

Your Excellency Minister Skog

Ms. Gertrud Sahler, President of the International Conference on Chemicals Management

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the UN Environment Programme and the Executive Director Solheim, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the second meeting of intersessional process on SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste and to this great city of Stockholm.

At the outset, let me express my sincere thanks to the Government of Sweden for hosting this meeting. This reaffirms your longstanding Leadership and political commitment to the sound management of chemicals and waste. An area in which you have spearheaded initiatives and policy approaches at the national, regional and global level.

It is very gratifying to see such a large body of participants here, demonstrating, once again, your concern for this very vital issue. I have heard of the intense work that has been undertaken in preparation for this meeting at all of the recent regional meetings and other preparatory meetings. I would like to particularly thank the governments of Poland and Côte d'Ivoire for taking the leadership to host the meetings in their region.

We all know, and have committed to the role that SAICM has embraced for the past 12 years. SAICM has been at the core of working collaboratively to address a broad range of issues related to the protection of human health and the environment. SAICM has looked at issues ranging from the adverse effects of chemicals and to providing a unique policy framework to promote global chemical safety. SAICM has provided the space and opportunity for government and non-government actors alike, to discuss and deliberate on the management of chemicals throughout their life cycle. These deliberations have taken place in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

As you are all fully aware, the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management initiated this intersessional process, to prepare recommendations regarding the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. This meeting provides an important opportunity for stakeholders to continue to exchange views and share opinions. During this meeting, you will be discussing the fundamentals of a future policy approach to address the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

Let me just take a moment to refer to the third UN Environment Assembly held in December 2017, which had, as its overall theme, “Towards a pollution free planet”. The Executive Director, Erik Solheim, prepared a report on how to move towards a pollution-free planet. At the Assembly, a ministerial declaration was adopted by the more than 120 Ministers of Environment who were present. This Declaration contains important action points for governments and other stakeholders on how to advance the agenda towards a pollution-free world, outlining realistic steps to address pollution to protect human health.

Pollution is the largest environmental cause of disease and death in the world today. It is responsible for an estimated 9 million premature deaths. There have been figures quoted that the financial cost of environmentally related health risks lies in the range of 5-10% of GDP. Chemicals and waste management is at the centre in addressing the pollution agenda of today and the future. It is not and can never more be treated as a ‘stand-alone’ issue; rather it needs to be linked to sustainable development. Chemicals and waste are intrinsically linked to the health agenda, to the conditions of vulnerable populations, to the well being of children. But is also linked to the climate agenda, to the biodiversity agenda, the water management and oceans agenda, to sustainable consumption and production,

Collaboration across agendas and sectors, commitments from different actors, and action at different levels is at the core of our future success.. We have the responsibility to support and encourage intergovernmental organizations, governments, the private sector and civil society to ensure that their actions contribute to a cleaner environment and a better health for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not forget that chemicals are an integral and very valuable part of our lives and lifestyles. We all use them on a daily basis, they have been a part of our progress and development. At the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that chemicals, being integral to almost all sectors of society, their sound management is essential to protect our planet and people. The challenge is there: to produce, use and dispose of them in a safe manner.

Chemicals and waste management is at the very core of the sustainable development agenda. Not only should we be determining ways of combatting and preventing the adverse effects of chemicals, we must also look for medium and long term plans that will shift us to greener

economies, sustainable chemistry, circular economies and cleaner development plans. We must de-couple, de-carbonize and de-toxify our economies to improve the quality of our lives

The adverse effects of poor management of some of these chemicals are innumerable. To name but a couple, lead poisoning in children alone costs an estimated \$977 billion dollars per year – equivalent to 1.2 per cent of the world's GDP; chemical pollution depletes the ozone layer and disrupts delicate species and ecosystems.

We are now at a crossroads, in the starting blocks of a new phase, a moment in time when we need to seize the opportunities we have and make the most of them. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the policy direction for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 agenda is that opportunity, an opportunity to deepen our approaches and widen our agenda strengthen cooperation and coordination across sectors in the chemicals and waste cluster, including enhanced linkages between legally binding and voluntary policy frameworks.

Urgent action is our responsibility. We possess many of the technical solutions to the problem but what we need more is the leadership and commitment to take this forward. I would like here to take all of us back in time to 1972, a very important declaration was made here in Stockholm, a Declaration highlighting the fundamental right to life 'in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being'. We must deliver on this vision. Thank you.

---