



SLOVENIA

Check against delivery

**STATEMENT
BY**

H.E. DR. IVAN ERŽEN
State Secretary
Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia

and

panelist at the thematic discussions on
CHEMICALS

18th session of the Commission for Sustainable Development

New York, 4 May 2010

Honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I feel very honored to address you as a Head of delegation of Slovenia and especially as a president of the conference of SAICM

Chemical science, industry and trade have made a lot of good by discovering, constantly developing, producing and distributing new chemicals for numerous uses for the welfare of humans, plants and animals. A high number of people have **also found employment** and thus, their livelihood in this sector.

However, development continues, science continues to make discoveries and the industry utilises new technologies and materials, among which nanomaterials and nanotechnologies are most frequently mentioned.

Unfortunately, the **negative implications** of chemicals have been identified in the past. After the summit in **Rio de Janeiro** in 1992, these have been more under control to a larger extent, as they were nearly twenty years ago. Chemicals, including endocrine disrupting chemicals, still represent a highly considerable threat to biological species, including humans. Conditions for placing chemicals on the market have become more restrictive in some parts of the world, and the comprehensive treatment of them within the entire life cycle has improved. **However, we have by no means reached the optimum** relation between the benefits and dangers of chemicals, and have not even reached equal chemical safety in all parts of the world.

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), which was created on the basis of current discussions on chemicals at the Commission for Sustainable Development, is a strategic approach that sets out and defines in detail within its global action plan what still has to be done in order to attain the Johannesburg objective – **by 2020 chemicals will be produced and used in ways that minimize significant adverse impacts on the environment and human health.**

As one of the countries that, according to our level of economic development and our membership in the EU, has become **one of the donors of development assistance** and the fact that we are **aware** of and **taking over** part of the responsibility for the development of less developed parts of the world, Slovenia endeavours **to reduce inequalities and differences** world-wide. Therefore, it has been determined that, as a country that holds the SAICM Presidency, which binds us to even more radical confrontation with the globalised world, we must speak in favour of solutions that will lead to the reduction of differences in the field of chemical safety between countries and regions. Slovenia believes that **chemical safety is not a privilege but the right of everyone!**

That is why Slovenia calls upon all countries to do even more to reduce dependence on chemicals and to implement an international strategy of chemicals management in order to reach adequate international chemical safety. Efforts have to be intensified in searching for alternatives and alternative technologies for replacing the most hazardous chemicals. In order to enable chemical safety as an adequate priority, it has to be mainstreamed in the general national and international development strategies, namely, strategies for giving or receiving financial assistance and strategies for reducing poverty. The problem of chemicals has to be set high on the political agenda.

Notwithstanding the improvement of cooperation between countries and regions, we still cannot be satisfied with the results. We are concerned about the fact that the gap between the developed and developing countries is increasing further.

Chemicals are necessary for our survival; however, they can also have negative impact on human health and environment. Exactly in this paradigm is the essential role of the

Commission for Sustainable Development, which promoted the development of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, **and today it is necessary that the Commission watch over** its implementation. In order to reduce differences in chemical safety between countries and regions, it is necessary to **further enhance international cooperation**. Synergies between organisations functioning within the United Nations **and other** international organisations have to be continued and additionally promoted, as well as do non-governmental organisations, which can play an exceptional role at the local, regional and international levels. In this context, I wish to highlight the need for more cooperation with the World Health Organisation in particular, which has representatives in the majority of countries of the world. The World Health Organisation could play an exceptionally important role at the national level with the support of the Commission for Sustainable Development, particularly in places where the mechanisms of intersectoral cooperation have not yet been established. To engage health sector in the sound management of chemicals on the basis of resolution 8 of ICCM 2 (*International Conference on Chemicals Management*) the Strategy of involvement of health sector in the SAICAM implementation has been launched in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in February 2010.

It is necessary to raise awareness and provide education at all levels and for all stakeholders. Without education, no real progress can be made. In particular, we have to continue raising local awareness of all social levels – from the level of politics, as this is the only way to **increase the establishing** of chemical safety at the local level, **and for preventive action in cases in which obsolete technologies** and inappropriate chemicals are transferred to less developed parts of the world. Such cases include recent poisonings of children in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire due to unfair handling of chemical waste by exporters.

Improving **knowledge and training** of experts, public and non-governmental organisations and of course politicians is the key to establishing chemical safety. In light of interdependence in a globalised world, I strive for an enhanced and more intensive flow of knowledge, particularly in the direction of the less developed areas.

As an example of the measure which could improve chemical safety all over the world I would like to list the **radical enforcement** of a global system for classification, packaging and labelling chemicals which has been adopted within the United Nations in all countries of the world. This should be done as soon as possible. Here, I would like to point out that this system has already been put into effect in the European Union. It is of exceptional importance that countries that already enforced this system provide assistance in its enforcement on a global scale. This is the only way to contribute significantly to reducing inequalities in the "right of knowing" for all users of chemicals. Thus, those who don't know will learn what they may deal with when using certain chemicals and how they should handle them in order to protect themselves from their negative impacts.

As the president of the SAICM process, **I wish to emphasize anew the importance of cooperation** of all stakeholders at the national level. Therefore, **I ask all participants for support in my endeavours** to establish mechanisms for intersectoral cooperation in all countries where they do not yet exist, and that priorities coordinated at the interdepartmental level be defined for work in the field of chemical safety from the **SAICM global action plan**.

Chemicals must constantly be handled within the entire life cycle. We have not always had such a responsible attitude toward chemicals; therefore, we still have consequences nowadays in the form of obsolete pesticides and chemicals that threaten the health of millions of people and are hazardous to environment. Although the problem of **obsolete pesticides and chemicals is being solved** through various programmes, the dynamics of removing these old burdens is substantially slow. Nowadays, when we face many natural disasters from strong

winds to floods and fires, such chemicals, which are usually poorly stored, **are time bombs for the environment**. Recently, we were faced with a newly discovered landfill of such waste in Armenia, which several non-governmental organisations are now striving to solve.

Old burdens have to be solved once and for all, and in the future, we have to be sure not to repeat these mistakes. With this purpose, Slovenia has encouraged the preparation of a resolution, which is foreseen to be adopted during the 63rd Session of the General Assembly of the World Health Organisation, entitled **Improvement of health through sound management of obsolete pesticides and other obsolete chemicals** in Geneva, from 17 to 21 May.

Solving the problem of constant financing of the implementation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management is exceptionally important to all that has been said so far.

As shown by the data, the **production and consumption** of chemicals on a global scale is **increasing quickly and constantly**; a partial slowdown can be noted only during the recession. On the other hand, we have more and **more transfer of production to developing countries** and countries in transition, which are the most vulnerable due to their socio-economic characteristics, and many of the victims of improper handling of chemicals in these areas **are children, pregnant women, juveniles in the fertile period, and elders**. We constantly come upon questions of survival of the earth, which proves on a daily basis that we are not doing enough and that we must listen to our inner voices and begin not only to talk about sustainability, but also to follow through with acts of sustainability.

The welfare of humankind **does not depend only on gross domestic product**. Therefore, I propose that the Commission for Sustainable Development also **address the question of which additional criteria should be taken into account** when estimating the well-being of humankind. Continuing economic growth expressed in quantity and value of chemicals has its limits. Implications of chemicals for human health and the environment depend not only on their degree of danger, but also on the quantity of chemicals that is put into the life cycle and the frequency of their use.

We have to find solutions that will lead to **more considerable improvements** for the health of all humans and the global environment. The welfare of humankind also means the safety and future of the planet, as put forth by the **well known definition** adopted in 1946¹ by the World Health Organisation, which says that health is a state of complete physical, psychological, mental and social well-being, not only the absence of disease.

Thus, I invite all of you, Ladies and Gentelmanns, dear participants, to prepare answers to open questions for the 19th meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development, which will lead to the realisation of the objective that, by 2020, chemicals will be used safely all over the world.

Thank you for your attention.
