

## PRESS ADVISORY

### 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the Basel Convention

**Hazardous waste is threatening human health and the environment globally. Much of it is being exported to other countries, often to developing nations.**

A newly published report card by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention states that in 2006, 101 countries exported a total of 11.252.382 metric tons of hazardous and other wastes. Unknown additional amounts were and continue to be exported illegally. Accidents, spills and dumping release unknown quantities of toxic substances into the environment.

One of the fastest growing waste streams is e-waste such as computers, television sets and mobile cell phones. The threat from e-waste is real both in our local waste dumps and across borders. When e-waste crosses borders illegally and is indiscriminately dumped, or dismantled in unsound conditions, serious damage to human health and pollution of water, air and soil is often the result.

Electronic waste is a direct consequence of our ongoing desire to communicate from anywhere, connect more often and compute from home, office or on the road. Add an increasing demand for electronic gaming, higher definition televisions or smart cars and the result is a catastrophic accumulation of e-waste, now and into the future. An ongoing effort to address this exponentially growing problem is essential.

In 1989, under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was adopted. It aims to control the transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes by applying the “Prior Informed Consent” procedure. According to this procedure, only shipments between consenting countries are legal and all shipments made without or not in accordance with such consent are illegal. The Convention also adopted measures which require countries to ensure that hazardous and other wastes are managed and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner, including within their boundaries. To this end, countries are required to prevent and minimize the generation of wastes at source, to treat and dispose of wastes as close as possible to their place of generation, to minimize the quantities of waste moved across borders and to ensure the availability of adequate disposal facilities for the environmentally sound management of wastes.

Fortunately, there have been successes. For instance, the Convention has built partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations. One such partnership is The Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative, a partnership with the major mobile phone companies and service providers. In 2008 it concluded its work with the production of guidelines for the management of used and obsolete mobile phones. Also in 2008, the Convention launched the Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment, a multi-stakeholder partnership that provides a forum for governments, industry, non-governmental organisations and academia to jointly tackle the environmentally sound management, refurbishment, recycling and disposal of used and end-of-life computing equipment.

But many countries still lack the capacity to implement the Convention. As a result, illegal traffic in hazardous waste is still a reality. This is illustrated by incidents such as the dumping of hazardous wastes in Côte d’Ivoire in 2006, or the numerous reported cases of illegally exported e-waste to countries in Africa and Asia.

Twenty years later, the Basel Convention has clearly lost none of its relevance. The need for better implementing capacity at country level is critical. Recognizing this, Ministers renewed their commitment to the Convention at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Bali in 2008, by adopting the Bali Declaration on Waste Management for Human Health and Livelihood. The Declaration specifically recognizes the implementation of the Basel Convention as an essential component of attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

### 17 November 2009 event in Basel

To mark its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Basel Convention is launching the Basel Waste Solutions Circle, a global initiative to promote protection of human health and livelihood through environmentally sound management world-wide. The Circle will be launched during an event in Basel on 17 November 2009 featuring a televised panel discussion of the initiative's first concrete projects with the Ministers responsible for environmental matters of Kenya, Indonesia, Colombia and Switzerland. This event is jointly organized by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention and the Canton of Basel-City with the generous support of the Swiss Government.

Media are invited to attend the taping of the event or request interviews with panel members.

The following Ministers will be part of this high-level panel:

H.E. Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, Federal Councillor (Switzerland)  
H.E. John N. Michuki, Honourable Minister for Environment and Mineral Resources (Kenya)  
H.E. Prof. Dr. Gusti Muhammad Hatta, Minister of Environment (Indonesia)  
H.E. Mr. Carlos Costa Posada, Minister of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development (Colombia)

### 13 November 2009 press conference in Geneva

Four days prior to the 17 November 2009 Basel event, a press conference will be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 13 November 2009 at 11:30 in Salle III, Building C. The Ambassadors of Kenya, Indonesia, Colombia and Switzerland, together with the Executive Secretary of the Basel Convention will be present and available.

The following will be present at the 13 November news conference at the Palais:

H.E. Mr. Philip Richard Owade, Ambassador / Chargé d'Affaires (Kenya)  
H.E. Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Ambassador (Indonesia)  
H.E. Mr. Angelino Garzón, Ambassador (Colombia)  
H.E. Mr. Dante Martinelli, Ambassador (Switzerland)  
Ms. Katharina Kummer Peiry, Executive Secretary (Secretariat of the Basel Convention, Switzerland)

### About the Basel Convention:

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of hazardous wastes and their Disposal was adopted in 1989 and it came into force in 1992. It is the most comprehensive global environmental agreement on hazardous and other wastes. With 172 Parties, it has nearly universal membership. The Convention aims to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation, management, transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous and other wastes.

The Basel Convention obliges its Parties to ensure that hazardous and other wastes are managed and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. The Convention covers toxic, poisonous, explosive, corrosive, flammable, ecotoxic and infectious wastes. Parties also have an obligation to minimize the quantities that are transported to treat and dispose of wastes as close as possible to their place of generation and to prevent or minimize the generation of wastes at source.

The Basel Convention has 14 Basel Convention Regional and Coordinating Centres in the following locations: Argentina, China, Egypt, El Salvador, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovak Republic, South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (Samoa), South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. They deliver training and technology transfer for the implementation of the Convention.

### For more information, please contact:

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