

Chair's Summary of the CSD Waste Management Seminar

The CSD Thematic Seminar on Waste Management was held at UN Headquarters on 12 January 2010. The event was moderated by H.E. Hilario G. Davide, Jr., Permanent Representative of Philippines to the United Nations and Vice Chair of CSD-18. An introductory statement was also made by Tariq Banuri, Director, Division for Sustainable Development highlighting key features of the thematic seminar series.

A film produced by Consumers International and DanWatch entitled *Hidden Flow: The Rising Tide of European E-waste in West Africa* was shown as a lead-in to the panel presentation by Allen Hershkowitz, who discussed the problem of e-waste. As the fastest-growing waste stream component, more than 90% of discarded computers from the developed world are exported to China, Ghana, Pakistan, India, and other countries under the guise of recycling, but most end up channeled into toxic wastelands. Their contents of lead, cadmium, mercury, chromium, and polyvinyl chlorides are released into the soil, atmosphere and water supply, and where children and others are exposed with damaging results to their health and development. Increased production of computers, cell phones, and other electronics are not being regulated adequately by governments, and environmentally harmful activities are being subsidized so that the competitive advantage of recycling is minimized and compromised.

Since creation and enactment of government regulatory legislation is often too slow to be effective, there is an urgent need for a market-based approach that can be embraced by both consumers and the private sector. Higher standards can and should be met by culturally visible multinational industries to set a good example and show the way to other industries. Independent certification programs such as the e-Stewards Standard for Responsible Recycling and Reuse of Electronic Equipment provide examples of viable solutions that assure consumers of sound disassembly of e-waste and prohibit exporting.

Paul Connett precluded his presentation on the theory of Zero Waste and the practice around the world with a video highlighting the activities of household hazardous waste depots and residual sorting facilities in Nova Scotia. The Zero Waste strategy seeks to find a way to use community responsibility at the back end to drive industrial responsibility at the front end, outlining a series of steps to ensure that nearly 100% of discarded community waste can be diverted away from landfills and incinerators by 2020. Steps at the community level include: source separation; door-to-door collection; composting; recycling; waste reduction initiatives; reuse, repair and deconstruction; and economic incentives. Industry must be responsible for creating residual separation and research centers at the entrance to landfills, and for improving industrial design. He demonstrated through examples of good practices from Italy, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland that zero waste is possible and achievable. The example from the city of San Francisco highlighted that 72 percent of the waste generated by 850,000 residents was successfully diverted away from landfills in 2009, with a goal to achieve 100 percent diversion by 2020.

A regional perspective on waste management in the Caribbean was presented by Ianthe Smith, who examined its strengths and weaknesses and identified potential opportunities for improvement. Although English-speaking Caribbean countries have made significant efforts to address waste management problems in the past 15 years, the focus has been on municipal solid waste, urban sewage and industrial wastewater and less on rural, peri-urban and inner city communities. Good initiatives have included new legislation, policies and institutional arrangements; as well as public education and improved collection and disposal operations. However, lack of long-term political vision and overlapping agency responsibilities have contributed to an overall lack of integrated waste management planning in the region. Technical advances in waste-to-energy facilities, autoclave shredders for medical waste, and wastewater treatment facilities provide the most positive opportunities for advancement.

Munyaradzi Chenje outlined UNEP's involvement in global initiatives for solid waste management, noting that The UN Green Economy Initiative identifies waste management as a key area of intervention with strong potential for job creation. In partnership with international, national and local organizations, UNEP's waste management programme, led by UNEP's International Environmental Technology Centre in Japan, is intensifying its activities in the field of waste management and focusing on capacity building and support for technology identification, assessment and implementation at national and local levels. Japan's 3R initiative was discussed as an example of a successful approach to legislation and policy for sustainable waste management.

Following the panel presentations, the interactive discussion revolved around several key topics. On e-waste, it was emphasized that adopting extended producer responsibility is one of the most important legislative options available to both developed and developing countries to reduce all kinds of waste. While some participants called for increased technology transfer from North to South, others noted that low technologies are equally important for enabling the separation of residuals and composting in developing countries. There was general agreement on the potential for waste to be converted into profitable materials, but concerns were raised over industry cooperation and collaboration with community-level NGOs, where organization and education of communities is essential for success. Many of the approaches discussed by the panelists were recognized to be forward-looking in terms of minimizing waste, but concerns were expressed as how to deal with different form of waste generated and accumulated over a period of years. Finally, questions on how to deal with the management of nuclear and other hazardous wastes were also raised by several participants, and it was noted that these important issues would be carried forward to an online e-discussion format to be launched by the Division for Sustainable Development following the close of the seminar.