

POPs NEGOTIATIONS IN BONN

Hamish Kidd reports on the latest negotiations in Bonn on persistent organic pollutants (POPs)[†]

Introduction

The fourth round of negotiations (INC-4) on a global treaty on POPs concluded on 25 March 2000, with governments reaffirming eventual elimination as the goal of the Convention and including exemptions for use of DDT in controlling malaria mosquitoes and for existing uses of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), subject to periodic review. Intensive discussions also laid the basis for deciding on technical and financial assistance at the last round of negotiations, to be held from 4–9 December, 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa. A total of 317 delegates from 121 countries participated in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) negotiation, working with 11 UN bodies and specialised agencies, 7 intergovernmental organisations, and 81 non-governmental organisations and other bodies. Meeting participants totalled 501.

Controls

On controls, the negotiators favoured retaining the goal of ultimate elimination of production and use of all 10 intentionally produced persistent organic pollutants in the mandate. These are the pesticides – aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, mirex, and toxaphene; and the industrial chemicals – PCBs and hexachlorobenzene, which is also a pesticide. On DDT, negotiators continued to favour proposals eliminating production and use, but including a public health exemption as countries adopt alternative chemical and non-chemical strategies and reduce reliance on DDT. Negotiators agreed generally on basic provisions for continuing minimisation of the unwanted by-products – dioxins and furans. An annex was proposed as a basis for further negotiations, including not only dioxins and furans, but also hexachlorobenzene and PCBs when unintentionally formed in certain processes.

Procedural matters

Aside from a few technical issues, agreement was reached on proposals to establish scientific criteria for identifying additional persistent organic pollutants for future interna-

tional action and a procedure for deciding on their inclusion. The mandate for the negotiations calls for criteria and a procedure to give countries the means to respond to problems in the future. Among other provisions, there was support for proposals to: eliminate existing uses of PCBs by certain dates, to be determined; ensure the environmentally sound management of POPs wastes; require national implementation plans; promote information exchange; facilitate technology transfer; and foster research and development.

Financial

New proposals for ensuring access to funding were considered, including several, which if adopted, would build on the Global Environment Facility. The G-77 countries and China said the nature of the POPs issue and experience with existing mechanisms demonstrate the need for a dedicated financial mechanism, which should include an independent multilateral fund. The meeting requested the INC chair, John Buccini, INC chair to work intersessionally with 19 countries to identify common ground and a possible way to bring about resolution in December.

Future

There is still much work to be done to achieve agreement by the December 2000 deadline and in fact there was some concern that the INC-4 negotiations got “bogged down by deep divisions”. Certainly there are still a number of areas of contention, such as:

- whether the treaty's goal of ultimate elimination should be extended beyond the 10 intentionally produced POPs to also include the byproducts dioxins and furans.
- whether the precautionary principle will be integrated into the treaty in a meaningful way
- what will be included in an agreement governments reach on a financial mechanism to support developing countries and countries with economics in transition to implement the treaty.

If the final negotiations this December in Johannesburg result in a treaty, a signing ceremony will be held in Sweden in 2001.

For further information on the INC-4 negotiations see <http://www.chem.unep.ch/pops>.

[†] The Bonn meeting was the Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) for an International Legally Binding Instrument for Implementing International Action on Certain Persistent Organic Pollutants. It built on the foundation for a treaty laid at the First Session (INC-1) in Montreal; the Second Session (INC-2) in Nairobi; and the Third Session (INC-3) in Geneva