

2nd virtual Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability – Just Transition Towards a Pollution-free Planet

September 04-05 2023

Concept Note, June 14 2023

A second Berlin Forum (BF2) on Chemicals and Sustainability will be hosted by HE Steffi Lemke, German Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.

The goal is to continue building common understanding and providing high-level political guidance and momentum on key international issues and priorities regarding chemicals and waste management, including all relevant sectors and stakeholders. The BF2 aims to help raise and ensure a high level of ambition of the SAICM Beyond 2020 agreement and the outcomes of the 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5). It is meant to support the preparations for ICCM5 and its High-Level Segment and the final negotiations of the new framework instrument, as well as the envisaged follow-up of ICCM5.

Context

Global exposure to pollutants has become the third planetary crisis threatening our future, alongside climate change and biodiversity loss. Our handling of chemicals and waste has serious consequences for the environment and biodiversity, endangering health and safety at the workplace and in our private lives. Moreover, the impacts of exposure to pollutants affect global gross domestic product, and threaten our socio-economic development and prosperity.

The 2019 UNEP Global Chemicals Outlook II clearly points out that – while much progress has been made – the social, economic, and environmental costs of current, unsustainable practices are very high and increasing. Hazardous and often long-lived chemicals are everywhere: in our air, water, land, and oceans and in our own bodies. Continuing ‘business as usual’ is not an option. On the contrary, transformation is crucial: more ambitious and more widespread action by all relevant sectors in close collaboration among various stakeholders and across different levels is needed, and this requires significant investments.

International efforts, including through the voluntary Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), have not succeeded in achieving the agreed goal that, by 2020, “chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.” (Dubai Declaration, 2006)

Consequently, in 2015 the 4th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4) launched an intersessional process (IP) to negotiate a future agreement for SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. Germany has taken a leading role as Presidency of ICCM5 and is working alongside governments, intergovernmental organisations and stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, unions, and others to enhance the contribution of the sound management of chemicals and waste to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to ensure rapid and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic at all levels.

The first *Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability – Ambition and Action Towards 2030* was held in July 2021. It was attended by 50 ministers and 800 stakeholders over the course of two days. Opening speakers included UN Secretary-General António Guterres; European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius; and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The Forum highlighted, inter alia, that issues of capacity development and resourcing as well as cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration for implementation require further attention: All sectors need to be deeply involved and participate actively in making chemicals and waste management sustainable, safe, and fair. Therefore, the 2nd Berlin Forum is focusing on the contributions of the **health, food, and labour** sectors, and on the need for **scientific, technical, social, economic, and financial innovations** to overcome the pollution crisis and achieve just transition.

Date and time: BF2 will take place on 04-05 September 2023, in advance of ICCM5 that will be held 25-29 September 2023 in Bonn, Germany. The event will be held as a two-day virtual event, with 2,5-3hr sessions each day, held early afternoon CEST to enable broad global participation.

Moderator: Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions

Co-moderator: Minu Hemmati, consultant, ICCM5 Presidency Team

Speakers: Speakers will include government Ministers, high-level representatives of IGOs, regional organisations, and stakeholders such as industry, workers & trade unions, science & academia, NGOs, women & gender, children & youth, as well as representatives of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Speakers are invited to share knowledge and experience, good policy and practice examples, innovative ideas, as well as suggestions and commitments to action and collaboration.

Invited participants will be asked to indicate beforehand through the registration form, which thematic area (see below for session topics) they would like to give an intervention on. In addition, this concept note will be used to approach pre-assigned speakers for keynotes or panels in each thematic session.

Participants: All SAICM stakeholders and other interested parties as well as media will be invited to participate. All Participants will have access to interactive elements of the 2nd Berlin Forum.

Topics

Chemicals and waste management is relevant in most sectors. The chemicals and waste agenda is effectively also a health, food, and labour agenda, among others. In fact, none of the SDGs can be achieved without the sound chemicals and waste management worldwide. Implementing existing sustainable solutions together with significant scientific, technical, social, economic, and financial innovation as well as just economic transformation and behaviour change is needed to achieve this. Major gaps in capacities, knowledge, and resources

need to be overcome towards **just transition towards a pollution-free planet**, and the challenges of cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration need to be managed.

The 2nd Berlin Forum will address four main topics relevant to achieving a comprehensive agreement at ICCM5 and the implementation of its outcomes beyond the conference:

Human health and the environment: Sound chemicals and waste management is part and parcel of delivering the right to a healthy environment that was recognized as a basic human right by the United Nations General Assembly in 2022. The WHO estimates that more than 2 Million people die each year directly due to chemical pollution of air, water, food, and workplaces ([WHO 2021](#)). This is a 29% increase from 2016 to 2019. The social and economic impact of illnesses, disabilities and premature deaths on citizens and rights holders - women, men, children and elderly, families, workers, communities – and on countries' economic development is enormous. The World Bank estimates the annual loss of global GDP due to lead poisoning alone at over 4%.

To substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water, and soil pollution and contamination by 2030 (SDG 3.9) is a prerequisite to achieving SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing as a whole, as well as other health-relevant SDGs (2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 15). All health sector stakeholders need to significantly increase their efforts towards sound management of chemicals and waste, and the SAICM successor needs to be designed to enable this important engagement.

Envisaged outcomes: This session is designed to identify how existing activities, mechanisms and institutions in the health sector can be best used, and strengthened, to support contributions to the chemicals and waste agenda in view of ensuring a healthy environment for all. We'll be looking at ways the health sector can contribute to reducing death or illness from hazardous materials, air pollution, water pollution, and soil contamination. Additionally, this session will outline what attributes a successful SAICM framework should have to support all health sector stakeholders in their work for just transition as well as highlight necessary conditions, including resource requirements, for effective mitigation of health risks due to hazardous chemicals.

Food security: Agrochemicals help ensure productivity and increased yields of food and fodder and are key to achieving the SDGs – most prominently SDG2 Zero Hunger, SDG1 No Poverty, and SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing. In a world of growing populations as well as ongoing conflict, soil degradation and climate change we need to double global efforts to guarantee food security for all. However, the unsustainable use, transport and disposal of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, veterinary pharmaceuticals, and food packaging can also interfere with the protection of human health, climate, biodiversity, water, and soil. Due to past practices, many landscapes, soil, and water resources need to be restored. FAO is estimating that half a million tonnes of obsolete pesticide stocks are scattered throughout the developing world alone, compromising soil and water protection.

Envisaged outcomes: This session investigates how different government agencies, farmers, and other stakeholders involved in the production, processing, trading, and recycling of agricultural commodities and food can become equipped with the necessary skills to ensure both food security and human and soil health. Additionally, we will cover what a future SAICM framework should encompass for a well-rounded approach to agricultural productivity, environmental protection, and social development in both rural and urban areas.

Labour and occupational health: Chemical exposure in the workplace kills at least 1.1 million people worldwide every year, 85% of them in developing countries. Every year, about 160 million cases of work-related accidents or diseases are reported ([ILO & UN Global Compact 2021](#)). Risks are especially high in the informal sector, which is growing and where at the same time, health and safety measures are often not accessible. Ensuring chemical safety at the workplace is crucial for decent work (SDG 8) and the achievement of other related SDGs. A central element of both the global chemicals and the occupational safety and health agendas is the implementation of the Globally Harmonised System (GHS).

Envisaged outcomes: In this session, we look at how to strengthen the role of occupational health and safety and decent work in all chemical-using sectors. We will explore how education, social innovation, protective systems, due diligence approaches, and EPR mechanisms can be utilized. Furthermore, we will examine how trade can help foster a circular economy by supporting sustainable products and safer practices in chemicals and waste management and a shift towards a circular economy. Additionally, we will be looking at how a future SAICM framework can promote cooperation between various entities involved to maximize results and to support, in particular, labour-sector stakeholders in achieving a rapid and just transition.

Innovation for just transition: In 2021, the chemical-pharmaceutical industry accounted for 4.2% of global sales. Global trade in chemicals is expected to double by 2030 compared to 2017, with highest growth rates in non-OECD countries ([UNEP Global Chemicals Outlook II, 2019](#)). At the same time, around 100 countries do not have the basic legal systems, resources or institutional capacities to enable and support the safe handling of chemicals nor the institutional capacity to implement or enforce such measures.

Sound chemicals and waste management is also a prerequisite for creating comparable competitive conditions. Industry and other relevant private sector entities need to actively contribute along the entire value chain with innovative initiatives and business models that include all relevant actors – chemical industry, downstream users, finance, and trade. Ultimately, just transition towards a pollution-free planet implies the transformation towards sustainable chemistry – in design, manufacture and use of chemicals products and processes throughout their entire life cycle. This requires not only scientific and technical innovation but also social innovation to mobilize, and benefit, all societal groups as well as economic and financial innovation to generate the necessary significant resources that are needed to achieve change.

Envisaged outcomes: This session will explore how innovative solutions in chemical-intense sectors can help the global economy transition to an environmentally-friendly, climate-neutral and nature-positive model. We'll look at what incentives and which partnerships need to put in place to make this happen and how these changes can bring in circularity and resource efficiency as well as produce a safe and fair outcome for those affected by the switch. This session also examines how investors and other characters can be used to promote sustainable products, circularity and sound management of chemicals and wastes. We'll conclude with a discussion on what a future SAICM framework would have to entail to become a relevant instrument for the private sector.