

BRS High-level Segment Highlights: Wednesday, 1 June 2022

Ministers came together to discuss the global challenges posed by hazardous chemicals and waste. The high-level segment of the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions met just prior to the Stockholm+50 meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, which provided a backdrop for high-level commitment to action.

Opening Ceremony

Silvija Nora Kalniņš, President of the tenth meeting of the Stockholm Convention Conference of the Parties (COP10), opened the session on behalf of the Basel Convention and Rotterdam Convention COP Presidents.

Annika Strandhäll, Minister for Climate and the Environment, Sweden, characterized the Stockholm+50 Conference as an opportunity for co-creating a multi-stakeholder approach to accelerate actions that will lead to a net zero emissions, zero pollution, and nature positive world.

Ligia Noronha, UN Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), noted that the many sources of pollution also cause climate change and that pollution is a key driver of biodiversity loss. She called on countries to invoke the “Stockholm spirit,” to support the struggles of all against pollution.

Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, highlighted how the One Health approach can help make agri-food systems more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable to address health and planetary crises. She lamented that “we’re way off track” to meet several Sustainable Development Goals, but welcomed that the Rotterdam Convention helps to reduce the risk of hazardous pesticides, especially for those most vulnerable.

Ministerial Interactive Discussions

Ministers engaged in discussions on how implementing the BRS Conventions can help address the triple planetary crisis (pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss), and enact lifecycle management of chemicals and waste. Ministers also discussed the promotion of new, clean technologies and innovative financing approaches to enhance the implementation of the BRS Conventions.

Triple Planetary Crisis and the BRS Conventions: Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Egypt, moderated.

Vaughn Miller, Minister of Environment, Bahamas, underscored that small island developing states (SIDS) contributed least to the problem, but whose people may become climate refugees. He said his people survived enslavement and colonialism, and are now faced with climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, calling on adequate resources and finance to help fulfill their commitments to global agreements.

Sherry Rehman, Federal Minister for Climate Change, Pakistan, lamented that chemicals and waste issues are often overlooked compared to the attention and funding provided for climate change and biodiversity issues. She cited the value of the

BRS Conventions in guiding the development of national action plans and policies, but questioned if prior informed consent (PIC) procedures consider if the importing country has the capacity to recycle imported wastes.

Bettina Hoffmann, State Secretary, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Germany, recalled Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which initially drew attention to the impact of chemicals on wildlife, and outlined how chemicals also impact the climate. She lamented implementation gaps, including that the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) target (to phase down by 2025 and phase out by 2030) will most likely be missed.

Zakia Khattabi, Minister for Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development, and Green Deal, Belgium, said that the full implementation of the BRS Conventions is fundamental to achieving the vision of “One World, One Health.” She encouraged parties to continue to propose new chemicals for listing in the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions and to listen to the scientific bodies that recommend listing.

Rauf Hajiyev, Deputy Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Azerbaijan, expressed concern that industrial, agricultural and health sectors continue to use chemicals that are dangerous to the environment. He noted the potential for change, including through ecosystem-based approaches.

Terhi Lehtonen, State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment, Finland, underlined the need to urgently step up efforts and characterized the implementation of the BRS Conventions as “crucial” for tackling planetary crises. She encouraged countries to include the sound management of chemicals and wastes in their national development and economic planning.

Aminath Shauna, Minister of Environment, Climate Change, and Technology, Maldives, drew attention to the challenges SIDS face, including plastic wastes littering coastlines and chemical pollution harming coral reefs and ocean life. He reported how the BRS Conventions provide technical guidance and frameworks to help countries manage risks.

Lifecycle Management of Chemicals and Waste: Jan Dusík, Minister of Environment, Czech Republic, moderated.

Nelson Adrián Peña Robaina, Minister of Environment, Uruguay, outlined the pervasive nature of chemicals in our everyday lives, which he stressed requires a lifecycle approach to better understand the chemicals in products and appropriate management. Citing lead-acid batteries as an example, he underscored the need for capacity building and technical support for recycling to avoid the need to export these wastes.

Mehmet Emin Birpınar, Deputy Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, Türkiye, related his country’s success in eliminating stockpiles of persistent organic pollutant (POP) waste. He also relayed national policies to help reduce the amount of imported plastic wastes, especially mixed plastics, to encourage the recycling of domestic plastics.

Kwaku Afriyie, Minister of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation, Ghana, underlined the need for multi-stakeholder processes that include the vulnerable and poor that are disproportionately affected. He underscored that addressing poverty is fundamental to addressing pollution.

Nino Tandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Georgia, highlighted the benefits of inclusive approaches to chemicals and waste policies, citing her country's circular economy strategy. She also relayed the implementation of extended producer responsibility in her country.

Bhupender Yadav, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, suggested the BRS Conventions further synchronize their work to encourage a lifecycle approach and the Basel Convention could focus on fostering a circular economy in some waste streams. He further underlined the need for finance and technological support to implement these plans.

Yutaka Shoda, Vice-Minister for Global Environmental Affairs, Japan, said the BRS Conventions are key to building a recycling-oriented economy, as is stakeholder involvement. He cited the Basel Convention's action on plastics as a catalyst for his country's domestic action on plastics.

Josué Lorca, Minister of People's Power for Ecosocialism, Venezuela, underlined the need for financial and technological support from developed countries to enable developing countries to implement the BRS Conventions. He reported on efforts in Venezuela that involve extended producer responsibility, and multi-stakeholder technical roundtables on recycling and ocean waste.

Mohammed Hassan Abdullahi, Federal Minister of Environment, Nigeria, highlighted medical waste as an example of products that still cause environmental damage if not properly managed. He suggested global standards and environmental and health surveillance programmes to spur the sound management of chemicals and waste.

Beob-jeong Kim, Deputy Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea, noted his country's use of extended producer responsibility and outlined how targets for recycling, and the use of incineration for heat recovery can contribute to creating a circular economy.

Enhancing Implementation through Means of Implementation: Carlos-Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility moderated.

Espen Barth Eide, Minister of Climate and the Environment, Norway, stated that the BRS Conventions have made the world safer, but acknowledged further efforts are needed. He said the private sector is beginning to recognize the need for transparency and called for investment in safe alternatives.

Flavien Joubert, Minister of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment, Seychelles, said support must be long-term and sustained, given the long legacies of chemical and waste pollution. He called for a global notion of extended producer responsibility, given that SIDS are left with waste they did not produce.

Pierre Hele, Minister of Environment, the Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development, Cameroon, highlighted the benefits of the regional centres to assist countries in implementing the BRS Conventions, and called for innovative technologies and financing, particularly to help implement the Stockholm Convention.

Phouvong Luangxaysana, Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Lao People's Democratic Republic, said new finance, technology, and capacity building are crucial, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. He called for financial incentives to support using safer alternatives.

Paul Halucha, Associate Deputy Minister, Environment and Climate Change, Canada, stated no country can manage these risks alone, and called for cooperation among the climate, biodiversity, and chemicals and waste bodies, and a human rights approach.

Orlando Habet, Minister of Government, Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, Belize, related the difficulties SIDS face in managing chemicals they do not produce and noted the support of the regional centres. He called for funding to support the development of safe alternatives.

Zac Goldsmith, Minister for Pacific and the Environment, UK, acknowledged that the poorest are disproportionately affected due to "profligate attitudes" to profit. He highlighted the UK's support, including the Blue Planet Fund.

Siti Nurbaya Bakar, Minister of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia, related lessons learned from private-public partnerships in solid waste management, including the need to provide the private sector with incentives, including tax relief. She stressed the need for law enforcement and raising awareness in the legal community.

Closing Ceremony

Anita Breyer, Director-General for Emission Control, Transport, Safety of Installations, Chemical Safety and Environmental Health, Germany, stressed that the BRS Conventions lay the groundwork for a lifecycle approach, by regulating substances, products, and wastes. She said that discussions for the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 look to build on this approach. She looked forward to a world where chemicals are safe and sustainable by design.

Marcos Orellana, UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, called for the BRS Conventions to embrace the principles of transparency, participation, and accountability to secure the human right to a non-toxic environment. He noted that illegal traffic of wastes continues, and called on the Rotterdam Convention delegates to listen to its scientific subsidiary body.

Rolph Payet, BRS Executive Secretary, highlighted key messages from the high-level segment. These included:

- a call to action on PCBs to meet the 2025 and 2030 targets;
- the need for cooperation among the climate, biodiversity, and chemicals and waste treaties, the respective science-policy interfaces, and funding sources;
- global momentum toward a circular economy, and viewing waste as an input and economic opportunity;
- the effectiveness of regional and subnational cooperation;
- the need to understand impacts on the environment and value chains; and
- the fundamental importance of support to developing countries to manage the risks posed by hazardous chemicals and waste and the need to mobilize support from all sources, including the private sector.

Closing the session, Katrin Schneeberger, State Secretary and Director, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland, called on parties to proactively address electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) and to list the chemicals proposed under the Rotterdam Convention. She said the awareness and momentum raised at this high-level segment of the interconnections within the triple planetary crisis would strengthen support for the implementation of the BRS Conventions.

Stockholm COP President Kalniņš adjourned the meeting, which will reconvene in Geneva on Monday, 6 June.

In the Corridors

It's a rare opportunity when ministers gather, devoting their time and attention to global environmental problems. The Stockholm+50 conference afforded such an opening, and the BRS Conventions seized it. Unlike climate change and biodiversity loss, the chemical and waste pollution element of the triple planetary crisis traditionally receives less political attention and, importantly, funding. Over 80 ministers provided that political attention in Stockholm. Their messages will echo into the TripleCOPs, because, as Stockholm COP President Kalniņš said, negotiators work best when "ministers have their back."

Ministers sent messages that could have a real impact on the TripleCOP negotiations. There were several mentions of the looming, and potentially out of reach, goal to phase down and phase out PCBs by 2025 and 2030, respectively. There was a suggestion to discuss concrete strategies at the TripleCOP to rid the world of these POPs. While attention often fell on the plastic waste crisis, e-waste also featured, including the proposal to make some e-waste subject to the Basel Convention's PIC procedure. There were also calls to listen to science mixed in with more pointed references to the Rotterdam Convention's repeated failure to list some chemicals recommended by its Chemical Review Committee.