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Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste

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International Conference
Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste
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Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Global Framework on Chemicals – accelerating action: issues of concern

Accelerating action: new and existing issues of concern

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution V/5, the International Conference on Chemicals Management decided that all existing emerging policy issues and other issues of concern should transition to "issues of concern" under the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste, pending further determinations at the first International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals. The issues in question are as follows:

(a) Chemicals in products;

(b) Endocrine-disrupting chemicals;

(c) Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants;

(d) Hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products;

(e) Highly hazardous pesticides;

(f) Lead in paint;

(g) Managing perfluorinated chemicals[1] and the transition to safer alternatives;

(h) Nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials.

2. In the resolution, the International Conference further encouraged all relevant stakeholders to continue their work on those issues. It also invited the responsible participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), in consultation with stakeholders, to submit to the International Conference at its next session, a report including: (a) an update on progress achieved indicating how the work done contributed to achieving the strategic objectives and targets of the Framework; (b) an analysis of opportunities to further address the issues;

* UNEP/GFC/IC.1/1.

[1] The term "perfluorinated chemicals" was used in the original resolution. Since the initiation of work on the issue, the terminology and scope have evolved, and the term "per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)" is now used. The latter term is therefore used in the present note.

and (c) a recommendation on the future of each issue as an issue of concern under the Framework, including workplans, targets and indicators, and timelines, if relevant.[2]

3. In accordance with the provisions of the Framework, stakeholders were invited to nominate potential new issues of concern. Following a call for submissions, the following proposals were received:

(a) Chemicals management issues of special concern for children's health;

(b) Harmonization of global efforts to protect human, animal and environment health against the threat from hazardous chemicals by transitioning to new approach methods;

(c) Pharmaceutical pollution and its effects on human health and the environment;

(d) Towards a broader approach on lead: expanding the scope beyond lead in paint.

4. The present note provides a summary of the proposed way forward for each existing issue of concern, based on the report of the responsible participating organizations of IOMC (sect. II), as well as an overview of the proposed new issues of concern (sect. III) and a draft resolution text (annex).

II. Proposed approach for existing issues of concern

5. This section sets out a proposed way forward for existing issues of concern, the underlying rationale, suggested governance arrangements and priority areas for action, as well as the associated funding status. Further information, including proposed workplans where relevant, can be found in the report of the responsible participating organizations of IOMC.

6. Overall, the proposed approach is to retain activities for all existing issues of concern, under differentiated arrangements as follows:

(a) Chemicals in products, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, and nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials would be mainstreamed into implementation programmes as established under the Framework;

(b) Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants would be addressed through the establishment of an ad hoc working group, with consideration of the activities suggested under the workplan accompanying the nomination of a new issue of concern relating to pharmaceuticals (see sect. III.C), if adopted;

(c) Highly hazardous pesticides would be addressed through the Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides;

(d) Lead in paint would be addressed through the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, with the arrangements suggested under the workplan accompanying the nomination of a new issue of concern relating to lead (see sect. III.D), if adopted;

(e) Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) would be addressed through the existing Global PFAS Group.

Detailed recommendations

A. Chemicals in products

7. For chemicals in products, the proposal is to address the issue under implementation programme 1, on legal frameworks and institutional capacities for the sound management of chemicals and waste, and implementation programme 2, on industry engagement and action along value chains. Cross-cutting work, in particular on transparency and traceability along value chains and on green and sustainable chemistry innovations, would be of relevance to addressing this issue.

8. The exchange of information on chemicals in products has advanced in several sectors, such as cosmetics, personal care products and food additives, with mandatory communication of chemicals used in products in many, if not all, parts of the world, for example through labelling with full ingredient lists. In other sectors, however, such legal requirements are more limited, and information exchange relies primarily on voluntary initiatives by individual sectors or companies.[3] Progress has

[2] The report can be found on the website of the Global Framework on Chemicals at https://www.unep.org/global-framework-chemicals/international-conference-1.

[3] See https://wedocs.unep.org/rest/api/core/bitstreams/aad55f52-ad8d-4895-992d-99daf38eef27/content.

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been made through the development of information systems, guidance, tools and projects based on sectors and value chains, such as those for textiles, toys, electronics, and buildings and construction. The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals provides an important technical foundation for those efforts by ensuring consistent hazard classification and communication across supply chains. Nevertheless, gaps remain in transparency, in access to information and uptake across sectors and regions, and in assessing and reducing the exposure of humans and the environment to harmful chemicals in products. Many developing countries still require support in order to introduce and implement the Globally Harmonized System.

9. Mainstreaming the work on chemicals in products involves integrating this topic across relevant implementation programmes to ensure a coordinated and systemic approach and incorporating the issue into the implementation programme workplans. Doing so will make it possible to address risks of exposure to chemicals in products, to follow a sectoral approach and to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts.

10. The issue will continue to be addressed under existing initiatives covered under the implementation programmes.

B. Endocrine-disrupting chemicals

11. For endocrine-disrupting chemicals, the proposal is to integrate the issue into relevant implementation programmes, such as implementation programme 1, on legal frameworks and institutional capacities, and implementation programme 2, on industry engagement and action along value chains. Cross-cutting workstreams, including on transparency and traceability along value chains and on green and sustainable chemistry innovations, are also relevant to progress on this topic.

12. Efforts have been made in several areas highlighted as priorities by the International Conference on Chemicals Management, including raising awareness, strengthening scientific knowledge, updating global guidance and supporting regulatory action. There are, however, inconsistencies among countries, with chemicals identified and regulated as endocrine-disrupting chemicals by some countries but not by others. Current initiatives remain insufficient to address the diverse sources and exposure pathways of such chemicals, pointing to the need for more coordinated and cross-sectoral action, using a life-cycle approach beyond chemical-by-chemical management.

13. The proposal builds on existing efforts by stakeholders and includes the following: awareness-raising and education; information-sharing and transparency; capacity-building, training and technology transfer; promotion of innovation and safer alternatives and processes; support for regulatory and legislative action; promotion of sector-specific action, including in sectors with higher exposure and higher potential for negative environmental and human health impacts, such as agriculture, textiles, toys and cosmetics; and strengthening knowledge and science.

14. In terms of financing, proposed areas of work build on existing initiatives only. Additional financial and technical support, including from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through sectoral approaches that integrate considerations regarding endocrine-disrupting chemicals and feasible alternatives, would make it possible to scale up current activities and enhance the engagement of stakeholders.

C. Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants

15. For environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, on which work is already under way in many countries, the proposal is to address additional actions required along with those proposed under the new issue of concern “Pharmaceutical pollution and its effect on human health and the environment”[4] in an integrated work programme, should the new issue of concern be adopted by the International Conference. The broader focus of this new issue of concern calls for activities to cover pharmaceutical active ingredients and associated chemicals, including human and animal metabolites, environmental transformation products and manufacturing intermediates that are released throughout the pharmaceutical life cycle and result in pollution.

16. An ad hoc working group would oversee the work, bringing together representatives from relevant stakeholder groups and led or co-led by one or more partners.

[4] See sect. III.C of the present note and document UNEP/GFC/IC.1/INF/5.

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17. While progress has been made in raising awareness, strengthening the evidence base and developing guidance on environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, significant efforts are still required to address gaps in managing emissions throughout the full life cycle of pharmaceuticals and the impacts on both the environment and human health.

18. The draft workplan for this issue of concern includes further awareness-raising, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, including through the creation of a community of practice; strengthening of monitoring systems, including the identification and mapping of pollution hotspots and the prioritization of innovative solutions and best practices aligned with green and sustainable chemistry throughout the life cycle of pharmaceuticals where there are pollution risks; legal and policy frameworks and practical measures to address such pollutants, including take-back and extended producer responsibility schemes, sustainable public procurement strategies, and environmental risk assessment.

19. In terms of financing, the draft workplan builds on existing initiatives; however, the extent of its implementation will depend on the availability of additional resources. Further engagement of stakeholders and additional financial and technical support would make it possible to scale up activities. Continued GEF support to countries would be critical to accelerating action on environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants.

D. Hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products

20. For hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, the proposal is to integrate the issue into the electronics sector programme under implementation programme 2, on industry engagement and action along value chains.

21. Persistent regulatory and implementation gaps, rising global production and consumption of electronic products, and the challenges faced by developing countries in managing hazardous substances across electronics value chains call for continued action.

22. The proposed areas of work include a baseline analysis of the regulatory, technological and social dimensions of the sustainability of information and communications technology; knowledge exchange and engagement in global forums; development and dissemination of guidance materials on social and technical aspects; capacity-building and training across information and communications technology value chains, including reverse logistics; guidance and training materials on best available techniques and best environmental practices for component and material recycling; and technical support for necessary incentives and policy change for product design issues and end-of-life management in the sector. Through the Sustainable Cycles (SCYCLE) programme, these efforts would be supported through enhanced monitoring, statistics, research, capacity development and stakeholder engagement to advance sustainable life-cycle management of electrical and electronic products and circular economy approaches.

23. Proposed activities will be funded under the existing GEF Global Electronics Management programme. As noted above, funding for additional work under the ninth replenishment of GEF would further support accelerated action.

E. Highly hazardous pesticides

24. The Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides was established pursuant to resolution V/11 of the International Conference on Chemicals Management with the goal of taking effective measures to phase out highly hazardous pesticides in agriculture where the risks have not been managed and where safer and affordable alternatives are available.

25. Despite some progress, highly hazardous pesticides continue to have a substantial adverse impact on human health and the environment, and more work is needed. Addressing such pesticides has proved to be a topic on which stakeholders throughout the life cycle of relevant sectors (e.g. agriculture and natural fibre production) have wide-ranging views given their different economic, environmental and social perspectives, and on which the regional and global coordination of activities is essential for working across such a diverse group of stakeholders.

26. The International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals may wish to decide on a way to bring together the perspectives of different stakeholders to support the operationalization of the Global Alliance and to enable stakeholders to identify feasible actions for addressing economic, environmental and social priorities; to develop an action plan and provide technical support and guidance to strengthen country capacities to address highly hazardous pesticides; to mainstream

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actions related to such pesticides across relevant sectors (e.g. textiles, agrifood) under the Framework; and to support complementary actions by Governments, non-governmental organizations and industry to contribute to achieving target A7 of the Framework by 2035.

27. Funding for addressing highly hazardous pesticides has largely depended on multi-donor programmes and projects, including those supported by GEF, the European Union and the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund. Nevertheless, significant funding gaps remain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

F. Lead in paint

28. For lead in paint, the proposal is to extend actions from lead in paint to the additional actions proposed under a new issue of concern entitled "Towards a broader approach on lead: expanding the scope beyond lead in paint",[5] if adopted by the International Conference. This expanded breadth would extend to reducing the risks of exposure to lead in spices, cosmetics and other products, where its use results in adverse impacts on the environment and human health. Key elements of the existing Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint would remain, including its established governance structure, operational framework, advisory group and current business plan for the period 2025–2030, which would be integrated into the workplan of the broader issue of concern on lead, with additional stakeholders engaged from the different sectors concerned.

29. Despite significant progress, lead in paint remains an important source of human and environmental exposure in many countries and requires continued coordinated action. While 94 countries have legally binding controls on lead in paint (as of January 2024), many of those countries continue to face challenges in effective implementation and enforcement.

30. Proposed areas of work include strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement, promoting industry phase-out of lead paints, raising awareness of the associated risks, enhancing stakeholder engagement and improving coordination with relevant international initiatives and funding opportunities.

31. Activities under the proposed workplan are largely supported through the existing funding streams of workplan partners.

G. Managing perfluorinated chemicals and the transition to safer alternatives

32. For PFAS,[6] the Global PFAS Group, in which participation is open to all stakeholders, has guided work effectively over the past few years and will continue its work in this area. Systematic evidence collection, evaluation, capacity-building, legal and policy support to countries, and other activities will be carried out in accordance with the procedures of the relevant organizations.

33. In addition, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants provides the global legally binding framework for eliminating or restricting PFAS that are listed as persistent organic pollutants. Through the relevant scientific review and decision-making processes, several PFAS have been listed under the Convention. Parties are required to take measures to eliminate or restrict their production and use, and import and export, in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Convention, and to manage stockpiles and waste in accordance with article 6 of the Convention. The Convention also supports the transition to alternatives through relevant provisions and guidance.

34. Worldwide, awareness of PFAS-related issues has significantly increased, and a growing number of countries are implementing risk prevention and management measures. Given the widespread use of PFAS across many sectors and applications and their potential adverse impacts, especially where exposure is high, enhanced international cooperation and exchange of information on risk prevention and management approaches would be beneficial.

35. Priority areas of action would include synthesizing and disseminating information to support PFAS risk management, including on alternatives, and sharing national approaches (led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)); monitoring of PFAS in environmental and human matrices, capacity-building and technical assistance to support implementation of the Stockholm Convention, including, as appropriate, the development of inventories and action plans and the transition from firefighting foams containing PFAS (led by the

[5] See sect. III.D of the present note and document UNEP/GFC/IC.1/INF/5.

[6] The term "perfluorinated chemicals" was used in the original resolution. Since the initiation of work on the issue, the terminology and scope have evolved, and the term "per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)" is now used. The latter term is therefore used in the present note.

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United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and other relevant UNEP entities, including through GEF-financed projects); and the collection and evaluation of key evidence on health effects for prioritized PFAS (led by the World Health Organization (WHO)), including, where relevant, input to processes of the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives, which provides advice to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO member States and the Codex Alimentarius Commission on food additives and contaminants (WHO and FAO).

36. The proposed activities will be funded through the organizations' existing budgets and could also be eligible for financing from GEF under its ninth replenishment. The activities would build on PFAS-related work funded in the previous replenishment phase of GEF.

H. Nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials

37. For nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials, the proposal is to continue activities and mainstream the topic under implementation programme 1.

38. It is recognized that further work remains to be done in integrating manufactured nanomaterial considerations into chemicals management systems, as only few non-OECD countries have relevant legislation in place to manage industrial and consumer chemicals. In addition, not all technical tools required to implement regulatory provisions for manufactured nanomaterials are available, and gaps remain in OECD test guidelines adapted to their specific properties.

39. Accordingly, efforts would continue through existing structures to mainstream the issue, relying on OECD working parties and capacity-building activities conducted by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. Areas of work could include developing technical tools for nanomaterial risk assessment and sharing information to support regulatory preparedness, along with capacity-building for information dissemination, policy and road map development, stakeholder engagement and outreach.

III. Overview of new nominations of issues of concern

40. In accordance with the provisions of the Framework, a call for nominations of new issues of concern was made available through the website of the Framework and communicated to all stakeholders. Four nominations were received, each accompanied by a proposed workplan, and are summarized below.[7] The final nominations and proposed workplans are available in document UNEP/GFC/IC.1/INF/5. Comments received from stakeholders on these nominations are also available on the website.[8] The Conference may wish to decide whether the proposed issues become additional issues of concern under the Framework.

A. Chemicals management issues of special concern for children's health

41. This nomination, submitted by the Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform, highlights the distinct vulnerability of children to chemical exposure, including higher exposure levels, immature metabolic pathways, rapid development and longer time periods over which health effects may emerge. It also refers to the potential lifelong and intergenerational effects of childhood exposure and the need for more explicit attention to children's health in chemicals management.

42. The accompanying workplan proposes cooperative action on science, monitoring and data; education and capacity-building; policy and implementation support; partnerships and knowledge-sharing; and periodic review. Activities include stakeholder consultations, mapping of existing activities, identification of data gaps and policy needs, development of knowledge products, guidance and training, age-disaggregated data and awareness-raising.

B. Harmonization of global efforts to protect human, animal and environment health against the threat from hazardous chemicals by transitioning to new approach methods

43. This nomination, submitted by the World Federation for Animals, Inc., focuses on harmonized global efforts to support the implementation of new approach methodologies for chemical testing. In

[7] The summaries in the present document are based on the nominations and workplans submitted as at 24 June 2026. Final nominations and workplans, including any revisions following stakeholder comments, are available on the Framework website.

[8] https://www.unep.org/global-framework-chemicals/international-conference-1.

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the nomination, such methodologies are described as non-animal methods, usually human-based, including advanced *in vitro*, *in chemico* and *in silico* approaches, and are presented as tools to support chemical safety assessment and reduce reliance on traditional animal-based hazard assessment.

44. The accompanying workplan proposes stakeholder mapping, the establishment of a multi-stakeholder task force or advisory group, an analysis of existing initiatives, capacity-building and training for regulatory scientists, guidance on structuring regulatory systems to use new approach methodologies, and support for data interoperability and access to new technologies.

C. Pharmaceutical pollution and its effect on human health and the environment

45. This nomination, submitted by the University of York, builds on the existing issue of concern relating to environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants and broadens the focus to include pharmaceutical pollution and associated chemicals. The proposal covers pharmaceutical active ingredients and associated chemicals, including human and animal metabolites, environmental transformation products and manufacturing intermediates, released throughout the pharmaceutical life cycle.

46. The accompanying workplan proposes activities relating to monitoring, data access, environmental risk assessment, eco-pharmacovigilance approaches, green manufacturing, wastewater-related measures, capacity-building and international coordination. It also includes the establishment of a community of practice and research and monitoring activities in low- and middle-income countries. The workplan is complementary to the one proposed for environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants and includes a number of common elements, such as awareness-raising, capacity-building, monitoring, green manufacturing and policy development. It also introduces new elements, such as eco-pharmacovigilance and the development of an environmental justice index. At the same time, some actions of the workplan for environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, such as education and training, medicine take-back programmes and extended producer responsibility, are not explicitly mentioned. The workplan also covers a broader scope of pharmaceutical pollutants and a longer time horizon, which runs to 2050 instead of 2030.

D. Towards a broader approach on lead: expanding the scope beyond lead in paint

47. This nomination, submitted by the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution, presents a broader life-cycle approach to lead, expanding the scope beyond lead in paint to additional sources and pathways of exposure. It highlights sources such as the informal recycling of used lead-acid batteries, which, if not done properly, can be a significant source of human exposure and environmental contamination. Other sources include high-exposure-risk consumer products such as food, spices and cosmetics, as well as contaminated sites, industrial emissions and occupational settings.

48. The accompanying workplan sets out the overall objectives of ending childhood lead poisoning by 2040 and reducing lead exposure among vulnerable and at-risk populations. It proposes action to strengthen regulatory and institutional frameworks, support countries in identifying priority sources and pathways of exposure, promote safer alternatives and cleaner production, improve data and monitoring systems, strengthen occupational safety and health and health sector response systems, and mobilize financial and technical resources for implementation.

IV. Suggested action by the International Conference

49. The International Conference may wish to decide on the way forward with regard to issues of concern, considering the information available to it, and adopt a resolution along the lines of the text contained in the annex to the present note.

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Annex

Draft resolution GFC-1/[--]: Issues of concern

The International Conference,

Mindful that issues of concern under the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste are to be identified, prioritized and addressed through multi-stakeholder and multisectoral international action,

Recalling International Conference on Chemicals Management resolution V/5 on emerging policy issues and issues of concern,

Recognizing the efforts made, the progress achieved to date, and the contribution of the lead entities of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and other stakeholders in addressing the existing issues of concern,

Acknowledging that, despite the progress made, significant challenges remain and require strengthened, coordinated and sustained action by all relevant stakeholders,

Welcoming the report prepared by the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals pursuant to resolution V/5, and expressing appreciation to the lead entities of the Programme and the other contributors,

1. *Decides* to continue its work on the issues of chemicals in products, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, highly hazardous pesticides, lead in paint, nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), with differentiated arrangements as outlined in document UNEP/GFC/IC.1/5 and in the report of the responsible participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals;

2. *Invites* the Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides, the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint and the Global PFAS Group to advance work and implement priority actions on highly hazardous pesticides, lead and PFAS, respectively;

3. *Requests* the global implementation programmes on legal frameworks and institutional capacities and on industry engagement and action along value chains to mainstream the issues of chemicals in products, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, and nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials into their work on sectors, taking into account the activities set forth in their respective proposed workplans, and to report on progress through their respective governance arrangements;

4. *Adopts* […] as new issue[s] of concern under the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste;

5. *Decides* to establish [an] ad hoc multi-stakeholder working group[s] for […], and invites those groups to develop or refine workplans, including targets, indicators and timelines for implementation;

6. *Invites* the Global Environment Facility, within the scope of its mandate and programming, to support recipient countries' efforts in relation to issues of concern identified by the International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals, building on the Facility's existing sector- and value-chain-based approaches, as appropriate, that address endocrine-disrupting chemicals, environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants, hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products, highly hazardous pesticides, and PFAS;

7. *Calls on* all relevant stakeholders to contribute actively to addressing both existing and new issues of concern, including through financial, technical and capacity-building support;

8. *Requests* the secretariat to compile information on progress on all issues of concern through the new, differentiated arrangements and to report thereon to the International Conference at its next session and to the Open-ended Working Group of the Global Framework on Chemicals at its next meeting, for the purpose of reviewing progress, identifying gaps and informing further action.

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