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**Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention
on the Control of Transboundary Movements of
Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal**
Seventh meeting
Geneva, 25-29 October 2004
Item 8 of the provisional agenda*

Partnership for meeting the global waste challenge

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Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. By its decision III/14, the Open-ended Working Group recommended that the theme for the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties should be “Partnership for meeting the global waste challenge”.
2. As a follow-up to the Working Group’s recommendation and further to consultations with the members of the expanded Bureau, the President of the Conference of the Parties requested the Secretariat to prepare the elements of a paper reflecting the theme of the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties for submission to the Bureau.
3. At its fourth meeting, on 27 and 28 September 2004, the expanded Bureau considered how to structure and facilitate the interactive discussion proposed to take place during the high-level segment of the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

II. Implementation

4. A draft of the note from the President was prepared by the Secretariat and considered by the expanded Bureau at its fourth meeting on 27 and 28 September 2004. With some minor amendments, the expanded Bureau recommended that the note from the President be submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting as a contribution to the interactive discussion that is proposed to take place during the high-level segment of the Conference. The note from the President is contained in the annex to the present note.

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5. The expanded Bureau considered that, in addition to the note from the President, it would be useful to circulate, in advance, to Parties and others a preliminary draft paper that could be used during the high-level segment as a base for a ministerial statement or for possible elements for a decision. A copy of this additional paper is contained in document UNEP/CHW.7/27/Add.1.

III. Proposed action

6. The Conference may wish to consider the note from the President as well as the proposed ministerial statement or possible elements for a decision as background documents to orient and facilitate discussions during the high-level segment of the Conference.

Annex

Building partnerships to meet the global waste challenge

Note from the President in consultation with the expanded Bureau

I. Success and challenge

1. The 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal came into force in May 1992 and now has 163 Parties. In the first decade of its operation, the Basel Convention has succeeded in establishing an effective global regime for regulating transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes. It has contributed to raising the public profile of this critical issue, forged strong regional initiatives to facilitate national implementation, developing technical annexes and guidelines for the environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes. These are important achievements that deserve recognition.

2. Despite the progress to date, Parties to the Basel Convention still face enormous challenges in reducing the quantity of hazardous wastes, in minimizing their generation and in managing the residual amounts in a way to protect human health and the environment. Over 100 million tons of hazardous wastes are reported annually under article 13 of the Convention, the generation of which is growing steadily. The practical experience gathered during our first decade has demonstrated that the issues concerning the transboundary movements of hazardous wastes cannot be resolved in isolation, without concerted actions by Parties to promote the environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes over their entire life-cycle.

3. A framework for life-cycle management of hazardous and other wastes has been set by the 1999 Basel Ministerial Declaration on Environmentally Sound Management, adopted at the tenth anniversary of the Convention, as the focus of action in the second decade of operation. The ensuing Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the Basel Convention (2002–2010) identified priority programme activities for preventing, minimizing, recycling, recovering and disposing of hazardous and other wastes in an environmentally sound manner and for promoting capacity building and using cleaner technologies. The Plan emphasizes the need to prioritize action and maintain momentum through 2005–2010, in particular through the involvement of key partners.

4. The importance of action at source is the most effective means of protecting our environment from the generation of waste, their mismanagement, eliminating costly waste disposal, reducing transboundary movements and promoting sustainable development. It is not only a sound environmental strategy, it is good for business. It contributes to the efficiency and cost effectiveness of industry operations. The twin benefits of waste reduction – environmental and economic – are recognized as the key to any Government's sustainable development policy.

5. Experience with the Basel Convention suggests that today's global waste challenge is shaped in large part by several interrelated issues, namely:

(a) *The rapid accumulation of hazardous wastes and lack of environmentally sound management in urban settlements represent growing concerns for human health and the environment.* The problem is particularly severe in many developing countries, which often lack the capacity to manage the resulting rise in wastes and pollution. Emission from improperly designed or monitored landfills, from incinerators and the uncontrolled accumulation of solid wastes mixed with hazardous materials, as well as stockpiles of obsolete pesticides and other hazardous wastes, may have acute or long-lasting health effects such as lead poisoning, asbestos related diseases, food poisoning and vector-borne diseases; and provoke environmental damages such as in areas contaminated with PCBs, PAHs, spilled petroleum products and heavy metals;

(b) *The poor, including children, are particularly vulnerable.* Poor people are frequently exposed to wastes, air pollutants such as asbestos, dioxins and fine particles, and soils and water contaminated with heavy metals and other poisons. Such exposures often lead to chronic or acute diseases, resulting in expensive demands on under-resourced national health systems. Infections, diseases, poisoning and respiratory illnesses are common.

(c) *The sheer volume of wastes and the lack of segregation of hazardous from non-hazardous wastes is overwhelming national capacities to cope.* Global population growth, industrialization and increasing consumption are resulting in increasing levels of wastes. More and more hazardous wastes are being found intermingled with municipal and household wastes. Many countries do not have effective systems in place to manage this increasingly complex waste stream. Such hazardous wastes are sent for disposal in municipal landfills or dumpsites;

(d) *The siting of new facilities for hazardous waste disposal is becoming difficult and expensive.* This reflects not only a lack of space in some areas but also what might be termed the “not-in-my-backyard” syndrome;

(e) *End-of-life equipment is becoming the fastest growing waste stream worldwide.* The mass consumption of electronic and other equipment reaching the end of its useful life and its rapid obsolescence are generating huge amounts of wastes containing hazardous materials and their massive export to developing countries not prepared to receive them;

6. The importance of the environmentally sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes was confirmed in 2002 by the Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit for Sustainable Development. The Plan addresses the sound management of hazardous wastes and promotes the strengthening of coordination and cooperation between the chemicals and hazardous wastes regime. The Plan also emphasizes waste minimization. It formulates targets for chemicals to be used and produced by 2020 in a way that does not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment. Another target is to halve the number of people without access to safe sanitation and drinking water by 2015; as pointed out in the Plan, the contamination of water by untreated sewage, inadequate sanitation, heavy metals and silt from erosion, fertilizers, pesticides, mining tailings and industrial wastes threatens access to drinkable water.

7. Several other intergovernmental forums, such as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), have also recognized the links between hazardous wastes management and human health, the environment and development. At the summit in Sea Island, United States of America, in 2003, the G-8 group of countries adopted its “Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle” – or “3R” – initiative. This initiative is meant to encourage the more efficient use of resources and materials and will be formally launched at a ministerial conference in the spring 2005, hosted by the Government of Japan, in cooperation with relevant international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNEP and the Basel Convention. Meanwhile, the UNEP Governing Council has launched the strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM). Among other things, SAICM calls for the strengthening of synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. In this way it fully recognizes the importance of the life-cycle approach to chemicals and hazardous wastes management.

8. The Basel Convention is leading action on the environmentally safe management of hazardous and other wastes at the international level. It has generated a range of projects, guidelines, mechanisms and strategies, which identify waste prevention and minimization as priorities for action. These contributions to tackling the global waste challenge under the framework of the Strategic Plan include:

- (a) Information on a global database and awareness-raising;
- (b) Capacity-building through the 13 Basel Convention regional centres;
- (c) Projects and technical guidelines on environmentally safe management;
- (d) Partnership initiatives with Parties, industry, environmental non-governmental organizations and local governments.

9. As emphasized by the Strategic Plan, however, solving the hazardous wastes problem will also require cooperation and partnership at all levels between countries, public authorities, international organizations, the industry sector, environmental non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. North-South cooperation based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, South-South and public-private coalitions are the key elements of partnership for meeting the global waste challenge. Partnership programmes in line with World

Summit on Sustainable Development type II partnerships will strengthen the technical base of the Basel Convention and create synergies.

10. Partnerships can also contribute to ensuring adequate financial resources. Governments and international institutions must respond to a lengthy list of priorities, and hazardous wastes management has not always successfully competed with these other priorities for funding. Ensuring the environmentally safe management of hazardous and other wastes will require the mobilization of adequate financial resources. Partnerships with public authorities, industry and non-governmental organizations can help to channel funding towards hazardous wastes management.

II. Policy direction

11. Ultimately, the key challenges are to manage wastes in a way that protects human health and the environment, through measures applied to the entire waste cycle, from reducing the production of wastes, to promoting recovery, recycling and reuse and ensuring that wastes are disposed of with environmentally sound methods and technologies. The pursuit of sustainable development will require the decoupling of waste generation from economic growth. To make more rapid progress in this direction, maintaining the momentum of the implementation of the Strategic Plan through the years 2005–2010, the Basel Convention, together with its key partners and stakeholders, could focus on the key policy areas sketched out in the following sections.

A. Hazardous waste minimization

12. **Develop reliable worldwide statistics on hazardous and other waste generation:** Work is already under way on the further development of the reporting database, based on national reporting from Parties. With the support of the UNEP Global Resources Information Database at Arendal (GRID-Arendal), the Basel Convention could improve the statistical basis of the Convention, with a focus on generating comprehensive data from a variety of sources and identifying trends in waste generation and minimization. Work on waste prevention indicators also needs to be accelerated. This information will provide the basis for developing improved policies to deal with such wastes.

13. **Establish voluntary goals for minimizing the generation of hazardous wastes:** Parties could consider establishing voluntary, non-binding goals for reducing the quantity and the degree of hazard of wastes generated by industries and consumers, and develop instruments and incentive to implement such national efforts. Countries setting up their own voluntary targets to measure the phasing out of particular hazardous substances such as arsenic, cadmium, lead or mercury in products and processes could agree to report to the Conference of the Parties and encourage industries to look into replacements with less harmful substances.

14. **Promote transfer and application of low-waste and cleaner production technologies through the Basel Convention regional centres:** Working with UNEP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and their national cleaner production centres as well as with industries, the Basel Convention regional centres could be a depository of information and tools necessary to implement hazardous waste reduction and minimization practices and provide access for all countries, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to such information and tools, including economic instruments.

B. Life-cycle approach to chemicals and hazardous waste management

15. **Implement the environmentally safe management of persistent organic pollutant (POPs) wastes in harmony with the requirements of the Basel Convention and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants:** Countries party to the two conventions could participate in a review and update of inventories of POPs to ensure that such inventories include POPs wastes in the development of national implementation plans for the reduction or elimination of POPs. This could be done by providing information on the environmentally safe management of POPs wastes. The Parties of the Basel Convention, working with the Stockholm Convention Parties and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), could review national capacity needs to deal with POPs wastes in an environmentally sound manner, enhance national capacity to comply with relevant provisions of the two conventions and to

implement the technical guidelines on POPs wastes. The Basel Convention regional centres could play a central role in such a review.

16. **Develop a comprehensive approach to reduce health and environmental impacts from the inorganic content of wastes:** Together, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions address the entire life-cycle of hazardous chemicals. Various initiatives have already been undertaken to ensure that the three conventions support one another at the global, regional and national levels. UNEP, for example, has facilitated five regional and subregional workshops on the coordinated national implementation of the three conventions. Further initiatives should be encouraged at the national, subregional and regional levels and the Basel Convention should actively support the SAICM process initiated by the UNEP Governing Council.

17. In addition to tackling POPs, there is a need to look holistically at certain heavy metals, such as lead, cadmium and mercury, which are transported across national boundaries resulting in potential damage to the environment, having harmful effects on human health and generating economic losses. Combustion and industrial processes are the predominant human-caused sources of emissions of heavy metals into the atmosphere. Convergent policies to improve industrial processes and hazardous waste management practices together with the prevention and minimization of emissions and restrictions on certain uses of lead, cadmium or mercury will lead to the development of best available techniques to reduce impacts on health and the environment.

C. Integrated waste management

18. **Develop pilot projects in selected urban areas to improve the separate collection and treatment of hazardous wastes from municipal waste streams, with special emphasis on the segregation and safe disposal of biomedical and health-care wastes:** Development of integrated policies and plans for waste management in which local governments are proactively engaged will enable the key generators of municipal solid wastes (towns and villages) and hazardous wastes (industry, hospitals, research institutes and workshops) to work together to develop and implement comprehensive and effective solutions. This would involve the separate collection of biomedical and health-care wastes, household wastes, end-of-life electrical and electronic equipments, used batteries, used lead-acid batteries, used oils from vehicles, waste chemicals such as solvents, used pharmaceuticals and household pesticides.

19. In turn, such upstream activity will greatly ease the downstream measures of recycling, recovery and disposal, and will contribute to diverting hazardous wastes away from landfills. In addition, recycling or recovery of some of the segregated materials, such as plastics and metals, will provide economic incentives. Upstream measures will also reduce the input of nutrients from municipal, industrial, agricultural and other sources into water bodies with their subsequent adverse effects on the environment. Major partners would include UNEP, the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the World Bank and regional development banks.

20. **Encourage non-governmental organization initiatives to support the environmentally safe management of hazardous and other wastes at the local level:** Enhanced partnerships with civil society in support of environmentally sound management, through integrated waste management activities, would complement government efforts and the Basel Convention regional centre programmes. It could also lead to regional cooperation among non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations can become partner organizations, focusing on efforts to enhance capacity-building for local communities in the area of environmentally safe management.

21. Non-governmental organizations could play an active role, in cooperation with the Basel Convention regional centres, in the domains of information exchange on best available practices, on new and proven environmentally sound technologies, on waste minimization and on training schemes. Non-governmental organizations could also assist in producing outreach materials on environmentally safe management and the Basel Convention, including brochures, newsletters and video programmes that could be used during conferences or workshops which they organize or in which they participate.

22. **Parties, with the support of the Basel Convention regional centres, could identify lacunae in dealing with hazardous waste as part of programmes for municipal wastes management and could provide options on ways of remedying the situation:** Specific activities could include developing approval or certification procedures for facilities committed to environmentally safe management, through the promotion of public and private partnership. Such pilot projects could be carried out in partnership with local governments and industry. Support from United Nations bodies and the World Bank would be an asset.

D. Regional approach

23. **Develop regional schemes for the environmentally sound collection, recycling, recovery and disposal of e-wastes:** The establishment or upgrading of regional capacity for the environmentally sound recycling, recovery or disposal of waste and hazardous wastes represents an environmentally sound and economic efficient option for certain wastes streams. Such an undertaking is already being initiated for the environmentally sound recovery of used lead-acid batteries in the Caribbean and Central America. This approach enables economies of scale, makes the export and import of the specific wastes stream transparent and facilitates enforcement. The short life of electronic equipment leads to mountains of wastes. Electronic equipment contains hazardous substances such as lead, arsenic, cadmium or mercury. Large quantities of e-wastes are exported to developing countries not prepared to deal with such fast growing quantities of wastes. In addition, imported e-wastes can be recycled or handled in poorly managed facilities leading to significant health risks and environmental contamination.

24. Countries within a specific region or subregion could get together in a proactive manner to protect themselves from the rising tide of imported e-wastes. This would require active collaboration among countries and between Governments and industries or businesses. The purpose of a regional approach would be to limit the unwanted import of e-wastes and reduce their undesirable impacts on health and the environment by agreeing on a level playing field for the sound management of these wastes and in providing incentives to industry to improve the recycling, recovery and disposal of e-wastes generated domestically or imported.

25. The countries in a region could seek the assistance of a Basel Convention regional centre to act as an information clearing-house on environmental and health requirements, and on any other measures taken by Governments to minimize the effects of the massive import of e-wastes. Such regional schemes could be developed through stakeholders' consultations including Governments and industry, together with UNEP, UNESCO, the United Nations University, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and environmental non-governmental organizations. The Basel Convention regional centres could facilitate such endeavours.

26. **Develop early action for building countries' capacity for the environmentally sound management of PCB wastes to meet the objectives of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions:** A regional approach to assist Parties to reduce and eliminate releases of PCBs in the atmosphere, soil, sediment, freshwater aquifers, inland and marine waters through the environmentally sound management will make use of regional entities, like the BCRCs and networks and would be country driven. Such regional approach would consider the ongoing work done on the National Implementation Plans under the Stockholm Convention. It will take into consideration economies of scale and national priorities. The regional approach would catalyze and support capacity building for early action on the environmentally sound management of PCB wastes.

III. Resources

27. The Basel Convention is both an underutilized and under-resourced instrument in this challenge.: Recognizing this, the Parties to the Convention are finalizing a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy with a view to better articulating the great potential of the Basel Convention and its focus on the environmentally safe management of hazardous waste, as an important partner in key aspects of the global waste challenge. *Mobilizing Resources for a Cleaner Future* attempts initially to identify those areas in which real synergies can provide more effective and efficient approaches to the challenge. As part of the implementation of the resource mobilization strategy, the Secretariat is developing a preliminary proposal on the joint implementation of the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam conventions. As indicated in *Mobilizing Resources for a Cleaner Future*, technical and financial resource mobilization will require the

development of partnerships with a wide range of potential donors and raising awareness of practical links between the environmentally safe management of hazardous wastes and other international agendas.

IV. Conclusion

28. The present paper has discussed the important role that the Convention can play in building partnership for meeting the global waste challenge. It has indicated some policy direction that Parties may find useful.

29. To meet the health and environmental challenges posed by hazardous waste, there is a need to ensure the effective implementation of the Basel Convention, to develop coherent policies that lead to more effective and efficient flow of technical and financial resources that support waste and hazardous waste management and to build public and private partnerships as means of enhancing hazardous waste minimization and capacity-building.

30. It has been recognized that the environmentally safe management approach under the Basel Convention provides a framework for countries to improve the management of both domestically generated and imported hazardous wastes. It also provides a realm of opportunities – when supported by sound and coherent policies – for them to contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction, and helps ensure a level playing field for those with economic interests to protect.
