TOWARDS A GLOBAL CONVENTION ON POPS.

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Persistent organic pollutants, POPs, are hazardous chemicals that resist degradation by physical, chemical or biological pathways. They can be transported by air, water or other means to remote regions where they have never been used and concentrate in tissues of animals high up in the food chain. They may present a risk to the well-being of human populations and wildlife. There has been growing international concern that releases and emissions of POPs may endanger significant parts of the biosphere as well as human populations. The UNEP Governing Council decided in 1997 to set up a committee to negotiate an international agreement on POPs.

The UNEP Governing Council noted the need to develop science-based criteria and a procedure for identifying additional persistent organic pollutants as candidates for future international action. It requested the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to establish an expert group to carry out this work. The group should work concurrently with the INC to develop criteria to be considered in the legally binding instrument. The process should incorporate criteria pertaining to persistence, bioaccumulation, toxicity and exposure in different regions and take into account the potential for regional and global transport including dispersion mechanisms for the atmosphere and the hydrosphere, migratory species and the need to reflect possible influences of marine transport and tropical climates.

Regional negotiations for a protocol on POPs have recently been successfully concluded within the UN Economic Commission for Europe convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution. The protocol was signed by Environmental Ministers of the Contracting Parties on the 25th of June in Aarhus, Denmark. The Parties also agreed on the criteria and the process for adding further substances to the protocol.

UNEP has asked countries to supply information that would be useful in developing criteria for adding further candidates to the original twelve chemicals. The common picture that emerges from these responses is that, *inter alia,* the following criteria should be considered:Volatility, persistence, evidence of long-range transport, bioaccumulation and toxicity. In applying the criteria to individual chemicals climatic factors might be considered. When formulating the response to chemicals fulfilling the criteria socio-economic factors need to be addressed. The process for developing criteria will be described and discussed.