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**Rotterdam Convention on the Prior
Informed Consent Procedure for Certain
Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in
International Trade
Conference of the Parties
Fourth meeting
Rome, 27–31 October 2008
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Report on the activities of the Secretariat**

Activities of the Secretariat

Note by the Secretariat

1. Annexed to the present note is a report prepared by the Secretariat on its activities during the period 1 May 2006–30 April 2008, which were undertaken in accordance with its mandate under the Convention and as directed by the Conference of the Parties.
2. The Conference of the Parties may wish:
 - (a) To review and take note of the work undertaken by the Secretariat;
 - (b) To take into account the work undertaken by the Secretariat when considering the draft budget for the biennium 2009–2010.

* UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/1.

Annex

Secretariat activities from 1 May 2006 to 30 April 2008

Introduction

1. Except as otherwise noted or where apparent from the context, the present report describes activities undertaken by the Secretariat from 1 May 2006 to 30 April 2008.
2. During this period, Mr. Maged Younes served as Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention office in Geneva until November 2007, when Mr. Donald Cooper took up his appointment as the new Co-Executive Secretary. Mr. Peter Kenmore assumed the responsibilities of Co-Executive Secretary in Rome in February 2007.
3. The Secretariat's functions are defined in paragraph 2 of article 19 of the Rotterdam Convention. For ease of reference, the Secretariat's principal activities are described in the present note in terms of those functions.

I. Meetings of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies

A. Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties

4. The Secretariat arranged the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which took place in Geneva from 9 to 13 October 2006. The meeting was attended by more than 450 participants, representing over 110 Governments and a number of intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies. The relevant documentation, including 25 meeting documents and various information documents, was dispatched to all Governments at least 60 days prior to the meeting, in line with the rules of procedures, and was also made available on the Convention website in all six United Nations languages, where appropriate. The report of the meeting has been published as document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.3/26, which was distributed to all Parties and observers, and is available on the Convention website.
5. The Secretariat made travel arrangements enabling the attendance at the meeting of a representative from each developing country Party or Party with economy in transition.
6. Detailed reports on a number of issues arising out of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties are available in documents UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/14–20 and will be considered under item 6 of the provisional agenda.
7. By its decision RC-3/6, the Conference of the Parties requested the Bureau, working with the Secretariat, to review progress and priorities with respect to specific technical assistance activities at the midpoint of the biennium. The Secretariat arranged for a Bureau meeting in Geneva on 13 and 14 March 2008 at which the requested progress report on technical assistance activities was considered. The Bureau expressed its appreciation for the Secretariat's progress in the delivery of the approved programme of work.
8. As requested by the Conference of the Parties in decision RC-3/6, the Secretariat developed a standard export notification form to facilitate implementation of article 12 of the Convention. The form has been field-tested in selected countries and at subregional workshops. The final version was distributed to all Parties through their designated national authorities in June 2008 and posted on the Convention website.

B. Third meeting of the Chemical Review Committee

9. The third meeting of the Chemical Review Committee was held in Rome from 20 to 23 March 2007. Chaired by Ms. Bettina Hitzfeld (Switzerland), it was attended by all 31 members of the Committee. Observers from 28 Governments and various intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (mainly from industry) also attended.
10. The Secretariat assisted the individual members of the Committee and arranged travel for supported members from countries that were not members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

11. The Secretariat, working with the Bureau of the Chemical Review Committee, undertook a preliminary review of the notifications and supporting documentation for the candidate chemicals and proposed priorities for the intersessional review by the Committee.
12. Meeting documents were provided directly in hard copy to members of the Committee, with most documents available more than six weeks before the meeting. Late documents were provided to Committee members in hard copy and electronically, with copies of all documents available at the beginning of the meeting. All documents were posted on the Convention website, with over 33 documents being made available for consideration by Committee members and observers.
13. The Committee considered eight notifications and associated supporting documentation for five chemicals. Only one notification was found to meet all the criteria of Annex II, for which a rationale was prepared and annexed to the report of the meeting.
14. The report of the meeting has been published as document UNEP/FAO/RC/CRC.3/15, which was distributed to all members of the Committee and observers, and is available on the Convention website. It is reproduced in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/7.

C. Fourth meeting of the Chemical Review Committee

15. The fourth meeting of the Chemical Review Committee was held in Geneva from 10 to 13 March 2008. Chaired by Ms. Hyacinth Chin Sue (Jamaica), it was attended by 27 members of the Committee. Observers from 26 Governments and various intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (mainly from industry) also attended.
16. In follow-up to decision RC-3/2, the Secretariat worked with Governments in the nomination of 14 new experts by providing the associated conflict of interest forms, among other things. The Secretariat also facilitated the change of nomination of one expert from Canada.
17. The Secretariat assisted the individual members of the Committee and arranged travel for supported members from countries that were not members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
18. The Secretariat, working with the Bureau of the Chemical Review Committee, undertook a preliminary review of the notifications and supporting documentation for the candidate chemicals and proposed priorities for the intersessional review by the Committee.
19. Meeting documents were provided directly in hard copy to members of the Committee, with most documents available more than six weeks before the meeting. Late documents were provided to Committee members in hard copy and electronically, with copies of all documents available at the beginning of the meeting. All documents were posted on the Convention website, with over 32 documents being made available for consideration by Committee members and observers.
20. To assist the Committee's new members, the Secretariat, working with some of the Committee's experienced members, introduced the mandate of the Chemical Review Committee and the policy guidance and working procedures developed for the operation of the Committee.
21. The Committee considered 10 notifications and associated supporting documentation for six chemicals. It concluded that at least two notifications for alachlor and aldicarb met the criteria set out in Annex I of the Convention, as did one notification for carbaryl. Rationales were prepared for each and annexed to the report of the meeting.
22. Intersessional drafting groups were established to prepare decision guidance documents for aldicarb and alachlor. The drafting groups' composition and workplans were annexed to the report of the meeting. The Secretariat has worked closely with the drafting groups since the meeting to develop the documents.
23. The report of the meeting has been published as document UNEP/FAO/RC/CRC.4/11, which was distributed to all members of the Committee and observers, and is available on the Convention website. It is reproduced in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/7.

II. Facilitating assistance to Parties in the implementation of the Convention

24. The Secretariat has continued to work to facilitate assistance to Parties in the implementation of the Convention. The Secretariat's principal activities in this regard are set out below.

A. Technical assistance

25. A detailed report on the Secretariat's activities to implement decision RC-3/6 is available in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/16. It includes detailed information on the number and types of workshops (national and subregional) and other technical assistance activities that the Secretariat has undertaken. A proposed workplan for the biennium 2009–2010, along with an indicative budget, is set out in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/17.

26. The Secretariat has continued to work with the regional offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to promote a regional approach to the implementation of the Convention and to increase the visibility of the Convention as a tool to assist with chemicals management. The Secretariat has also continued to work with the group of regional experts established in 2005 that assists the Secretariat in the delivery of technical assistance activities. A meeting with that group took place in October 2007 in Geneva. These measures aim to improve the delivery of technical assistance to Parties and to increase the Secretariat's efficiency.

B. Facilitating information exchange

27. The Secretariat has updated and amended the Convention website (<http://www.pic.int>), using it to distribute information on, among other things, forthcoming workshops, guidance materials and decision guidance documents, together with a list of contributions made to the General Trust Fund, including contributions made for the years 2007 and 2008, and meeting documents for the Conference of the Parties and the Chemical Review Committee. Reports from workshops are posted on the website as they become available. Information submitted by Parties on national risk evaluations or available alternatives to the chemicals listed in Annex III may also be posted through the clearing house mechanism.

28. The website includes the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Circulars and access to the PIC database, which contains information on official contact points, designated national authorities, notifications of final regulatory actions, proposals for severely hazardous pesticide formulations and import responses for chemicals in Annex III.

29. To improve further the accessibility of information available on the website, the Secretariat has revised substantively the sections on chemicals and technical assistance and has improved access to the PIC database. Participants in national and subregional meetings have been informed about these revisions to help to ensure that they are aware of the information on banned or severely restricted chemicals available under the Convention and to seek feedback on how the website might evolve further to meet their needs.

30. The chemicals section of the website has been revised to facilitate the exchange of information for chemicals within the scope of the Convention. A tabular summary of chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted in at least one Party has been developed and includes direct links to the summary of the notifications of final regulatory actions published in the PIC Circular.

31. A subset of these chemicals includes those that have been reviewed by the Chemical Review Committee and found to meet the criteria of Annex II of the Convention. A tabular summary of those chemicals is presented with direct links to the original notifications, supporting documents and the rationales,¹ where available.

32. A further subset is those chemicals that have been recommended by the Chemical Review Committee for inclusion in Annex III but for which the Conference of the Parties has not taken a decision. To facilitate access to information on these chemicals, including the original notifications of final regulatory action, relevant supporting documentation, the rationale and the draft decision guidance document, a separate subsection has been created on the Rotterdam Convention website. A review of the information available for this subset of chemicals is available in document UNEP/FAO/COP.4/12 entitled opportunities for information exchange on chemicals recommended by the Chemical Review Committee, and will be considered under agenda item 5.

¹ Where the Chemical Review Committee has determined that the notifications meet the criteria of Annex II of the Convention, a rationale is prepared that explains how the criteria have been met. The rationale becomes part of the report of the meeting of the Chemical Review Committee.

33. The technical assistance section has been revised and reorganized by biennium. The information for the period 2007–2008 is organized according to the five categories of activities set out in decision RC-3/6. To facilitate further access to the reports of these meetings, an interactive map has been developed to enable searching by region or by country.

34. Lastly, as noted above, access to the PIC database has been extended to include summaries of all complete notifications submitted to the Secretariat after September 1998 and may be searched by chemical name or by country. All import responses for Annex III chemicals received by the Secretariat may be found by searching by chemical name or by country.

C. Resource kit

35. The resource kit is intended to assist countries in the implementation of the Convention. Its target audience includes the general public, designated national authorities, other stakeholders and partners. It includes awareness-raising material, technical guidance, a training manual and sources for specific information on chemicals and chemicals management. A number of its sections have been updated or expanded to reflect experience gained.

36. A new brochure entitled “Towards Responsible Trade” has been prepared in English, French and Spanish and will be available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian before the end of 2008. A brochure providing information on the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions was updated, reformatted and reprinted in English, French and Spanish and will be available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian before the end of 2008.

37. Additional language versions of existing guidance documents were also published. The document entitled “Guidance to the designated national authorities of the Rotterdam Convention”, along with a leaflet on steps towards ratification and a guide to the PIC Circular, are now available in Arabic and Russian, in addition to English, French and Spanish.

38. Similarly, the legal case studies from Ethiopia, Ghana and Jamaica produced to supplement the guide on the development of national laws to implement the Rotterdam Convention, along with the guide itself, will also be available in all six United Nations languages. The Customs case studies from Jamaica and Switzerland are available in English, French and Spanish.

39. Fact sheets have been developed on specific themes, such as the World Customs Organization Harmonized System codes and how to access information on banned or severely restricted chemicals under the Convention. The new form for export notification mentioned previously has been distributed to all Parties and included in section C of the resource kit.

40. The training manual in section D of the resource kit focuses on the key operational elements of the Convention and includes slide presentations and information notes. The manual will be updated by the end of 2008 to reflect countries’ feedback. It will be supplemented by an interactive e-learning course on the operation of the Rotterdam Convention developed, to facilitate the self-directed learning, principally for designated national authorities. The prototype of the e-learning course was field-tested and will be made available on a trial basis on CD-ROM and included in section D of the resource kit.

41. Section E of the resource kit on cross-cutting issues was revised extensively. Selected sources of information have been made available to assist Parties in developing and strengthening their chemicals management infrastructure, together with information that may assist them in evaluating chemicals. Section E is organized around the themes of general chemicals management, evaluating the risks of hazardous chemicals and information on hazardous chemicals. This section will also be available in all six United Nations languages.

42. The resource kit has been reproduced and distributed regularly to new designated national authorities, partners, at workshops and on request. Participants in national and subregional meetings are invited to comment on the resource kit’s overall utility so that it might continue to evolve to meet their needs. The Secretariat received financial support from the European Union to publish additional language version of documents and reproduce the resource kit.

III. Coordination with secretariats of other international bodies

43. As part of its core operations, the Secretariat works closely with the secretariats of other relevant international bodies. Some of the principal activities are set out below.

A. Intersessional work on synergies among the Rotterdam, Stockholm and Basel Conventions

44. In line with decision RC-3/8, the Secretariat supported the three meetings of the Ad hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, in particular the third meeting, which took place in Rome from 25 to 28 March 2008 and was attended by 45 participants. A detailed report on the progress made towards implementation of decision RC-3/8 is available in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/20 and will be considered under agenda item 6 (f).

B. Cooperation with the Stockholm and Basel Conventions on awareness-raising and joint outreach

45. The Secretariat has included elements relating to the Stockholm and Basel Conventions in the information provided to participants at national and subregional meetings on implementation of the Rotterdam Convention. Focal points for these instruments have been invited to participate in workshops on developing national implementation plans for the Rotterdam Convention and Parties have been encouraged to include elements relating to the implementation of all the relevant conventions in these plans. The Secretariat has provided specific information on the status of implementation of the Rotterdam Convention on request and has made copies of materials used in relevant presentations on the Convention available to the Secretariats of the Stockholm and Basel Conventions to assist them in their technical assistance activities. The Secretariat seeks every opportunity for cooperative activities with the Stockholm Convention Secretariat with a view to the integrated implementation of these multilateral environment agreements at the national level.

46. The Secretariats of the Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions have taken the opportunity, when participating in various high-level meetings relevant to chemicals management issues, to initiate consultations with non-Parties with a view to encouraging their ratification of the two Conventions. One such occasion was during the Latin American and Caribbean regional meeting on the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management convened from 14 to 16 February 2008 in Panama. The Secretariat organized two brief subregional consultations with non-Parties in the region during this meeting. As a follow-up, five non-Parties to the Rotterdam Convention expressed an interest in organizing national stakeholder meetings to discuss advantages and opportunities of becoming a Party to the Convention. Country visits to support these national stakeholder meetings are being planned by the Secretariat in cooperation with the Stockholm Convention Secretariat and the interested Governments.

47. A similar approach is planned during the twelfth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, scheduled for 7–12 June 2008 in South Africa, where ministers and other high-level representatives of non-Parties will be invited to consultations organized by the Secretariat. Additional consultations in other regions will be undertaken when opportunities present themselves.

48. The two secretariats are also planning to participate in the forthcoming meeting of the Coordinating Group of Pesticides Control Boards of the Caribbean, to be held from 16 to 20 June 2008. Currently, only 5 of the 15 member countries of the Coordinating Group are Parties to the Rotterdam Convention, while 11 are Parties to the Stockholm Convention. During the meeting, the secretariats will organize a one-day consultation, focusing on promoting ratification, stimulating discussion on how the two Conventions are complementary tools for effective pesticides management.

49. A further example of this cooperation between the Secretariats but also with the FAO subregional office for Central Asia is an integrated awareness-raising workshop for the Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions to promote ratification and implementation of the Conventions, scheduled for 1–3 July in Turkey. The meeting will involve seven countries, of which five are non-Parties to the Rotterdam Convention and three are non-Parties to the Stockholm Convention.

50. The Secretariat is also working with the Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions to develop a programme for coordinated outreach. It will provide information on the Convention to relevant non-governmental organizations to help to enable them to cooperate further in the implementation of the three conventions within their countries.

C. Cooperation with the World Customs Organization

51. The Secretariat has continued its cooperation with the World Customs Organization (WCO), in part through providing information on the Convention for distribution at WCO regional seminars and train-the-trainer workshops. These included regional seminars in Azerbaijan for members of the European region, in Jordan for members of the North Africa, Near and Middle East region and in Burkina Faso for the West and Central Africa region.

52. The work of multilateral environmental agreements, including the Rotterdam Convention, was for the first time the focus of a half-day session at the meeting of the WCO Enforcement Committee held from 25 to 29 February 2008 in Brussels. Recommendations emerging from this meeting strongly encouraged WCO to work with the Green Customs Initiative, of which WCO is also a partner, in areas such as: raising Customs officials' awareness of the work of multilateral environmental agreements; organizing regional training programmes in conjunction with the Green Customs Initiative and delivering training activities for Customs officials via the WCO e-learning programme.

D. Participation in the Green Customs Initiative

53. The Secretariat has continued to be an active partner in the UNEP Green Customs Initiative, undertaking such tasks as providing information material and presentations for workshops organized to promote the initiative. Work in 2007 included national meetings in Kenya and Bahrain and three subregional meetings in Mauritius, Senegal and Thailand, which involved 20 countries, together with a Green Customs Initiative train-the-trainer workshop, held in China and organized in conjunction with WCO for regional training centres in the Asia-Pacific region, which involved six countries. In 2008, further meetings were scheduled to take place in Ethiopia (including Customs officers from Djibouti) and in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (including Customs officers from 10 countries). Members of FAO and UNEP regional offices have represented the Secretariat at some of these meetings.

54. The Green Customs Guide, having been revised further and updated, is expected to be available by June 2008.

E. Coordination with the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management

55. The national focal points for the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management are routinely invited to participate in national and subregional meetings on the implementation of the Convention. Further specific cooperation has included working together to approach non-Parties to the Rotterdam Convention as part of the Strategic Approach regional meeting in Panama (see paragraph 46). The Secretariat is also working closely with the Strategic Approach secretariat in the organization of a meeting of the Open-ended Legal and Technical Working Group of the Strategic Approach at FAO headquarters immediately prior to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention.

F. Contribution to the UNEP Bali Strategic Plan

56. Chemicals is one of the thematic areas identified under the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, which was adopted by the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-third session. A key objective under the Bali Strategic Plan is providing assistance for facilitating compliance with and enforcement of obligations under multilateral environmental agreements and implementation of environmental commitments. Technical assistance activities in support of the Rotterdam Convention contribute directly to attaining this objective. For example, the submission of import responses for Annex III chemicals directly benefits countries by assisting in preventing unwanted imports of hazardous chemicals.

G. Cooperation with the World Trade Organization

57. The Secretariat has continued to cooperate with the Committee on Trade and Environment of the World Trade Organization. Details of this cooperation can be found in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/18 and will be considered under agenda item 6 (d).

IV. Secretariat functions as specified in the Convention and determined by the Conference of the Parties

58. The Secretariat's functions, as specified in the Convention, include:
- (a) Maintaining a register of designated national authorities (article 4);
 - (b) Processing notifications of final regulatory action to ban or severely restrict a chemical and forwarding them to the Chemical Review Committee (article 5);
 - (c) Processing proposals for listing severely hazardous pesticide formulations and forwarding them to the Chemical Review Committee (article 6);
 - (d) Drafting and disseminating decision guidance documents (article 7);
 - (e) Processing information regarding the removal of chemicals from Annex III of the Convention and forwarding it to the Chemical Review Committee (article 9);
 - (f) Processing decisions regarding the future import of chemicals listed in Annex III and informing all Parties of the responses received (article 10);
 - (g) Working with the World Customs Organization in assigning to the chemicals in Annex III Harmonized System customs codes under the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (article 13);
 - (h) Facilitating information exchange among Parties (article 14);
 - (i) Communicating to all Parties proposed amendments to the Convention (articles 21 and 22).

A. Maintaining a register of designated national authorities

59. Under article 4 of the Convention, each Party is obliged to designate a national authority authorized to act on its behalf in the performance of administrative functions required by the Convention and to notify the Secretariat of the name and address of such authority. The Secretariat informs each new Party to the Convention of this obligation. There have been 17 new Parties welcomed during the reporting period, including 19 new designated national authorities. There were also 33 changes to existing designated national authorities.

60. When a new Party designates a national authority or when there are changes in the designated national authority, a letter is sent to the authority providing information on the authority's obligations under the Convention and the status of implementation in the Party. Letters may also include information on the import responses submitted and a list of notifications submitted by the Party both prior to and following the adoption of the Convention. The letter is accompanied by a complete set of decision guidance documents for the chemicals included in Annex III and a copy of the resource kit in hard copy and on CD-ROM.

61. A complete list of designated national authorities is circulated with the PIC Circular every six months, with a request that the information on the list be checked and any necessary changes reported to the Secretariat. If the Secretariat becomes aware that the contact information for the designated national authority of a Party is no longer current, efforts are made to ensure that it is updated. The Secretariat will use sources of information such as registration forms for workshops or meetings, import response forms and notifications of final regulatory action to confirm contact details and verify the accuracy of such information with designated national authorities prior to updating its database.

62. In July 2007, in follow-up to a previous communication, the Secretariat wrote to the official contact points in the four Parties that had not nominated designated national authorities at that time to draw their attention to their obligations under article 4 of the Convention. This communication was copied to the relevant missions in Geneva and to their permanent representatives to FAO in Rome. The Secretariat also requested the FAO regional offices to follow up with the Governments when visiting those countries. As of 30 April 2008, one Party had not yet notified the Secretariat of its designated national authority, while a second was pending confirmation by its official contact point.

B. Processing notifications of final regulatory action to ban or severely restrict a chemical and proposals for inclusion of severely hazardous pesticide formulations and forwarding them to the Chemical Review Committee (article 5)

63. The Secretariat examines notifications of final regulatory action submitted under article 5 of the Convention to determine whether they include the information required under Annex I. The Secretariat also prepares a synopsis of each notification received that meets the information requirements of the Convention. The synopsis of these complete notifications is provided to all designated national authorities every six months, through the PIC Circular, in English, French and Spanish. As part of the verification process, the Secretariat liaises with the designated national authorities that have submitted incomplete notifications and helps them to complete them.

64. The Secretariat received 150 notifications from 12 Parties during the reporting period.² The synopses were circulated to Parties in appendix I of PIC Circulars XXIV (December 2006), XXV (June 2007), XXVI (December 2007) and XXVII (June 2008). A cumulative list of complete notifications received by the Secretariat is published every six months in appendix V of the PIC Circular.

65. The Secretariat forwarded 18 notifications of final regulatory action and associated supporting documentation for 11 chemicals to the Chemical Review Committee at its third and fourth meetings for its consideration.

66. The Secretariat has adopted a proactive approach to work with countries to encourage them to submit notifications for chemicals that have been the subject of final regulatory action, with particular emphasis on chemicals for which the Secretariat has already received one or more complete notifications. A list of all notifications received is updated and published in Appendix V of the PIC Circular.

C. Processing proposals for the listing of severely hazardous pesticide formulations and forwarding them to the Chemical Review Committee (article 6)

67. No proposals for the listing of severely hazardous pesticide formulations were received by the Secretariat during the reporting period. The Secretariat continues to make information on this process available to developing countries that may wish to use it as a way of indicating the difficulties that they face in the management of hazardous pesticide formulations. As part of the Secretariat's technical assistance activities, particular attention is drawn to the provisions under article 6 and the benefits that these may have for developing countries. In cooperation with the Pesticides Action Network, a joint project on pesticides poisoning, covering two African countries, was undertaken. The Secretariat has also worked with the Government of Ecuador in the development of a national thematic meeting on severely hazardous pesticides scheduled for September 2008.

D. Drafting and disseminating decision guidance documents (article 7)

68. Following the decision of the Chemical Review Committee at its second meeting to prepare decision guidance documents for endosulfan and tributyl tin compounds, the Secretariat has facilitated the drafting group's work. Following completion of the documents by the co-chairs of the drafting group, the Secretariat circulated the first draft for review and comment. The Secretariat then compiled the comments received and worked with the co-chairs to incorporate them into the document, which was circulated to all members of the Committee and observers. All comments received were addressed either by amending the document or by including them in the table of comments along with information on how they were addressed. At its third meeting, the Chemical Review Committee approved the decision guidance documents and adopted a recommendation to the Conference of the Parties that it should include endosulfan and tributyl tin compounds in Annex III of the Convention. The decision guidance documents and the Committee's recommendations can be found in documents UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/9 and UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/10, which, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 21 of the Convention, were made available to Parties on 15 April 2008, six months before the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

² The European Community submitted six notifications. Each notification represents the 27 member States, of which 26 are Parties to the Convention.

69. As noted above (paragraph 22), the Secretariat is currently working with the two drafting groups for aldicarb and alachlor established by the Chemical Review Committee at its fourth meeting.

E. Processing information regarding the removal of chemicals from Annex III and forwarding it to the Chemical Review Committee (article 9)

70. No information was provided to the Secretariat regarding the removal of chemicals from Annex III of the Convention during the reporting period.

F. Processing decisions regarding the future import of chemicals listed in Annex III and informing all Parties of the responses received (article 10)

71. Under paragraph 2 of article 10 of the Convention, each Party must transmit to the Secretariat, as soon as possible and in any event no later than nine months after the date of dispatch of a decision guidance document, a response regarding the future import of the chemical concerned.

72. Under paragraph 3 of article 10, the Secretariat must, at the expiration of the time period given in paragraph 2 of the article, forthwith address to any Party that has not provided such a response a written request to do so, through its designated national authority. On a continuous basis, reminders of the failure to transmit a response take the form of a listing in the PIC Circular.

73. Under paragraph 10 of article 10, every six months the Secretariat must inform the Parties of the responses that it has received. Such information must include a description of the legislative or administrative measures on which the decisions have been based, where available. The Secretariat must also inform the Parties of any cases of failure to transmit a response.

74. The Secretariat received 378 responses regarding the future import of the chemicals listed in Annex III from 39 Parties during the reporting period. Those responses, together with all the previously submitted responses and information on all cases of failure to provide a response, were circulated to Parties in appendix IV of PIC Circulars XXIV (December 2006), XXV (June 2007), XXVI (December 2007) and XXVII (June 2008), in English, French and Spanish.

75. On 31 May 2007, the Secretariat wrote to the designated national authorities of Parties that had not submitted import responses for any of the chemicals listed in Annex III, reminding them of their obligations and inviting them to contact the Secretariat should they require assistance. Mali, Saudi Arabia and Yemen responded with the submission of 81 import responses. As of 30 April 2008, 10 Parties had failed to submit import responses for any of the chemicals included in Annex III. Of those, two are to participate in national or subregional meetings before the end of the year, while another two are to receive follow-up visits by the relevant FAO regional plant protection officers. A further two countries had representatives on the Chemical Review Committee with whom the lack of import responses had been discussed during the meeting of the Committee. The remaining four Parties will be followed up in 2009 and 2010. Their needs might be best addressed through the training and awareness raising workshops that have been proposed in the programme of technical assistance for 2009 and 2010.

76. Pursuant to paragraph 4 (b) (iv) of article 10 of the Convention, providing assistance to Parties in the evaluation of chemicals is an integral part of the Secretariat's work. The Secretariat did not receive specific requests for assistance under the provisions of article 10 during the reporting period. The issue of the obligation to provide import responses and the benefits that can be gained by providing them, however, is highlighted at national and subregional workshops. Further follow-up with countries that have not submitted any or all of their import responses has been limited during the reporting period owing to a shortage of staff within the Secretariat.

G. Working with WCO in assigning Harmonized System customs codes to the chemicals listed in Annex III (article 13)

77. The specific Harmonized System codes for 25 of the chemicals listed in Annex III of the Convention entered into force in January 2007. A list of the codes was sent to all Parties through their designated national authorities and is available on the Convention website. The Secretariat is preparing a fact sheet containing a list of the codes for Annex III chemicals to facilitate their use.

78. The Secretariat has continued to work with WCO with the result that new codes have already been proposed for the remaining 14 chemicals. These new codes do not currently exist in the Customs nomenclature (Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, fourth edition, 2007), but will be included in the fifth edition and will enter into force formally on 1 January 2012. The Secretariat will

follow up with WCO regarding specific codes for any new chemicals included in Annex III of the Convention.

H. Facilitating information exchange among Parties (article 14)

79. During the reporting period, the Secretariat received and responded to 325 queries and requests for information related to the implementation of the Convention.

80. The Secretariat also circulated information relating to the domestic regulatory actions of two Parties through PIC Circulars XXVI (December 2007) and XXVII (June 2008), as requested.

81. A review of opportunities for information exchange on chemicals recommended by the Chemical Review Committee for inclusion in Annex III of the Convention but for which the Conference of the Parties has yet to take a decision is included in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/12 for further discussion under agenda item 5.

I. Communicating proposed amendments to the Convention (articles 21 and 22)

82. During the reporting period, the Secretariat provided information to the Parties on the proposal to amend Annex III of the Convention to include endosulfan and tributyl tin compounds, following the recommendation made by the Chemical Review Committee and its adoption of the decision guidance documents on endosulfan and tributyl tin at its third meeting. Based on decision RC-3/3, the Secretariat also communicated to the Parties the proposal to amend Annex III to include chrysotile asbestos, following the recommendation made by the Chemical Review Committee and its adoption of the decision guidance documents on the chemical at its second meeting,

83. The proposed amendments were communicated to Parties on 15 April 2008 and are contained in documents UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/8–10.

84. As the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties did not decide on any amendments to the Convention, none were communicated to Parties.
