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**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/8 on sound
management of chemicals and waste**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. In its resolution 4/8 on sound management of chemicals and waste, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP, subject to the availability of resources and, where appropriate, in cooperation with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, to (a) step up technical and capacity-building assistance to Member States to meet the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as soon as possible; (b) strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication of actions undertaken by member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals; (c) enhance the support provided to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management in preparation for the fifth meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management; (d) synthesize the analysis of best practice in sustainable chemistry into manuals on green chemistry and sustainable chemistry; (e) follow trends in the design, production, use and release of chemicals and the generation of waste in order to identify issues of concern for future editions of the *Global Chemicals Outlook* and the *Global Waste Management Outlook*; (f) prepare a report on matters in which emerging evidence indicates a risk to human health and the environment; (g) prepare an assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level; (h) provide technical advice, policy support and capacity-building assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition; and further encourage industry and private-sector involvement in the sound management of chemicals and waste; and (i) submit a progress report on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report contains an update on progress in the implementation of resolution 4/8, highlighting the activities undertaken under the 2019–2021 programme of work, mainly covered by the chemicals, waste and air quality subprogramme.

* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

** UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1.

I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/8

A. Institutional strengthening and capacity-building

3. Under resolution 1/5, the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted the terms of reference for the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level to enhance the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. The objective of the Special Programme is to support country-driven institutional strengthening at the national level, in the context of an integrated approach to address the financing of the sound management of chemicals and wastes, taking into account the national development strategies, plans and priorities of each country, to increase sustainable public institutional capacity for the sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout their life cycle. The Special Programme responds to expected accomplishments (a) and (b) of UNEP subprogramme 5 (see UNEP.EA.4/4, pp. 76 and 77).

4. Voluntary contributions and pledges to the Special Programme Trust Fund, established in September 2015, totalled \$27,457,607 as at 30 October 2020. To date, 42 projects across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean have been funded following three rounds of applications. Implementation is still ongoing for most projects and is undertaken by recipient governments, with implementing agencies providing support in some instances. The funded activities include development of national policies and legislation, establishment of multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms for better management of chemicals and waste, coordinated implementation of the relevant instruments, improved reporting mechanisms, capacity-building and awareness-raising. The fourth round of applications for funding will be considered by the Special Programme Executive Board in early 2021.

B. Strengthening cooperation and avoiding duplication of actions undertaken by member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals

5. UNEP has been actively engaging with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and beyond. UNEP participated regularly in the Inter-Organization Programme meetings, and the reports mentioned below were developed in collaboration with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements.

6. The secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management has been working with the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals in the execution of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management Global Environment Facility (GEF) project, including in leadership roles in presenting it to the communities of practice established for lead in paint, chemicals in products, highly hazardous pesticides and the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. UNEP is also an active partner and a host of coalitions aiming at coordinating actions in specific domains. Within the framework of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO) collaborate with partners (including the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) to prevent exposure to lead by promoting efforts to phase out paints containing lead. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNEP and WHO, together with relevant partners, are developing a global action plan on highly hazardous pesticides that aims to bring together key stakeholders and initiatives whose common objective is to eliminate the harm caused by highly hazardous pesticides. UNEP also actively participates in the FAO/WHO joint meeting on pesticide management in an effort to contribute to the aspects related to environment. Supporting countries' commitments under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the planetGOLD programme, a partnership between UNEP, UNIDO, the United Nations Development Programme, governments, the private sector and artisanal and small-scale gold mining communities, is working to eliminate mercury from the supply chain of gold produced by artisanal and small-scale miners. UNEP, in collaboration with the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, is implementing several GEF projects to assist countries to implement the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

8. Besides the development of the report on the environmental impacts of antimicrobial resistance and the causes for the development and spread of resistance in the environment, UNEP is carrying out several actions in close collaboration and coordination with the organizations of the

tripartite collaboration on antimicrobial resistance (FAO, the World Organization for Animal Health and WHO) and other key stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels, based on the “One Health” approach. In 2018, UNEP and WHO signed a memorandum of understanding that is now under implementation covering collaboration in the following areas: air, climate change, water, biodiversity, chemicals and waste, antimicrobial resistance, and food systems and nutrition.

9. Furthermore, UNEP conducted an assessment of linkages with other clusters related to chemicals and waste management and options to coordinate and cooperate on areas of common interest. The assessment was conducted in April 2019 at the request of the intersessional process for the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and sound management of chemicals and waste. The assessment paper highlights seven clusters related to chemicals and waste: health, biodiversity, world of work, climate change, agriculture and food, human rights, and sustainable consumption and production, and proposes provides elements of coordination and cooperation.

10. With regard to biodiversity, pollution is identified as one of the five key pressures directly driving biodiversity loss globally. UNEP, in a joint effort with the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the Ozone Secretariat, is actively engaged in the process and has provided inputs for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework with the aim of building linkages between the pollution and nature agendas.

11. Moreover, UNEP is contributing, through the development of a report on chemicals in plastics, to efforts to better understand chemicals of concern and the potential for innovation, relevant to resolutions 4/6 and 4/9.

C. Enhancing the support provided to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and considerations beyond 2020

12. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, to be held in Bonn, Germany, was postponed to 5–9 July 2021. Work continues on consideration of the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 through an intersessional process.

13. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the resultant postponement of the fourth meeting of the intersessional process considering the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 and of the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, the Bureau of the fifth session of the Conference and the co-chairs of the intersessional process proposed establishing a number of virtual working groups to support the work of the intersessional process to advance its deliberations. Proposals by the virtual working groups may address identified gaps, present possible compromise text, or propose new or alternative text that could be considered at the fourth session of the intersessional process.

14. In addition, participants in the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management will consider a high-level declaration. The declaration could renew the commitment enshrined in 2006 in the Dubai Declaration on International Chemicals Management. In October 2020, the President of the fifth session launched a process for developing a possible high-level declaration reflecting input, ideas, suggestions and the views of all stakeholders in the intersessional process.

D. Manuals on green chemistry and sustainable chemistry

15. UNEP has, in preparation for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, developed manuals on green chemistry and sustainable chemistry. They include a framework manual, an executive summary and a specific manual on education in order to facilitate a better understanding of, and provide guidance to countries and stakeholders on, advancing green chemistry and sustainable chemistry.

16. The green chemistry and sustainable chemistry framework manual builds on the 2019 UNEP report that analyses stakeholder submissions on sustainable chemistry, pursuant to resolution 2/7, and on *Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

17. The Governments of Germany and Sweden funded this activity, together with the Environment Fund. A multi-stakeholder group of experts guided its development, and the manuals were sent to the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals for review.

E. Following trends in the design, production, use and release of chemicals and the generation of waste in order to identify issues of concern for future editions of the *Global Chemicals Outlook* and the *Global Waste Management Outlook*

18. The forthcoming edition of the *Global Waste Management Outlook* is being prepared for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. Efforts to identify issues of concern are detailed in paragraph 19 below and build on *Global Chemicals Outlook II*, which was published in 2019. In the development of the outlook reports, UNEP reviewed the design, production, use and release of chemicals and the generation of waste.

19. Progress was made in identifying and mapping hotspots where pollution occurs, and in identifying good practices. Seven regional waste management outlook reports were published in June 2020 covering Africa, Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, small island developing States and mountainous regions. The forthcoming edition of the *Global Waste Management Outlook* builds on key trends identified in regional outlooks. Waste generation is growing at a much faster pace than growth in new infrastructure to manage that waste, which implies that uncontrolled disposal will continue to rise. E-waste, a relevant waste stream with high chemicals content and the use of chemicals in the recycling process, has increased by 21 per cent in five years and a record 53.6 million metric tons of electronic waste was generated worldwide in 2019. Overall, the waste management industry is being driven by the interaction of four major trends: the circular economy, marine litter, climate change and the fourth industrial revolution.

20. It is important to highlight the fact that chemical and waste-related policies can have a high positive impact in product design and upstream efforts towards sustainable consumption and production and circularity. In order to achieve that goal, these policies will require coordination with other product-related policies. Several countries cited the national implementation of chemicals conventions as a positive example that had led to national-level coherence and collaboration with regard to product policy efforts – for example, through the development of national legislation on banning mercury from products.

F. Report on matters in which emerging evidence indicates a risk to human health and the environment

21. A report on matters in which emerging evidence indicates a risk to human health and the environment has been compiled, with funding from the Government of Switzerland. It aims to inform the international community about the current situation of specific issues of concern. It was developed in cooperation with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements.

22. The report contains an assessment of the eight emerging policy issues and other issues of concern identified under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management: chemicals in products, endocrine disrupting chemicals, environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, hazardous substances in the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, highly hazardous pesticides, lead in paint, nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. It reviews how current regulatory and policy frameworks address them by specific instruments and actions, building on the findings in *Global Chemicals Outlook II* and highlighting challenges and opportunities.

23. The report on issues of concern also addresses the 11 issues with regard to which emerging evidence indicates a risk to human health and the environment that are identified in *Global Chemicals Outlook II*: arsenic, bisphenol A, cadmium, glyphosate, lead, microplastics, neonicotinoids, organotins, phthalates, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and triclosan. The report assesses current exposure and instruments and actions under current regulatory and policy frameworks, highlighting challenges and opportunities. Background information on the effects of these issues on human health and the environment are also provided based on existing assessments by national governments and intergovernmental institutions.

24. In the report on issues of concern, a “thought starter” on the identification of issues of concern is presented, including a review of existing approaches, a map of other current relevant initiatives, and considerations of potential areas in which future issues of concern might be identified and possible identification processes. This is followed by an overarching outlook for future international work on issues of concern.

G. Assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface

25. A report providing an assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level for the sound management of chemicals and waste was developed for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and released on 30 June 2020. The Governments of Germany and Switzerland, as well as environment funds, funded the development of the report.
26. The aim of the report is to facilitate and inform discussion on strengthening the science-policy interface for chemicals and waste management and thus support and promote science-based local, national, regional and global action on sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.
27. In the report, a variety of existing science-policy interface platforms are reviewed and lessons learned from the development of outlooks and assessments are discussed. The impacts of and outputs from a strengthened science-policy interface platform are examined and the institutional design of such a platform is discussed. Considering the need for authoritative outputs that are policy relevant but not policy prescriptive, and of a highly responsive platform, the report provides an outline of options for strengthening the science-policy interface.

H. Technical advice, policy support and capacity-building for developing countries and countries with economies in transition

28. UNEP provides support and capacity-building for monitoring persistent organic pollutants in biotic and abiotic media through the implementation of the GEF projects on the Global Monitoring Plan on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which include training and technical guidance on sampling and analysis of matrices for the levels of those pollutants. UNEP also supports the generation of data on the levels of persistent organic pollutants in human milk and environmental media through selected expert laboratories. This contributes directly to the Global Monitoring Plan of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and its effectiveness evaluation process.
29. For example, in addressing mercury, to date UNEP has supported 62 countries in the development of Minamata Initial Assessments and 30 countries in the development of national action plans to reduce mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, with funding from GEF. It has also developed key tools and guidance materials to support action on artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
30. Furthermore, with over 190 stakeholders, the Global Mercury Partnership focuses on supporting countries in the timely and effective implementation of the Minamata Convention, providing state-of-the-art knowledge and science on mercury and delivering outreach and awareness-raising on global action on mercury.
31. UNEP, through the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, supported 61 countries, including under component 1 of the Global Best Practices on Emerging Chemical Policy Issues of Concern under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management project. Technical assistance on adopting legislation on lead paint was provided to countries in terms of legal drafting and awareness-raising.
32. UNEP is currently providing support to four countries in Asia to fulfil the multilateral environmental agreements through the development of bespoke online courses and a series of capacity-building activities based upon a gap assessment, with a budget of \$1 million from the China Trust Fund.
33. A memorandum of understanding between UNEP and the International Council of Chemical Associations was signed in 2016 to develop and implement effective chemicals management regimes for businesses and public institutions. A number of joint activities have been conducted, including studies, national capacity-building activities in developing countries (Argentina, China, India, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania) and the development of learning tools relating to chemicals-related environmental health and safety information.
34. UNEP and the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management have revitalized their Joint Task Force on Programmatic Cooperation on Chemicals and Waste. The Task Force aims at enhancing programmatic cooperation and serves as a platform to explore linkages with broader agendas on the environment and sustainable development, such as the pollution agenda, sustainable lifestyles, circularity and cities.

35. In order to respond to increased demand for improved data and capacity for the follow-up and review of progress made in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting the targets therein, in 2017 UNEP launched a project entitled “Chemicals and waste in the 2030 Agenda: building capacity in Sustainable Development Goal follow-up and review in developing countries to minimize chemicals and waste risks across sectors”, financed by the United Nations Development Account. Three selected project pilot countries are currently being assisted in conducting a national assessment of their chemicals and waste statistics, indicators and reporting, with the aim of developing a national action plan on indicators, monitoring and reporting of statistics relevant for chemicals and waste management.

II. Lessons learned

36. Under paragraph 24 of its terms of reference, the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level to enhance the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management will be open to receive voluntary contributions and applications for support for seven years from the date it is established. On the basis of a satisfactory review and evaluation, and subject to a recommendation from the Executive Board to the Environment Assembly, the Special Programme may be eligible for a one-time extension, not to exceed an additional five years. Special Programme funds may be disbursed for a maximum of 10 years from the date the Programme is established, or eight years from the date it is extended, if applicable, at which point the Programme will complete its operations and close.

37. In October 2020, following the satisfactory midterm evaluation of the Special Programme, the Executive Board began its discussion on the possible extension of the Programme’s duration. Any recommendation adopted by the Executive Board in this regard will be made available on the Special Programme website.¹

38. UNEP will continue working with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and beyond, in order to strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication of actions. UNEP will further support the implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements.

39. The Environment Assembly continues to support an ambitious enabling framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. The Environment Assembly will be invited to adopt the new enabling framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste. UNEP will continue to host its Secretariat and provide/second the Head of the Secretariat. The new medium-term strategy will support the implementation of the new enabling framework. The new targets and indicators will be considered in the medium-term strategy 2022–2025, through the development of the biennial programmes of work.

40. While some issues are being addressed, more ambitious worldwide action by all stakeholders is urgently needed, including on heavy metals, a legacy that requires further international effort.

41. The activities of UNEP supporting countries on chemicals and waste have shown that the sound management of chemicals and waste is intrinsically linked to one of the three pillars of the proposed medium-term strategy, chemicals and pollution, and contributes to sustainable consumption and production.

III. Recommendations and suggested actions

42. The Environment Assembly may wish:

(a) To consider extending the duration of the Special Programme, as provided for in its terms of reference, and contingent upon a recommendation by the Executive Board of the Special Programme, in order to accelerate action by recipient countries towards the sound management of chemicals and waste;

(b) Acknowledging the efforts undertaken, to consider highlighting the need to continue to enhance support to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the new framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste and its implementation, including with sufficient staff and resources for the secretariat;

¹ See www.unenvironment.org/events/working-group-meeting/fourth-teleconference-executive-board-special-programme-support.

- (c) To consider encouraging all Member States and relevant stakeholders to consider and apply the green chemistry and sustainable chemistry manuals, which, together with the *Global Chemicals Outlook II*, highlight the crucial importance of environmentally sound innovation;
- (d) To consider calling upon all relevant stakeholders to consider the findings of the recently issued report *An Assessment Report on Issues of Concern: Chemicals and Waste Issues Posing Risks to Human Health and the Environment*² and the conclusion in the *Global Chemicals Outlook II* that the global goal of minimizing the adverse impacts of chemicals and waste was not achieved by 2020;
- (e) To recognize that a broader set of issues of concern may need to be considered and identified by the international community in the future;
- (f) To consider urgently calling for more ambitious worldwide action, including on heavy metals, by all stakeholders;
- (g) To consider encouraging further development and analysis of the addendum to the report *An Assessment Report on Issues of Concern: Chemicals and Waste Issues Posing Risks to Human Health and the Environment*, to take stock of the existing national- and organization-level initiatives relating to each issue, and to identify gaps and appropriate future actions;
- (h) To consider the options put forward in the report providing an assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level for the sound management of chemicals and waste and suggest a way forward in order to reinforce the science-policy interface in a comprehensive way and thus address the multiple facets of sound management of chemicals and waste;
- (i) To consider drawing attention to the role that the sound management of chemicals and waste can play in addressing legacy pollution and shaping the future, from the design of environmentally sound innovative products, processes and value chains to sustainable consumption and production systems, as reflected in the medium-term strategy.

² Available at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/33807/ARIC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.