WHO Opening remarks

Second meeting of the ad-hoc open ended working group developing proposals a science-policy panel to further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution

Distinguished delegates, on behalf of the World Health Organization, thank you for the opportunity to give some brief opening remarks at this second meeting of the Open-ended Working Group to develop proposals for a science-policy panel to further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

Known avoidable environmental risks to health cause at least 13.7 million deaths every year and account for about one quarter of the global burden of disease. More effort, higher priority and greater innovation are needed to prevent these sizable impacts and address the gaps in capacity and specific concerns of countries in different stages of development.

We believe that the proposed panel can make a real difference by tackling some of the broader interdisciplinary questions such as how to speed-up implementation of evidence-based solutions at the country level. A strategic approach that adds value and avoids duplication of existing processes should be sought.

WHO is a specialized UN agency mandated for leading on global public health issues. Our work encompasses as wide range of science-policy activities, relevant to the proposed panel including

- establishing evidence-based scientific guidelines for air quality, drinking-water quality and chemicals of key public health concern,
- carrying out chemical risk assessments, developing and harmonizing assessment methodologies and guidance materials that can be used by countries to protect health;
- preparing recommendations, procedures and protocols to establish the scientific basis for the conduct of health surveillance and biomonitoring of priority chemicals
• synthesizing emerging science and evidence, such as updating the *State of the science of endocrine disrupters 2012*, and addressing cross-cutting issues such as microplastics in drinking water and hazardous chemicals used in health care

WHO's work is underpinned by high standards of transparency and integrity, with strict and well-established processes, particularly those for identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest of experts.

We have already started a process of engagement and outreach to our constituents about the important work that is taking place this week and the proposals being developed. We are committed to coordinating our work and value our working relations with UNEP and other members of the Inter-Organizational Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC).

We have been requested by the World Health Assembly to report on possible options for the role of WHO in the proposed panel at the upcoming meeting of the Assembly in May 2024.

The documents available for this week would suggest that the thinking on this is still at a relatively early stage and we would encourage you to coordinate with your health ministry colleagues ahead of time including at the Executive Board Meeting in January 2024. This is essential so that appropriate provisions can be made in the proposals for the panel and in the arrangements for its adoption by the proposed intergovernmental meeting.

We are happy to be participating in the discussions this week and remain committed to continued engagement in the future. On behalf of WHO, I wish the meeting every success.