

Executive Director of UNEP
Opening speech – SPP IM

Establishing a science-policy panel to safely manage chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution

Co-chair Laura Dupuy Lasserre, Advisor to the General Direction at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay,

And Co-chair Yutaka Matsuzawa, Vice Minister for Global Environmental Affairs for Japan,

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

My deep thanks once again to the government of Uruguay for hosting us here in Punta del Este this week, first for the resumed third session of the ad hoc open-ended working group (OEWG) on a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and pollution prevention, which closed this morning, and now, for the Intergovernmental Meeting to consider the establishment of the panel.

We arrive at this Intergovernmental Meeting determined after several days of long, intense negotiations. Some of you are exhausted. I stand in awe of your commitment and in deep appreciation.

In this context, let me recall the mandate of the OEWG and that of the Intergovernmental Meeting. The mandate of the OEWG, under UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolution 5/8, is to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel. The UNEA resolution further requested the Executive Director, upon completion of proposals prepared by the OEWG, to convene an Intergovernmental Meeting for the purpose of considering the establishment of a science-policy panel.

That is what we are here to do. The OEWG that has met and negotiated since October 2022 has now completed its work with a recommendation to transmit the following outcomes to this, the Intergovernmental Meeting:

The outcomes are:

- (a) The establishment of the Panel;
- (b) Recommendations for consideration by the Governing Body at its first session; and
- (c) Arrangements for the interim period.

I would like to highlight that now that the OEWG has finalized a complete package of texts necessary for the establishment of the panel, it is the responsibility of the Intergovernmental Meeting – in accordance with its mandate – to consider and adopt these outcomes.

In this context, I understand that the Foundational Document does have certain bracketed text. I would like to recall that other founding documents – for example that of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) – had bracketed text when created. This does not preclude adoption.

What is clear is that this panel is needed. This is very clear from our time here in Punta del Este, where you have worked exceedingly hard and shown that you too believe that this panel is really important. This panel will bridge science and knowledge and policy in a broad sense without being prescriptive. And it will fill a longstanding gap, which is why Member States set up in this space back at UNEA in 2022.

As I said on Sunday, there is no more time left. Every year without a strong global scientific body is another year in which many countries lack access to the best peer-reviewed science on chemicals, waste and pollution – and therefore our struggle to manage pollution will continue to spiral.

This new panel will provide a critical link, making science available to those who want and need it. The proposals for the panel submitted by the OEWG will allow for broad thinking on how chemical, waste and pollution issues can be addressed, factoring in economic and business realities and provide space for all communities, Indigenous Peoples, science, business and other stakeholders.

However, let me reiterate that this panel will not set prescriptive policy. Policy is made at the national level. It will simply provide the best-available science so that governments can set their own path based on their own national contexts. That is what we have seen in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which provides us with the latest science on climate change, and that is what we have seen in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which provides us with the latest science on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

This panel will be trusted and independent. The panel will be forward looking. The panel will serve the world. The panel will be inclusive. The panel will have an authoritative voice. And the panel will understand how we can better protect our environment for people and for planet.

So, the time is now. Negotiators have worked incredibly hard. Two nights ago working until 6am in the morning, determined to hammer out an agreement. I salute and thank you all.

So, now it is up to you.

This is the moment to prioritize what the world needs,

This is the moment to deliver on the promise made at UNEA.

This is the moment to capitalize on the current momentum.

This is the moment to establish this panel.

So, when you do this – and I do say when – you will have the opportunity to make history during this meeting.

I encourage you all not to let this moment slip by.