

The Third Session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS or Forum) met in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, from 15 - 20 October 2000. Eighty-three governments, ten intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and twelve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the meeting. A summary of outcomes is presented below. A copy of the full meeting report, including a list of participants, can be obtained from the IFCS secretariat.

The theme of Forum III, *In Partnership for Global Chemical Safety*, was taken up on the opening day by a panel of representatives from the various IFCS groups: governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Panelists stressed the importance of commitment and involvement by *all* stakeholders, and the need for mutual trust and respect, for progress to be made in solving human health and environment problems. Encouraging examples of partnerships in action were given from all perspectives.

Continuing with this theme, the President's Analysis of Progress report highlighted the commitment of the stakeholders to work together to improve the management of toxic chemicals. It noted both the progress that had been made, and the need for a more complete sharing of information between all IFCS partners to increase the effectiveness of future work.

Forum III conducted a full review of the IFCS. In view of the fact that the Forum has undergone a gradual evolution as it has adapted its procedures to improve the organization of its work to better meet the needs of its participants, certain changes were proposed and accepted. These included: discontinuation of the Intersessional Group; election of five Vice-Presidents, one from each region, and an independent President; and provision for the important role of National Focal Points.

Priorities for Action beyond 2000

Forum III revised and updated the Priorities for Action that had been adopted by the Forum in 1994. The revised Priorities include the potential to: improve chemical safety at all levels; prevent or reduce adverse health and environment effects of chemicals throughout their life-cycle; be suitable for immediate implementation by most countries; use existing tools for rapid implementation. All IFCS partners - countries, international organizations, industry, labour unions, public interest groups - are called upon to actively participate in realizing these Priorities within a defined time-frame.

The Bahia Declaration

Perhaps the single most important document to issue from Forum III was the Bahia Declaration, a commitment by IFCS participants to strengthen efforts and build partnerships to accomplish specific targets during the next decade. Key goals are those specified in the Priorities for Action. The Declaration recognizes the importance of providing technical and financial assistance and technology transfer to enable accomplishment of IFCS priorities and recommits to challenges set out in Chapter 19, Agenda 21.

Summary of the Outcomes of Agenda Topics

Prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products

The global concern surrounding this topic was ascertained and two recommendations were adopted: that the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC POs) establish a working group to assess the situation, and consequently make recommendations to Forum IV on ways to deal with it; that governments elaborate their national strategies for dealing with this problem and support initiatives aimed at harmonizing Custom Systems Codes for certain chemicals.

Barriers to information exchange for the sound management of chemicals

It was agreed that an effective communications network is essential for information exchange, and recommended that a global effort be undertaken to provide internet access to all chemicals management focal points in governments. IFCS partners were asked to assume specific responsibilities for ensuring the success of this project.

Information exchange for chemical production decision-making

It was agreed that a mechanism providing up-to-date information to decision makers concerning design of new chemicals-production facilities was needed. To this end, IOMC POs were asked to develop a mechanism for transferring the body of knowledge from developed countries; the chemicals industry was requested to fully commit to providing advance notification on new or expanded production facilities, including any anticipated health or environmental hazards, and to recommend preventive measures. IFCS National Focal Points were asked to take leadership roles to help place the available information into the hands of the decision makers.

Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) / Emission Inventories

The role of PRTR/emission inventories as effective tools for environmental management was re-confirmed. Countries were urged to continue the development

and implementation of these inventories, involving all affected and interested parties, and establish links to reporting requirements under international agreements; industry was asked to report to Forum IV on progress achieved in implementation of ICCA policy and voluntary disclosures.

Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building

The development of an Information Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals within the framework of the IFCS was endorsed. The network will be coordinated with work ongoing and planned in other fora. As outlined in the provisionally adopted Terms of Reference, countries and organizations were asked to provide support for initiating the start-up phase, to designate points of contact for the network. Countries, international organizations, industry, labour unions, public interest groups and the academia are requested to actively participate in the network by 2003.

Awareness Raising

The need for high-level political awareness and support in governments and international development agencies was acknowledged. Ways to achieve this included: linking chemicals management to other health and environment issues; implementing national committees; establishing a single contact point for chemicals management in donor countries; enhancing coordination of capacity building programmes; and providing support to strengthen public interest NGOs active in chemical safety. IFCS highlighted worker safety as an on-going focus for its activities and urged that cooperation between IFCS and ILO be strengthened.

Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS)

The Forum welcomed the progress made towards making the GHS ideal a reality. All countries are encouraged to implement the GHS as soon as possible, with a goal to have the system fully operational by 2008. It was agreed that the GHS guidance document must meet the needs of the various user groups and be supported by other tools, such as training packages available on the Internet and in other, more traditional forms. The need for appropriate and targeted assistance for certain countries was also noted. UNITAR and ILO have agreed to take the lead in assisting countries to prepare for implementation.

Future Meetings

Forum IV: 2003, Thailand

Forum V: 2005 or 2006, Hungary

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Overview of Outcomes