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For Immediate Release

2 October 2015

World Conference Re-Commits to Action on Toxic Chemicals, but Lets Funding for Most Impacted Countries Expire

(Geneva) Delegates to the world's only international forum addressing global and national chemical issues re-committed to take essential actions to fulfill a goal of sound chemicals management by 2020, but allowed the only program funding activities in the most impacted countries to expire. The USD \$4 trillion/year chemical industry, which participates in the conference, also failed to offer new funds to pay their fair share for the costs of chemicals management and harm. A very small global levy on the industry of 0.1% would yield more than USD\$4 billion/year.

"ICCM4 agreed to take action on some critical toxic chemical issues," said Olga Speranskaya, Co-chair of IPEN. "However, a five-year funding gap will make it extremely difficult to implement them. This makes the need for funding urgent. Governments, financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations and the chemical industry must each pay their fair share," she added.

Current issues include highly hazardous pesticides, information about chemicals in products, eliminating lead paint, nanotechnology, pharmaceutical pollutants, and endocrine disrupting chemicals.

A key outcome at ICCM4 was a strategy to tackle the world's worst pesticides – those that are highly hazardous and linked to a rising incidence of cancer and developmental disorders. The decision at ICCM4 represents the first time that these substances will be addressed in a comprehensive way in a UN agreement. Delegates took a major step towards sustainable agriculture by emphasizing a more holistic agroecology approach. "In Ethiopia, highly hazardous pesticides poison farmers and pollute the land," said Tadesse Amera, Pesticide Action Nexus. "Now we need to get to work on the new strategy so that instead of poisoning ourselves with pesticides, we grow food in a way that respects human health, our land, and our water."

Delegates from government, industry, public interest groups, trade unions, and health professionals from more than 130 countries attended this year's ICCM4. ICCM4 is the implementing body of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), which is coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).



Positive actions taken by this year's ICCM4 include:

Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs). Delegates affirmed that HHPs harm human health and the environment, particularly in developing and transition countries. ICCM4 agreed to take concerted action on HHPs with an emphasis on promoting agroecology¹ as an alternative to HHPs and strengthening regulatory capacity.

International chemicals management beyond 2020. Delegates mandated the development of a plan for continuing international cooperation on chemicals' management beyond 2020 when the process expires.

Information about chemicals in products. ICCM4 recommended that companies identify and disclose harmful chemicals in their products and supply chains using both national laws and criteria for chemicals of concern. Delegates recommended to start pilot participatory activities on information disclosure and signaled the need to make information disclosure equally available in developing countries.

Hazardous chemicals in electronics. Delegates called on equipment manufacturers to provide health and safety information to workers on chemicals they are handling or exposed to and to devise and implement take back programs at the end of life. ICCM4 also signalled the need for procurement initiatives that favour greener electronic products and called on the industry to make safer products.

Endocrine disrupting chemicals. Except for chemical manufacturers, the meeting participants agreed that endocrine disrupting chemicals can harm humans and wildlife and that reducing exposure should be an important focus. Delegates agreed to respond to needs identified by developing and transition countries.

Lead in paint. ICCM4 affirmed the goal to phase out lead in paint by 2020.

Nanotechnology. There was a mandate to all stakeholders to conduct awareness raising, capacity building and information sharing activities on nanotechnology; a call for sustained funding; encouragement to develop a clearinghouse mechanism; and for activities to include information about both benefits and harms.

Pharmaceutical pollutants. At ICCM4, environmentally persistent pharmaceutical substances became a special SAICM focus area with intent to increase awareness among policymakers and other stakeholders.

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[IPEN](http://www.ipen.org) is a global network of over 700 public interest organizations in 100 countries working to eliminate toxic substances. www.ipen.org@ToxicsFree <http://ipen.org/conferences/iccm4/overview>

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¹Agroecology is the basis for sustainable agriculture and encourages democratic, decentralized decision-making by farmers and incorporates practical, low cost and ecology-based technologies for productive farming.