

Bureau of the Conference of the Parties

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING¹

Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties to the UN/ECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents was held in Geneva on 19-20 February 2001. A joint meeting with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the UN/ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) took place in the afternoon of 19 February and in the morning of 20 February to discuss common issues under both Conventions - items 4, 5 and 6 of the agenda (COPB1 of 5 February 2001).

2. It was attended by Mr. Ernst Berger (Switzerland), Mr. Jürgen Wettig (European Commission), Mr. Evgeny Gorshkov (Russian Federation), Mr. Pal Popelyak (Hungary), Mr. Ulf Bjurman (Sweden) as Bureau members representing Parties and by Mr. Fabrizio Colcerasa (Italy), Mr Janusz Zurek (Poland) and Mr. Jim Makris (United States) as Bureau members representing other UN/ECE member countries. Mr. Lajos Katai-Urban and Mr. Tamas Koszeghy (Hungary) and Mrs. Patricia Charlebois (Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit) were present at the meeting as invited participants. The meeting was serviced by Mr. Sergiusz Ludwiczak (Convention Secretary)

I. Opening and adoption of the agenda

3. Mr. Berger, Chairperson of the Conference of the Parties, opened the first meeting of the Bureau welcoming all its members and invited participants. The Bureau adopted the agenda for its first meeting as contained in COPB1 with the modification to discuss item 3: Organization of work within the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties in conjunction with item 7: Implementation of the work plan.

II. Preparation for the joint meeting with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention

4. Mr. Berger introduced the three agenda items to be discussed jointly with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention: Joint special session of the governing bodies; International workshop and exercise on “Industrial safety and water protection”; and Joint ad hoc expert group on water and industrial accidents. The Bureau members, in preparation for the joint meeting, exchanged views on possible approaches to the joint work under both Conventions, mandated by the

¹ Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson of the Conference of the Parties.

Conference of the Parties and the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention. The main item discussed was the substantial preparation of the joint special session of the two governing bodies and its organizational arrangements.

III. Organization of work within the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties

5. This item was discussed in conjunction with item 7 of the agenda (see para. 20)

IV. Joint special session of the governing bodies of the UN/ECE Conventions on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

6. This item was discussed jointly with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention. The decisions taken jointly by the two Bureaux are contained in the minutes of the joint Bureau meeting (MP.WAT/BUREAU/2001/10 - COPB3).

V. International workshop and exercise on “Industrial safety and water protection”

7. See para. 6.

VI. Joint ad hoc expert group on water and industrial accidents

8. See para. 6.

VII. Implementation of the work plan:

A. Competent authorities

9. Mr. Ludwiczak informed the Bureau on the status of ratification of the Convention – since the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Kazakhstan became a Party raising their number to 21. He also stressed that only 9 Parties had so far notified the secretariat about the designation of their competent authority under the Convention. The Bureau recommended that a reminding letter should be addressed to those Parties that did not fulfil this obligation by the secretariat. Mr. Gorshkov informed the Bureau that the Russian Federation would soon inform the Parties, through the secretariat, about the designation of its competent authority. Mr. Wettig offered to assist the secretariat in obtaining the required information from the Parties being EU member States.

B. Implementation report, reporting format, Working Group on Implementation

10. Mr. Ludwiczak informed the Bureau that the secretariat would shortly disseminate the reporting forms for the first implementation report together with an explanatory letter to all Parties and other UN/ECE member countries. The Bureau recommended that a reminder also be sent by the secretariat close to the deadline for replies, which are due by 31 March 2002.

11. The Bureau decided to schedule the first meeting of the Working Group on Implementation soon after the deadline for replies to the reporting form. Mr. Wettig extended an invitation for the meeting to be held in Brussels at the European Commission. The Bureau welcomed this offer. The Bureau entrusted the Working Group to discuss and recommend a possible solution to the question of future reporting periods.

C. Subregional workshop facilitating the implementation and ratification of the Convention

12. Mr. Ludwiczak recalled the background of the workshop – the idea to assist groups of countries in the UN/ECE region in implementing and ratifying the Convention through subregional workshops. This approach was accepted by the Conference of the Parties and included in the long-term programme of work. The organization of one such workshop was included in the work plan for 2001-2002. At the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Armenia offered to host such a workshop on the understanding that financial support would be provided. The Working Group on Implementation was entrusted with the task of overseeing the organization of the workshop.

13. The Bureau, taking into account the fact that the Working Group on Implementation will not become operational until the second quarter of 2002 (see para. 11), decided that it will monitor the substantial preparations for this event. To this end, the Bureau entrusted Mr. Zurek as its liaison with the target countries and in particular with the host country. Mr. Gorshkov also offered to play a substantial role in the preparatory work.

14. The Bureau discussed possible approaches and substantial issues that could be addressed by the workshop. Mr. Bjurman suggested that the workshop should concentrate on issues of civil protection and offered to explore the possibility of a financial contribution by Sweden. Mr. Makris stressed that, when preparing the workshop, consideration should be given to work previously done (assessments, workshops) on assessing the needs and problems of countries with economies in transition. The Bureau agreed that the target countries should play a key role in the workshop and in its preparation. Therefore, it recommended that Mr. Zurek would consult them on the content of the workshop as the first step. The Bureau accepted the mid 2002 as the target date for the event and agreed to continue this discussion after it received further information.

D. UN/ECE Industrial Accident Notification System

15. The Bureau recommended that the next test of the UN/ECE Industrial Accident Notification System should be carried out during the course of 2001. In this context, it welcomed the offer of Croatia to carry out this test and requested the secretariat to make all the necessary arrangements. The Bureau also decided to schedule a consultation of the points of contact for 2002 (the exact date of the consultation would be decided later). The points of contact are expected to evaluate two test that were performed by Poland and Switzerland in 2000 and the 2001 test and

draw up recommendations concerning the System for the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

E. Facilitation of exchange of information and safety technologies

16. The secretariat informed the Bureau of the proposal it had received from the delegation of Germany on assuming the responsibility as a lead country for items 7.1.1 (Preparation of background material for the Conference of the Parties on creating more favourable conditions for the exchange of safety technologies) and 7.1.2 (Organization of a workshop on the facilitation of the exchange of safety management systems and safety technologies) in the work plan for 2001-2002 and providing a financial contribution towards their implementation.

17. The Bureau welcomed the initiative of Germany and expressed its appreciation for this additional in kind contribution from Germany to cover the financial requirements under the Convention.

18. The Bureau agreed with the proposal to organize the workshop back-to-back with the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties in the Republic of Moldova in 2002. It also agreed with the German suggestion that a small preparatory group of experts be established and that it would start its work in June 2001. The Bureau requested the secretariat to ask the German delegation to provide it with further information on the main goals and issues to be addressed by the workshop so that Bureau members can further discuss it and provide an input to the preparatory work.

19. The secretariat also informed the Bureau of the interest of the Meeting of the Parties to the UN/ECE Water Convention in participating in the preparations for and the workshop itself.

Organization of work within the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties

20. The Bureau accepted Mr. Berger's proposal, that it would meet only when necessary and that calls in performing its functions between meetings, it would make use of the available modern means of communication i.e. e-mail and periodic telephone conference. The next regular meeting of the Bureau was tentatively scheduled for early spring 2002, the exact date will be communicated in due time.

VII. Resources for 2001

21. Mr. Ludwiczak informed the Bureau on the status of resources that were made available or pledged by Parties and other UN/ECE member countries to meet the requirements of the work plan for 2001-2002 and once again expressed appreciation to donor countries.

IX. Other business

22. The Bureau tentatively scheduled the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to take place in the Republic of Moldova, from 6 (afternoon) to 8 November 2002.

23. The secretariat informed the Bureau of a planned meeting (25 June 2001) among representatives of governing bodies of ECE environmental conventions to discuss public participation as a cross-sectoral issue. The holding of such a meeting was suggested at a meeting of the convention's secretariats. This initiative was then taken up and further developed by the Bureau of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The suggested meeting should be seen as a follow up activity to the round-table discussion on the supporting the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, held within the framework of the seventh session of the UN/ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The Bureau agreed that Mr. Ernst Berger, its Chairperson, together with the Convention's Secretary would represent the Industrial Accidents Convention at the meeting.

24. Mr. Jim Makris asked for information on the preparations for Rio+10 and raised the issue of a possible input of the Convention to this process. He also informed the Bureau of the progress in reviewing and revising the OECD "Guiding Principles for Chemical Accident Prevention, Preparedness and Response". Finally, he shared his view of using the UNEP/APELL Programme as a tool for transposing some of the provisions of the Convention into practice at local level.

25. The Bureau expressed support for the APELL Programme and agreed to work closely with it. The secretariat reiterated that it is in the process of developing close working relations with APELL, the planned input and participation of APELL in the Hungarian workshop and exercise being just one example of this new cooperation (see MP.WAT/BUREAU/2001/10 - COPB3).