

2022 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and Economic and Social Council

Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5-7 and 11-15 July 2022

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 “**Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**”.

The HLPF in 2022 will review progress toward SDGs 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The Forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across these SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.

Input from the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention could showcase the views, findings, research, data and policy recommendations on specific aspects of an SDG-driven response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the SDGs under review.

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 2022, it has 165 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 on a national level 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 notifications of final regulatory actions related to chemicals and pesticides and proposals for severely hazardous pesticide formulations and makes recommendations to the Conference of the Parties for listing.

While the Rotterdam Convention does not constitute a ban on the use and/or production of chemicals some chemical producers consider inclusion in Annex III to the Rotterdam Convention a “blacklisting” of chemicals and they see their trade volumes decrease. 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.

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 notifies the Secretariat. The Convention specifies both the information required and the time limit within which such notifications are to be transmitted in order to be considered for listing. The Secretariat

¹ See the website of the Rotterdam Convention:

<http://www.pic.int/Implementation/EnhancingtheeffectivenessoftheConvention/Impactsoflistingchemicals/tabid/7649/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

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 in order for it to review and consider recommending the chemical for inclusion in Annex III.

The Chemical Review Committee, a subsidiary body of the Rotterdam Convention, is mandated to review notifications for chemicals and pesticides as well as proposals for severely hazardous pesticide formulations (SHPF) and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties for listing such chemicals in Annex III.

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.

At the face-to-face segment of its tenth meeting in June 2022, the Conference of the Parties will consider listing recommendations from the Chemical Review Committee of seven chemicals: acetochlor, carbosulfan, chrysotile asbestos, decabromodiphenyl ether, fenthion formulations, paraquat dichloride formulations, and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts and PFOA-related compounds. Furthermore, at its seventeenth meeting in September 2021, the Committee recommended listing of iprodione and terbufos in Annex III to the Convention, potentially to be considered at a future meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

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.

With regard to the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention at the national and regional levels, economic processes, including retail 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.

COVID-19 impacted agricultural sector, including use of pesticides addressed by the Rotterdam Convention and global plant health and crop protection with the resulting effect on global food security and safety. This includes various factors such as the disruption or limited supply and/or availability of plant protection products and related personal protective equipment, lack of timely crop protection interventions due to shortage of labor and spray operators, equipment shortage and quarantine restrictions.

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

SDG 4 on quality education

Numerous activities under the Rotterdam Convention contribute to SDG 4 by helping to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, education, outreach, training and awareness-raising activities are increasingly being delivered through hybrid and online means, such as webinars and online trainings. In 2021, the Secretariat facilitate approximately 45 online webinars and workshops with hundreds of participants, thus conveying knowledge on key mechanisms and procedures so as to ensure that Designated National Authorities and other relevant stakeholders have the required expertise to fully implement the Rotterdam Convention. Moreover, on Earth Day in April 2020, the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions supported the launch of the “Earth School”, providing kids, parents and teachers around the world with engaging nature-focused content to stay connected to nature during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, face to face learning remains as relevant as always.

SDG 5 on gender equality

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on gender equality, with the World Economic Forum estimating that women's full equality with men is now 136, as opposed to 99, years in the future.² The pandemic has affected women and men differently due to their distinctive roles in global economies and societies: this is profoundly the case in the waste management sector. The pandemic thus has had concerning health, livelihood and economic impacts on women. The Rotterdam Convention is promoting gender equality and mainstreaming in the chemicals management sector through targeted activities aimed at improving understanding of the gender and chemicals nexus in different developmental settings and developing specific country-context recommendations for improvements. Such recommendations will promote improved awareness of gender equality in the context of management of hazardous chemicals and wastes, and integrating gender considerations into the policies, legislation/regulation, and practices for the implementation of the Basel Convention. Additionally, training workshops on how to better integrate gender-equality targets and tools into national chemical and waste plans, and their implementation through gender-responsive methodologies and institutional development, are being conducted for authorities and decision-makers. Such activities have thus far been carried out in Bolivia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and are currently underway in Kenya and Tunisia.

SDG 14 on life below water

Pesticides are mainly applied on land but can – depending on their physical-chemical properties reach any water bodies including groundwater, rivers and oceans through drift, run-off, leaching, erosion, and long-range transport. Other factors contributing to the increase of environmental pollution in oceans and seas is urbanization and soil sealing. In areas with more permeable land, polluted runoff can be absorbed before reaching the ocean, but in urban areas that are heavily concreted, contaminated water cannot be absorbed and goes into the sewer system or directly into coastal waters.

SDG 15 on life on land

The effective implementation of the Rotterdam Convention contributes to progress for the implementation of the SDG 15 on life on land as adverse effects of pesticides and severely hazardous pesticide formulations can cause severe environmental degradation through the pollution of water, soil, flora and fauna. The large-scale use of pesticides may have direct or indirect effects on soil biodiversity. With the intensification of agriculture, the use of pesticides has increased worldwide to approximately two million tonnes per year (herbicides 47.5 percent, insecticides 29.5 percent, fungicides 17.5 percent, other 5.5 percent). The intensive use of pesticides and herbicides in greenhouses not only affects soil quality but creates risks to human health. In some greenhouse systems, long term multiple cropping has led to soil acidification, salinization and biological deterioration, especially where large amounts of fertilizer and pesticide/herbicide have been used. Chemical pollution has emerged as a threat to soil quality³.

³ See the report on Status of the World's Soil Resources, FAO, 2015.

Initiatives to support efforts on sustainable management and use of soil resources are for example the FAO-led Global Soil to Partnership⁴.

SDG 17 on partnerships

There are currently no partnerships established by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Rotterdam Convention, however there are initiatives and partnerships that support the implementation of the Convention.

(b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body

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.

The Rotterdam Secretariat together with FAO’s Decent Rural Employment Team published two brochures on occupational safety and health, child labor reduction and pesticide exposure in March 2021 and developed a dissemination strategy.⁵

Women’s exposure to pesticides tends to be higher than recognized, and cases of poisoning often go unreported, particularly in low-income countries that rely on less sophisticated agricultural technologies (UNEP, 2021). Gender-related dimensions are often overlooked in pesticide management policies and programmes.

The Rotterdam Secretariat together with FAO’s Decent Rural Employment Team is currently preparing a publication on Gender and pesticide management to be published in summer 2022.

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

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/about/why-the-partnership/en/>

⁵ See the brochures on [Addressing hazardous child labour and reducing risks posed by hazardous pesticides](#), FAO, 2021 and [Eliminating hazardous child labour through safe and sustainable farming practices](#), FAO, 2021.

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.

Activities to promote the sound management of chemicals and waste under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, particularly those in relation to gender (see section (a) above), are undertaken to promote countries' technical capacities in the management of waste, including COVID-19 waste, and to promote information exchange to ensure women and other vulnerable groups can access appropriate information about how to apply precautionary practices such the use of PPE and the management of infectious waste as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review

- 1) 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.
- 2) To encourage efforts of Parties and stakeholders to actively contribute to the activities of existing or propose new partnerships promoting the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention.

(d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

There are a number of actions 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 Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, some of the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To call for States to increase their efforts on the implementation of global treaties on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including 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 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 encourage States and others to invest in research related to alternatives for hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 5) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- 6) To develop and adopt integrated pest management and integrated vector management in national agricultural and public health strategies.
- 7) To provide priority attention to developing, enforcing and/or strengthening national legislation and/or regulations implementing the Rotterdam Convention.
- 8) 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.
- 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.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF

- 1) To recognize the importance of multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions as well the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the voluntary mechanisms such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and its evolving 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 multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste to protect human health and the environment from adverse impacts of chemicals and hazardous and other waste.
- 3) To mainstream Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in light of raising profile and visibility of chemicals and waste on the national level.

- 4) To emphasize the importance of data transmission in accordance with the obligations of the multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste, including the Rotterdam Convention, as there is the close link between the core obligations of the Convention and the obligation to transmit information in accordance with the SDGs and its monitoring framework.
- 5) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- 6) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.
- 7) Emphasize the importance of establishing, in low-income countries, public structures with the specific mission of collecting relevant chemicals information to minimize the risks that may arise from the mismanagement of chemicals and hazardous waste.
- 8) To strengthen the traceability of trade between developed and developing countries to prevent and combat illegal trade of prohibited or strictly regulated chemicals.
- 9) To emphasize the importance of the involvement of the chemical industry in contributing to initiatives on minimizing the risks of exposure of vulnerable populations in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to adverse effects of chemicals.