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PRESS RELEASE

From talk to action: Governments adopt national plans for eliminating 12 extremely hazardous chemicals

Geneva to host Stockholm Convention on POPs from 1 - 5 May

Geneva, 27 April 2006 – Governments participating in next week's annual conference of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) will focus on the practical measures now being taken at the national level to rid the world of some of the most dangerous chemicals ever created.

The Stockholm Convention, which became effective in May 2004, targets 12 hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals that can kill people, damage the nervous and immune systems, cause cancer and reproductive disorders and interfere with normal infant and child development.

"The promises made by the Stockholm Convention must now be realized through specific activities, policies and investments at the national and community levels," said Shafqat Kakakhel, Deputy Executive Director and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Environment Programme, under whose auspices the treaty was negotiated.

"This conference will allow us to examine the first real evidence of how the Convention is leading to actual reductions in POPs," he said.

Mr. Kakakhel called on the governments meeting in Geneva to underline their support for a "full and sufficient replenishment of the Global Environment Facility given its importance for the Stockholm Convention and for other international agreements."

Governments are required to submit a National Implementation Plan (NIP) within two years of joining the Convention. They are using these NIPs to establish their particular priorities and to set out detailed action plans. They will then report every two years on progress towards achieving their Plan's goals.

The first National Implementation Plans have been submitted from a geographically diverse set of countries, including Bolivia, Burundi, Egypt, Japan, Latvia, Moldova, Niue, Romania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Another issue on the conference agenda is the development of a reporting system on the use of and continued need for DDT to combat malarial mosquitoes. While DDT is targeted for eventual elimination, the Convention recognizes that a number of countries will

need to continue using this pesticide for some years in order to protect the health of their citizens.

Other issues on the conference agenda include the strengthening of a global monitoring network to track the levels of POPs in the environment and the effectiveness of the Convention, technical assistance, financial resources, the first review of the financial mechanism, approaches to minimizing releases of dioxins and furans, non-compliance and liability and redress.

The 12 initial POPs covered by the Convention include nine pesticides (aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex and toxaphene); two industrial chemicals (PCBs as well as hexachlorobenzene, also used as a pesticide); and unintentional by-products, most importantly dioxins and furans.

Governments will add more chemicals to this list over the coming years; the first round of five proposed new chemicals is currently undergoing a technical review and will be ready for a final decision in two or three years.

Some 130 countries are expected to participate in the Geneva meeting, which is known formally as the Second Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP 2). Over 50 industry, environmental and community NGOs have also registered to participate.

While the risk level varies from POP to POP, these chemicals all share four properties: they are highly toxic; they are stable and persistent, lasting for years or decades before degrading into less dangerous forms; they evaporate and travel long distances through the air and through water; and they accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife.

Every human in the world carries traces of POPs in his or her body. POPs circulate globally through a process known as the "grasshopper effect". POPs released in one part of the world can, through a repeated process of evaporation and deposit, be transported through the atmosphere to regions far away from the original source.

Fortunately, there are alternatives to POPs. The problem has been that high costs, a lack of public awareness, and the absence of appropriate infrastructure and technology have often prevented their adoption. Solutions must be tailored to the specific properties and uses of each chemical and to each country's climatic and socio-economic conditions.

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