

Future challenges for the Basel Convention

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Thank you very much for this kind words Joachim.

First of all I like to thank the German authorities for having invited me here. I should say at the same time, that Joachim, Andreas and Michael here have been extremely supporting of the Basel Convention and of the Secretariat. I like to extend my thanks to Marco Buletti, Ludwig Krämer and John Mysliki. So I like to express my really deep appreciation for their help; particularly at the last conference where we closed the meeting at two thirty in the morning.

We have a difficult task to talk about the future because of course we don't know the future. Perhaps in order to speak about the future I should speak about the past. I would say that since 1998 the financial basis of the Convention has been weakened. One of the reasons is that the Parties and the main contributors in particular have decided to use the reserve we had accumulated to pay for contributions. That's their decision, their choice. It is their money but, after a number of years, we have run out of reserve more or less. At the same time the same parties have agreed to give a substantial amount of money from the reserve to found projects to support the Strategic Plan for the implementation of the convention.

And that has been extremely helpful to implement the strategy but we don't have this money anymore as it was said earlier, there is a financial problem with the Convention. If we look at the new budget that the conference adopted for 2005/2006, this is not a realistic budget if you compare to the 42 decisions adopted by the conferences during that meeting and looking at the huge expectations from developing countries. So, one of the difficulties that the past is telling us is that there maybe a future financial collapse of the Convention. We should not close our eyes to this possibility. Likely, this will not happen because we have seen over the years that the commitment of parties is there. So is there a future for the Convention?

There are different perceptions of where the Convention is aiming for instance. Some parties believe that the Convention has achieved its purpose. We have an effective, control mechanism in place worldwide which is being used and has positive effects in

decreasing illegal traffic. It has also the effect of decreasing export of hazardous waste although export for recycling or recovery is on the increase. It is a system that is essential and functioning.

Developed countries may share the appreciation that the Basel Convention is an instrument for controlling transboundary movements of hazardous waste principally, whereby developing countries believe that we are far from having reached the place where we should be in controlling wastes and ensuring their environmentally sound management.

The management of end-of-life equipment is a striking example; it is the fastest growing waste stream representing a huge problem many developing countries. And one of the reasons this trade is happening is partly because those exporting this waste will not call it waste or hazardous waste of course. So I think this is something we need to look at because we have to be in line with the spirit, intent and purpose of the Basel Convention. We can witness significant divide among nations that are in different development stages. A number of countries that were very forceful in pushing for the ban amendment in 1994, for instance, and then in 1995 like Brazil, are fast industrializing and today for them the ban amendment has a different impact than it had before (i.e. access to secondary raw materials from OECD countries), whereby for many countries in Africa or Central America the ban amendment remains an essential tool to protect those countries against any unwanted import of hazardous waste.

Also very important to remember and again it has been alluded this morning in particular by Mr. Krämer that the waste - any waste will follow the path of least resistance and this is very critical and that's the reason why we need a global regime. You can have the most perfect regime within the EU but it can have adverse effects on the rest of the world and vice versa the rest of the world may have adverse effects on the EU regime. The globalisation of the economy is also the globalisation of the waste trade. One cannot be dissociated from the other and we know that we haven't been able also to decouple waste generation from economic growth. So it's the question of choice and it's also showing commitments.

4 million dollars US annual budget for the secretariat of the Basel convention more or less and you're the secretariat is small compared to the 14 million US for the climate change secretariat. Well, perhaps, climate changes like ozone have a lot of money because there are environmental problems affecting developed countries. The Basel is

mostly made for responding to the needs of developing countries. We have one of the smallest budgets among the multilateral environmental agreements. This has effects on the work of the secretariat.

Either we need to cut on activities, which we believe many of them are essential, or we can be inventive and creative to compensate from the lack of support by parties. Well, at the secretariat we prefer the second option and also we understand very well why some countries cannot commit a stronger budget for the Convention. There are many reasons for it. Also coming back to the partnership programme, I would like to say that we should not be let to believe that the partnership programme can provide responses to all problems. The partnership programme, as Marco Buletti mentioned is not a substitute for parties' obligations and responsibilities. But at the same time the partnership programme is what makes the future possible. Unless everyone that has a responsibility in the issue of hazardous waste and waste management is involved, there's no way we can really change the world if I may say. Now on the aftermath of the seventh meeting of the conference of Parties, we need to invest a lot of efforts in fund raising for concrete projects. By what projects? And where do we get the funding that we cannot get through regular contributions.

But the future we know is not just money. We need inspirational goals like, for instance, for those who are familiar with the 1999 Ministerial Basel Declaration on ESM and which has been operationalized partially through to the ten year Strategic Plan until 2010. So, the future depends on what we want as part of the global community. The parties have expressed this very clearly in the Basel Declaration. And basically, the parties said in their declaration that environmentally sound management of hazardous waste and other waste should be accessible to all, at all the time and every where and that's what the Basel Convention, at the end of the day, is meant to achieve.

The control system is one pillar. Environmentally sound management is another pillar and partnership could be a third pillar for instance. So, although the control of transboundary movements is an essential tool, we need to go further, very much further if we want the Basel Convention to have a future. At the last conference of the parties we have adopted a ministerial statement and what on the global waste challenge. Well, basically the message of the statement says we need a fundamental shift from I would say a reactive attitude, from remedial measures, looking at the problems and trying to find solutions to a more preventive approach. What can we do up-front to avoid problems from occurring.

For instance, one of the best ways to make sure that we don't have final disposal problems with mobile phone because of the hazardous components they contain is to make sure that we don't use hazardous substance when manufacturing the mobile phone. John Mysliki mentioned the life-cycle approach, looking from maker to breaker, from design to final disposal. Every year there are hundreds of new chemicals coming into the market but nobody has a clue how to disposal them later on. We all pass the buck to the end which is to the waste and to the waste manager - to you, to many of you. We have to deal with what the society doesn't want to deal with anymore. We, consumers, once we have put our waste in the bin we believe everything is over, well, it is when everything starts in fact. We want to believe that the society will take care of it. So the issue of waste and the issue of Basel convention are not just issues for waste managers it an issue for producers and consumers. Most of us have a mobile phone today. How many of us will be tempted to change it because a new model is coming on board? At the conference, parties decided that the four main policy directions for the Convention will be: hazardous waste minimisation at the top, life-cycle approach, integrated waste management and regional approach.

Many countries will not be able or willing to build hazardous waste management infrastructure because of economies of scale and efficiency. They will look for regional approach. In that respect, parties should make use of the regional centres they have established. The future on the Convention lies, in great part, in the ability of parties to put into practise the four policy directions and to have effects on them.

If we want to obtain money from the World Bank we have to demonstrate that the generation and management of hazardous waste have adverse effects, when improperly managed, on health and sanitation, development, poverty, water protection, water quality. Which is the case! We were just talking about the problems linked to the obsolete stockpile of pesticides that mismanaged having acute and long-term effects on human health and contaminating the environment. We should dissociate hazardous waste issues from their consequences on social and economic development. Then, there will be opportunities to raise money, to mobilise resources to an extent that will make a difference tomorrow. If we don't do that is not the 4 million US dollar given to the secretariat that will change the world as we would like...!

So there's a huge responsibility from the countries themselves to work on this. And of course, as it was mentioned by Marco Buletti, partnerships become essential because unless we talk to industry, to NGO or municipalities we will fall short of solutions.

In Switzerland, where I come from, waste management consumes a large portion of any municipal budget. Well why it should be different in Panama, Vietnam or Somalia in twenty years time.

Now, I would to say why the world cannot afford not to have the Basel Convention. Because, the Basel Convention is today the only instrument you have in your hands for a global programme on hazardous waste. There is no other instrument. So, we should make better use of the Convention as a platform, as a place to discuss and exchange experience to find new solutions to an old problem. It does not mean that the Basel Convention should extend its scope of application. It does not mean that the secretariat should get tomorrow 20 Million dollars. But it means that we need to use optimally what we have, make the best out of it. I'm sure everyone in this room is working hard on the issue, back to your office tomorrow with piles of documents waiting for you and many things to do. So, at least, let's make our work meaningful and inspirational.

One of first thing we need to do is to re-build the dialogue among all stakeholders. There is a world outside EU. There is a big world outside. Of course, you have a major task of integration to do. Everybody is fully conscious of that. But, at the same time, there is a dialogue you need to reinforce with in Africa, Centre America, and Asia. Because we can see that there is a divide in the Convention.

For instance, many developing countries have a perception that developed countries do not apply the polluter pay principle. They are very convinced about that. They don't understand why the major generator of hazardous waste puts the burden on to African countries. When they see operators in developed countries exporting waste, all kinds of waste not just hazardous waste, and making a profit out of it, there is a strong suspicion among African countries. They don't understand when then they come to the conference of the parties of Basel they see developed countries parties arguing for 5 days on a 4 US\$ budget.

Are we giving the right message? Whether the perception is the perception of the reality or is a true reflection of that reality, I don't know but that's the perception of developing countries.

It was said that the history of Basel it is be a recurrent problem. John Mysliki explained to us the background and how the African countries were suspicious of the Convention capacity to help them. Ludwig Krämer claimed that it was provocative to say that the Basel Convention promotes transboundary movements and I share this view. The convention provides transparency in export and import. It is not the same thing. I think that many of the new countries coming into the EU have neighbours like Ukraine for instance. Well, Ukraine now has a dual problem; the country is receiving a lot of waste and hazardous wastes illegally from the EU but cannot benefit anymore from the treatment of recyclable wastes originally coming from the either have to find other market and perhaps more expensive solution. EU countries which we used to export recyclable waste to Ukraine now may export them to Germany for instance. So we are not living in isolation and what ever you do within the EU, and the integration will have effects outside the EU and vice and versa.

Now, basically what is the Basel Convention trying to achieve? It is trying to set up a level playing field for everyone within the spirit, intend and purpose on the Convention that to protect human health and environment from hazardous waste and other kind of problematic waste. So, I fully support what Ludwig Krämer said that we can not live without a global system. Dismantling of ships is a typical example. Until you have a global framework that will address the issue from a global prospective (from ship designer, to the flag state, the ship owner or ship operator, the port authority and so on), you will not be able to construct solutions. This is the spirit of the Basel Convention which I believe is essential to do the right and the good.