



برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة
United Nations Environment Programme
المكتب الإقليمي لغرب آسيا
Regional Office for West Asia



**WEST ASIA REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING
FOR THE 7TH GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM**
Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain
19-20 November 2005

Statement

The statement focuses on the three items (namely Chemical management, Energy and environment and tourism and environment) that are under discussion by the Minister at the 9th special session of UNEP Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 7-9 February 2005. Participants had also the opportunity to express their views more generally on UNEP work.

Statement on Chemical management

Despite the benefits of chemicals in many major sectors of the world economy including agriculture, industry, housing, transport, textiles, and the health sector and in the home, they can be corrosive, explosive, flammable, an irritant, oxidizing, and dangerous to human health and the environment. Therefore, chemicals need to be managed through establishing legal frameworks and infrastructure for research, management, monitoring, measuring and prevention of impacts in human health, safety and environment resulting from chemicals production and uses and civil society need to be participating in all aspects. In view of the fact the international policy developments have taken place with major relevance for chemicals management that include adoption of agenda 21 and the issuing of 11 conventions to govern and manage chemicals.

The civil society groups meeting in Manama are calling upon their respective governments in the UNEP Governing Council to:

- Establish coherent national chemicals management framework that meshes with broader national environmental and development policies and effectively addresses local needs with special focus on the following priority areas:
 - Implementation of the Global Harmonized System GHS and related hazard communication issues;
 - Strengthened Framework for Regulation and Enforcement for Sound Chemicals and Waste Management;
 - Promotion of Capacity Building for Risk Assessment activities Required by International Agreements;
 - Development of an Integrated Approach to Emergency Response;
 - Promotion of Capacity to meet training needs in relation to sound chemicals and waste management;
 - Strengthening Analytic Capacity for sound chemicals and waste management;

- Strengthening Capacity for Health and Environmental Surveillance in relation to exposures to chemicals and hazardous waste;
 - Strengthen coordination among concerned ministries and involvement of civil society and major groups to avoid low acceptance of these policies, resulting in inadequate implementation and enforcement;
 - Include among of the national policies the polluter pays principle. The polluter beneficiary principle and EIA...etc.
- Establish an integrated information network for the management of chemicals in order to facilitate the exchange of information between the governmental institutions on one hand and civil society organizations as well as those interested in the management of chemical materials on the other hand.
 - Formulate plans, awareness and instruction programs in order to improve and enhance the level of awareness of the hazards consequent upon the handling of chemical materials towards the various community classes, involve the private sector therewith and provide the material support for the development thereof with emphasis on the role of the media in the implementation of such programs and using various types of publications.
 - Enhance and encourage the policy of dialogue and cooperation between the government and civil society.
 - Endorsing and supporting SAICM to be a mandatory rather than a voluntary tool.

While countries are requested to improve the chemicals management system each at its national soil in the global context, they are urged to observe the following principles:

- The Right-to-Know Principle
- The Importance of civil society involvement
- The Importance of Science
- The importance of countries to be transparent to lead to a successful cooperation.
- Ensuring clear Roles and Responsibilities of the civil society groups.
- Ensuring Comprehensive Participation
- Two-way Communication
- Understandable and Timely Information Disclosure
- Civil society education
- Secure and allocate adequate funding

UNEP is urged to

- Lobby with governments to support the involvement of civil society in chemicals management, build their capacities and mobilize the necessary resources to ensure its participation and taking the active role.
- Work to support developing countries among of which our region to get access to the resources, skills, technology and appropriate training and capacities.
- Help to establish the creation of a regional training centre for the exchange of experiences, aims, needs and technical and analytical training to support the national organizations.
- Work with the national countries to wipe out and mitigate the consequences revealed by wars and conflicts in the region and other regions.

- Establish a specialized center for qualifying the local cadres in the various fields for the management of chemicals.

Civil society groups are urged to be

- Initiative taking in developing programs and campaigns to raise awareness of the various community sectors.
- Proactive in approaching governments and international organizations to involve them in the process of getting chemicals managed and properly handled at the national, regional and international levels.

A message to the Private Sector

The private sector must take the initiative to be part of the process, allocate resources to assist governments and civil society groups in the direction of managing chemicals. Governments should take the necessary measures to encourage the involvement of private sector and create incentive mechanism that encourage them to allocate the resource. The civil society should approach the private sector to mobilize resources.

Statement on Energy and environment

West Asia Region comprises some of the major oil producing and exporting countries, which also possess the bulk of proven world reserves. Other countries of the region are importers of energy, and the disparity in accessibility to energy is manifested in the high per-capita consumption in most of the oil exporting countries, while up to twenty percent of the population in the same region lack access to the power grids. West Asia Region as a whole possesses high potential to harness renewable energy, in particular solar.

The following are the points that may bind relevant statements:

1. Invest sufficient resources of the increasing oil revenues in research and development of clean and renewable energy.
2. Harness the potential available in the region of renewable energy resources such as solar, wind, wave, and bio-energy, that will not only increase efficiency but also help alleviate poverty.
3. Initiate and encourage cooperation and coordination at regional level in the production and distribution of energy to secure fair access and efficiency.
4. The need to restructure the pricing and taxation policies to reflect the cost of petroleum as a depletable resource, taking into account the social, economic and environmental concerns of the consuming as well as the producing countries.
5. Energy strategies should be developed in a way to give priority to the needs of poor people to seek affordable and sustainable access to energy as a basic human right.
6. Connect the impact of energy related activities to gender issues.
7. Acknowledging that corporate social responsibility is an effective tool to achieve sustainable development, governments of the region should emphasize the role of the private sector to spearhead research, development and production of clean and alternative energy sources.
8. Raise awareness about energy conservation among the communities of the region.

Statement on tourism and environment

The economies of the GCC countries have, in the past, depended on oil revenues and related industries while those of the Mashriq countries and Yemen are more diversified. In recent times the countries of the West Asia region are strongly committed to diversifying their economies, a large part of which includes tourism. It is important for NGOs and local communities to back this strategy in accordance with the social, economic and environmental implications of such a strategy. To ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, mitigate impacts, preserve biodiversity and enhance local community involvement, real legislation needs to be put in place. Environmental awareness, in relation to tourism, needs to be promoted both within the private sector and local communities.

Key Issues:

Some countries are still in the early stages of tourism development due to political policies, instability and foreign occupation, whereas others have been involved in this sector for decades. Governments need to have a clear vision within the tourism sector. The key issues are highlighted below:

- Lack of environmental consideration in tourism development in relation to promotion, development and infrastructure.
- Lack of updated policies and legislations. There is no integration between environmental and tourism policies. Once there is legislation there is a need for regular updating of these policies.
- Weak enforcement of current environmental legislation with relation to tourism.
- Lack of nation-specific environmental certification within the private sector.
- Poor environmental awareness at all levels (government, local communities, private sector and tourists).
- Lack of communication between stakeholders (government, local communities, private sector, NGOs and international organizations).
- Lack of awareness regarding conflicts of interest when investing in tourism developments. There is a need for a clear separation between ownership and regulation.
- Natural resources are abused due to the lack of integrating environmental costs.
- The safeguarding of culture and heritage is not taken into consideration within tourism development.
- Lack of community involvement within tourism development.
- Lack of environmental expertise and research in relation to tourism and environment.
- Lack of infrastructure to support tourism.

Recommendations to Governments:

- Sustainable tourism must be promoted, encouraged and developed by governments.
- Enhancement of intra-governmental cooperation in the West Asia region in promoting sustainable tourism and joint projects.
- Governments should develop nation-specific regulations in relation to and integrating tourism and the environment. Sectoral Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are a must and mitigation measures must be put into place in order to avoid potential impacts.

- Governments should not only encourage, but also enforce environmental certification through regular monitoring and auditing to ensure sustainable tourism.
- Waste management needs to be implemented as part of a country's infrastructure before promoting, and in order to support tourism.
- Natural resources management is a key issue in preserving the environment while promoting tourism. This should include coastal zone management, biodiversity conservation and land use management.
- Governments should ensure the transparency and public dissemination of information (especially EIAs).
- Local communities should be encouraged to be a part of the tourism development by starting small and medium sized enterprises attracting tourists.
- Governments should ensure job creation within local communities.
- Governments need to ensure that culture and heritage is safeguarded.
- Governments must promote the innovation of environmental technology within the private sector.

Conclusion:

Recently, governments and NGOs jointly started working towards ensuring economic, social and environmental best practices within the region. We hope to further develop and strengthen these ties in order to achieve sustainability within the tourism sector. There is a need for financial independence and capacity building within NGOs. We urge UNEP to continue encouraging communication between all stakeholders to achieve these goals.

Other additional points raised during the civil society open discussion meeting

- The civil society expresses concerns on the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region and the aging of some of them and therefore urges international action in this direction of freeing the region from the nuclear energy weapons.
- UNEP and civil society in the region have to strengthen their relationship through getting into partnerships on priority issues among of which that have been discussed in this meeting: chemicals, energy and tourism.
- Advise countries in the region to resort to the debt for swab mechanism as a means to mobilize resources and ensure funding for civil society organizations for the sake of protecting and conserving environment.
- There is a need to build a strong relationship between governments of the region and the civil society groups.
- There is a need to institutionalize the civil society group's work through recruiting a full team staff, build its capacity and considering at the same time the involvement of volunteers.