

Bamako Convention: Preventing Africa from becoming a dumping ground for toxic wastes

- In August 2006, the cargo ship *Probo Koala* discharged 500 tons of toxic waste in Abidjan killing 17 people and poisoning thousands more.
- In 1988 thousands of barrels of hazardous waste disguised as building materials were discovered in the village of Koko, Nigeria. Several barrels were unsealed causing leakage and serious health effects to the residents.

Nairobi, 30 January 2018 – African nations have long been at the center of incidents involving hazardous waste dumping. From the leaking barrels of toxic waste in Koko, Nigeria in 1988 and the Probo Koala scandal in Cote d'Ivoire in 2006, to the current piles of e-waste threatening the health of West African communities; the continent continues to be disproportionately affected by the dumping of harmful chemical materials.

In an effort to prevent incidents such as 'Koko' and 'Probo Koala' from happening again, and to reinforce existing international treaties surrounding the shipment and disposal of hazardous waste – as established in the Basel Convention and Bamako Convention – African States will come together for the second Conference of the Parties (COP2) to the Bamako Convention.

The conference will be held from 30 January to 01 February 2018 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. While pursuing the objectives of the Convention, COP 2 will be a platform to discuss ways and means of ensuring that the continent rids itself of hazardous wastes and contribute to the achievement of a pollution-free planet.

"We have a collective responsibility to safeguard communities from the environmental and health consequences of hazardous waste dumping," said Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director of UN Environment. "The creation of regional Public-Private Partnerships could lead to the creation of adequate facilities to manage hazardous waste internally generated in Africa. Previous experiences have led us to establish these international treaties around chemical waste, and together we must ensure they continue to be adhered to."

The Basel Convention, established in 1989, prevents the shipment and disposal of hazardous waste from industrial to developing countries. This international treaty establishes a procedure of strict requirements and consents of any transboundary movement of hazardous waste.

To complement the Basel Convention, African Nations established the Bamako Convention in 1991. The Convention, which came into force in 1998, is aimed at protecting the health of populations and the environment of African countries through a ban on the import of all hazardous and radioactive wastes. It also prohibits the dumping or incineration of hazardous wastes in oceans and inland waters, and promotes the minimization and control of trans-boundary

movements of hazardous wastes within the African continent. The Convention also aims to improve and ensure ecologically rational management and handling of hazardous waste within Africa, as well as the cooperation between African nations.

“It is expected that at COP-2 of the Bamako Convention, Parties will reaffirm their engagement for an effective implementation of the Convention including establishing synergies with other international treaties,” said Julliette Biao Koudenoukpo, Regional Director and UN Environment Representative in Africa.

“Parties are also expected to identify mechanisms and financial resources to implement the Convention,” she added.

The first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) to the Convention took place from 24 to 26 June 2013 in Bamako Mali. One of the outcomes of this Conference is a declaration by African Ministers of Environment in which they state their determination “to prevent Africa from becoming a dumping ground for toxic wastes through an effective implementation of the Bamako Convention”. The declaration further states that “the import of hazardous waste into Africa is a crime against humanity” and commit “to prompt action to overcome barriers to effective management and minimization of waste in Africa through increased knowledge on waste scenarios in order to prevent harm to health and environment.”

For more information on COP-2, please visit:

<https://www.unenvironment.org/events/conference/second-conference-parties-bamako-convention>

Note to editors:

Probo Koala Incident: In 2006, a Panama-registered cargo tanker, chartered by Trafigura, a commodities trading multinational, dumped over 500 cubic meters of highly toxic waste in Abidjan, killing 17 people and poisoning thousands.

Koko, Nigeria incident: In 1988, Italian businessmen illegally dumped over 2000 drums, sacks, and containers full of hazardous wastes in a small fishing village in southern Nigeria. The waste was claimed by the dealer to be fertilizers that would help poor farmers, but instead it turned into a nightmare. Few months later the containers started leaking causing stomach upset, headache, failing sight and death to the local community. The area around the dumpsite was rendered inhabitable and 500 residents were evacuated. People in the Koko village still remember this accident as ‘*drums of death*’.

About the Bamako Convention:

The Bamako Convention was negotiated by twelve nations of the Organization of African Unity at Bamako, Mali in January 1991, and came into force in 1998. It prohibits the import to Africa and ocean and inland water dumping or incineration of hazardous wastes; establishes the precautionary principle; and provides for the sound management of these wastes within the continent.

About UN Environment:

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