

NGOs Disappointed at Nano Outcome of International Conference on Chemical Management (ICCM2)

Geneva, May 15 2009 –

Delegates from countries, industries and non government organizations met in Geneva this week to address chemical management under the banner of the Strategic Approach to Chemical Management. Delegates considered a number of emerging issues including nanotechnology.

“The actions on nanotechnology that were agreed upon today do not reflect the urgency of the issue. The delegates were made aware that nanomaterials are an intergenerational risk, with nanoparticles being passed from mother to child via maternal blood. Yet these risks appear to have been ignored in the response by ICCM2,” said Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN CoChair.

“We are long way from the statement that was adopted less than a year ago at the meeting organized by the International Forum on Chemical Safety in Dakar,” said Diana Bronson from ETC group. “There, Governments, industry, trade unions and non-governmental organizations had agreed that the precautionary principle needed to be applied, that countries should have the right to say no to nanotechnology and that special measures are needed to be taken to protect vulnerable groups. We got none of that in Geneva.”

The Dakar statement was undermined during the preparatory period of this conference, marginalizing the UN and along with it, the majority of its member states. Successive drafts, negotiated during late night session in English only, placed the OECD and the International Standards Organization firmly in charge of the issue. Not surprisingly, this version failed to get the support of delegates.

“After some tough negotiations, the resolution adopted by the plenary of the conference recognizes the need for a truly global, open and transparent process to address the issues raised by nanotechnologies, states that further research needs to be undertaken, and that wider dissemination of information about the presence of nanomaterials in products is required” said David Azoulay from the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL). “The resolution also contains loose proposals for some modest actions over the next three years: consultation, information sharing, meetings and workshops in different regions, and, critically, a report on the issues of relevance to developing countries and countries in transition to the Third Session of the ICCM. It is now up to organizations and governments who are concerned about these issues to ensure that these actions are provided with the necessary resources so that substantive discussions can take place leading to a stonger plan of action at ICCM3.”

“Developing countries need better information about these manufactured materials” said Imogen Ingram of Island Sustainability from the Cook Islands. “As consumers, we need to know what is in that sunscreen we are spreading on our skin. In SAICM, it states that chemicals relating to the health and safety of humans and the environment should not be regarded as confidential. We cannot be satisfied that industry is going to voluntarily hand over that information. We would strongly urge industry to implement labeling of articles containing them.”

Judith Carreras from Sustainlabour, part of the trade union delegation, also expressed her disappointment that a stronger statement had not been achieved on occupational health and safety issues related to nano. “We barely got a mention of workers in the document, yet they are on the front lines of exposure to nanomaterials at workplace (research, manufacture, packaging...). In many cases, workers do not even know they are working with nanoparticles, let alone at risk of any harmful effects. It is urgent that this question receives more attention and we are disappointed that some delegations fought against stronger provisions.

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David Azoulay, CIEL : +33 686 524625 (dazoulay@ciel.org)

Diana Bronson, ETC Group: 1 514 629 9236 (diana@etcgroup.org)

Imogen Ingram, Island Sustainability Alliance: isaci@oyster.net.ck

Judith Carrera, Sustainlabour: 34 91 449 1045, sustainlabour@sustainlabour.org