

In terms of its implementation, 75 % of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention appear to have at least minimum capacity institutional capacity to implement this Multilateral Environment Agreement (MEA) according to data collected for the reporting under the SDG indicator 12.4.1. Among the key challenges linked to the transmission of information under the Rotterdam Convention are the lack of availability of data and information, inadequate legal and institutional frameworks, scarce financial resources and technical capacity, lack of understanding of the usefulness of the information reported, lack of consequences in case of the non-transmission of information, and low political priority of the issues at hand.

Science-policy interface

One of the fundamental processes in the operation of the Rotterdam Convention is that a Party, when it has adopted a final regulatory action to ban or severely restrict a chemical, must notify the Secretariat thereof. The Convention specifies both the information required and the time limit within which such notifications are to be transmitted in order for the chemicals in question to be considered for listing under Convention. The Secretariat will verify the notifications and inform other Parties about the notifications received. When the Secretariat has received at least one notification from two different prior informed consent (PIC) regions regarding a specific chemical, it forwards the notifications to the Chemical Review Committee. The Chemical Review Committee which is a subsidiary body of the Rotterdam Convention is mandated to review chemicals and pesticide formulations and to make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties for listing such chemicals in Annex III.

Additionally, any Party that is a developing country or country with an economy in transition that is experiencing problems caused by a severely hazardous pesticide formulation (SHPF) under conditions of use in its territory, may propose to the Secretariat the listing of the SHPF in Annex III to the Convention. In its Annex IV, the Convention specifies the documentation required from a proposing Party, the information to be collected by the Secretariat and the criteria for listing the severely hazardous pesticide formulation. The Secretariat will verify the proposals, inform other Parties about the proposals received and collect additional information as specified by the Convention. Subsequently, the Secretariat forwards the proposal to the Chemical Review Committee in order for it to review and consider recommending the pesticide formulation for inclusion in Annex III.

Following the recommendations of the Chemical Review Committee at the ninth meeting of the Conference to the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in 2019 a number of important decisions were adopted to strengthen the Convention.

Two chemicals, the pesticide phorate and the industrial chemical hexabromocyclododecane were added to Annex III, making them subject to the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure.

Across the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the conferences of the Parties have recognized the importance of the science-policy interface for the effectiveness of the conventions

and the need for greater access to scientific understanding in developing countries to enhance informed decision-making on the implementation of the conventions. Under the programme “From Science to Action”, capacity building to enhance interaction between scientists, policymakers and other actors for science-based action has been carried out.

Compliance Committee

The adoption in 2019 of procedures and mechanisms on compliance with the Rotterdam Convention provides an essential source of assistance to Parties and a tool to further improve implementation. The Compliance Committee can deal with specific submissions on the compliance of an individual Party and review systemic issues of general compliance. It will become operational in 2022.

Cooperation and coordination between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions

Cooperation and coordination among the three conventions has become a standard manner of conducting business under the three conventions, through a series of decisions adopted by each of the respective conferences of the Parties to the conventions. This so-called "synergies process" aims to strengthen the implementation of the three conventions at the national, regional and global levels by providing coherent policy guidance, enhancing efficiency in the provision of support to Parties to the conventions, reducing their administrative burden and maximizing the effective and efficient use of resources at all levels, while maintaining the legal autonomy of these three multilateral environmental agreements. This unique approach is a successful example to other parts of the global environmental agenda and demonstrates how to enhance international environmental governance through coordination and cooperation.

This process has changed the way in which the implementation of the conventions is undertaken at the national and regional levels. Parties to the conventions and entities supporting countries in the implementation of the conventions, such as regional centres, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, also undertook efforts to increase coherence in the implementation of the conventions.

There are linkages between actions mandated by the COP of each of the conventions and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) which sets priorities for global environmental policies. The Secretariat of the BRS conventions cooperates with the United Nations Environment Programme on issues of common interest, such as chemicals and waste management, SDGs implementation and reporting, marine pollution, environmental governance, as mandated by UNEA ministerial declaration and resolutions and COPs decisions.

It is my expectation that the Rotterdam Convention and its Conference of the Parties will bring concrete measures and actions on chemicals in the upcoming decade addressing global emerging environmental challenges. Taking into account that the use of chemicals are critical in the modern life through manufacturing of goods, use in industrial processes, agriculture, public health, as well as the fact that all chemicals as well as products at some point become wastes, sound management of chemicals and wastes addressed by the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions is a must. To support Parties in the implementation of the obligations under the Rotterdam Convention,

raising the profile and visibility of chemicals on the national level will be critical in the upcoming decade to have the required achievements.

(c) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels against of background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by your intergovernmental bodies

Gender issues related to implementation of the conventions have been discussed and taken into account by the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, particularly the impact of poor management of hazardous chemicals and wastes on vulnerable groups such as women and young children.

Hazardous chemicals and pesticides have different impact on the life quality of women, men, children and other vulnerable groups interacting with their health directly and indirectly and with the environment that is surrounding them. More than 90 per cent of sampled water and fish was found to be contaminated by several pesticides and about 3 per cent of exposed agricultural workers suffer from an episode of acute pesticide poisoning every year².

While the Rotterdam Convention requires Parties to take actions at the country level to reach its objectives, it also plays an important role for striving toward empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality. The world’s poorest 3.5 billion people largely directly rely on the environment for their basic services (water, food, shelter etc.). Protection of health of farmers but also the general public from the use of toxic pesticides and the food safety need to be safeguarded and this is where the Rotterdam Convention plays an important role. Millions of workers and the general public all together are exposed to harmful effects of industrial chemicals and all, rich and poor should be protected from the exposure.

The Rotterdam Convention therefore supports the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” in terms of the protection of all from harmful pesticides and industrial chemicals by encouraging information sharing about hazards posed by specific chemicals so that countries which lack capacity to evaluate impacts of these chemicals on the human health and the environment can also benefit from this body of knowledge and take measures to protect its citizens. On the regional level and national levels, the governments conduct activities in line with the obligations of the Convention which help protect women, men, children.

(d) Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

There are a number of actions and recommendations³ within the mandate of the Rotterdam Convention which will support Parties in accelerating progress for those affected by hazardous chemicals. In light of enhancing coordination and cooperation of the implementation between the

² UNEP, “Global Environment Outlook -5”, 2012, p.180.

³ Please see reports and decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention:
<http://www.pic.int/TheConvention/ConferenceOftheParties/COPDecisions/tabid/1728/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, some of the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To call for Parties to increase their efforts on the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions with the purpose of protecting human health and the environment and in support of circular economy and resource efficiency.
- 2) To increase efforts of governments and stakeholders towards the coordinated implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions including through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms.
- 3) Given the cross-cutting nature of hazardous chemicals and waste in our lives, to promote an integrated approach to chemicals and waste management by mainstreaming chemicals and wastes issues into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors.
- 4) To provide priority attention to developing, enforcing and/or strengthening national legislation and/or regulations implementing the Rotterdam Convention.
- 5) To encourage Parties and others to invest in research related to alternatives for hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 6) To develop and adopt integrated pest management and integrated vector management in national agricultural and public health strategies.
- 7) To promote the adoption of best practices on the sound management of hazardous chemical and wastes throughout the value chain, including extended producer responsibility, publicly available information about chemical hazards and risks, green design and best available techniques and best environmental practices, and monitoring of contamination of air, water and land by hazardous chemicals and wastes.
- 8) To provide safe and decent jobs involving hazardous chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and productions, including resources recovery and recycling.
- 9) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including chemicals in products through labeling and other methods, for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.
- 10) To encourage efforts of Parties to promote gender equality to ensure that women and men from all Parties are equally involved in the implementation of the three conventions and are represented in their bodies and processes and thus inform and participate in decision-making on gender-responsive hazardous chemicals and wastes policies.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2021 HLPF

- 1) To recognize the importance of multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and their critical role in the overarching architecture of environmental governance in building post-COVID-19 a resilient path to achieve the Agenda 2030.
- 2) To accelerate efforts of Parties to implement their obligations under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to protect human health and the environment from adverse impacts of chemicals and hazardous and other wastes.
- 3) To mainstream the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors and in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.
- 4) To emphasize the importance of data transmission in accordance with the obligations under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to avoid non-reporting, incomplete reporting or late reporting and add value to the global indicator framework for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 5) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes for better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.