

International PRTR Coordinating Group

**First meeting
20 March 2006, Ghent, Belgium**

REPORT OF THE MEETING

I. ELECTION OF A CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON

1. Mr. Michael Stanley-Jones (UNECE), serving as interim secretary, opened the meeting and thanked the host government of Belgium.
2. Mr. Osmany Pereira Gonzalez (UNEP) and Mr. Achim Halpaap (UNITAR) were elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman, respectively. Each will serve for a term of one year through the conclusion of the second meeting.

II. LINKAGES WITH INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATION PROCESSES

3. The Chairman reviewed the main conclusions of the thirteenth and final meeting of the Inter-organisation Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) Co-ordinating Group (6 June 2005) where had decided to continue the work of the Group as an independent "international pollutant release and transfer registers coordinating group" on an interim basis.
4. The Chairman briefed the Meeting on discussions with the secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), which had been under consideration by the IOMC PRTR Co-ordinating Group as one of the potential frameworks for the new body. UNEP, UNECE and UNITAR had met with the SAICM secretariat in Geneva on 16 March 2006 to discuss the outcome of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM), held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (4-6 February 2006) relevant to PRTR activities and possible interactions with the Coordinating Group. The Global Programme of Action adopted in Dubai included PRTRs as possible areas of work, e.g. the creation of national and international registers and of guidance supporting their implementation, and promotion of political consensus in favour of access to information (UNEP/GCSS/IX.6/Add.2). The Chairman and Vice-chairman reported that the SAICM secretariat expressed interest in using PRTRs to measure progress on SAICM's Action Plan, in particular for analyzing trends in national implementation. Regional meetings of the SAICM could also provide opportunities for the Coordinating Group to provide information on national developments.
5. Some participants asked for clarification of the linkage of the International PRTR Coordinating Group to the OECD PRTR Task Force and of where the differences between these two bodies would lie. Mr. Hans Peter Saxer (Switzerland) drew a distinction between the OECD Task Force, which functions as a technical forum for discussion of how to set up and use PRTRs, and the International PRTR Coordinating

Group, which could discuss the role of different international organizations in PRTR development.

6. Mr. Alain Chung (Canada) viewed the Coordinating Group as being mainly a political group where high-level discussions could take place of how different organizations might cooperate in future initiatives. He saw a benefit in the Group reporting to the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) on PRTR-related developments but questioned whether annual meetings would be needed to prepare such reports.

7. Some participants thought that a meeting of international coordinating bodies could occur without national representatives necessarily participating in such meetings. Mr. John Dombrowsky (USA) suggested that the differences between the two bodies might emerge more clearly in time. Mr. Bernd Mehlhorn (European Commission) supported installation of the International PRTR Coordinating Group with a distinct set of objectives.

8. Speaking in his capacity as representative of UNEP, Mr. Pereira Gonzalez emphasized the importance for intergovernmental organizations of having opportunities to meet with national experts to discuss capacity building initiatives, both as PRTR implementers and as representatives of Governments supporting PRTR development. He noted that UNEP partnerships with Governments having established PRTR systems had provided opportunities for capacity building activities through the provision of their expertise and funding. He informed the group that beginning in 2006 regional workshops on implementation of SAICM would be organized and suggested that the Meeting consider whether these could be organized with selected members of this group to participate in SAICM regional meeting activities, such as hosting of side events.

9. Mr. Mehlhorn assumed that SAICM members would also report on their PRTR activities; and a report from the Coordinating Group would be additional to these national reports.

10. The Chairman expressed the view that individual reporting from each country will not help much to assess progress internationally and that this would require a lot of consolidation work be carried out on the information received from national Governments and IGOs. Mr. Michel Amand (Belgium) agreed, seeing a unique opportunity for the group to serve as a point of contact of SAICM. By fulfilling such a role, SAICM would not have to address each member country separately on its PRTR development.

11. Mr. Chung suggested an international conference on PRTRs might be held in three to five years to address common issues. Mr. Dombrowsky commented that PRTRs had been found to be useful components in the negotiation of free trade agreements.

12. Mr. Henrik Harjula (OECD) asked whether the group should not begin to work towards being located under the auspices of SAICM, rather than continue operating on an interim basis. Mr. Amand saw a need for coordination between Member States and IGOs to prevent duplication of initiatives, while avoiding duplication of the work of the OECD Task Force. It was agreed that efforts should be made to use meeting time efficiently and avoid duplication of effort undertaken by other intergovernmental bodies addressing PRTRs.

13. The Chairman recalled that at the final meeting of the IOMC PRTR Co-ordinating Group, its members had mandated its Chairman to contact the secretariat of Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) concerning possible contributions by members of the Group to Forum V, being held in Budapest, 24-29 September 2006. The Meeting noted that it was too late to initiate a contribution to Forum V. It requested that the Chairman contact the IFCS secretariat and inform it that the new Coordinating Group would be interested in opportunities to contribute to IFCS activities in future.

III. Draft Terms of Reference for the International PRTR Coordinating Group

14. The Chairman invited comment on the draft terms of reference for the new body which had been prepared and circulated by the Secretariat prior to the meeting (IPRTRCG(2006/2)). The secretariat explained that the draft document had been based on the former IOMC PRTR Co-ordinating Group's Terms of Reference as adopted in 2004.

15. The participants decided that the International PRTR Coordinating Group should focus its activities on promoting the coordination of PRTR capacity building activities in developing countries or countries with economies in transition. It could also serve as a reporting mechanism for the ICCM.

16. By holding its meetings back-to-back meetings with the OECD Task Force, when that body schedules its meetings in Europe, the Coordinating Group could promote participation by international experts who might not otherwise be able to attend a stand-alone meeting.

17. The Chairman invited discussion on the scope of membership in the Coordinating Group. Some participants asked whether the meeting was primarily intended for Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) rather than for the broader PRTR community. If the former, then it was felt that national, business and NGO representatives and experts might be invited as observers, rather than regular members of the new Group. Mr. Harjula saw value in the participation of those countries that are playing a capacity building role, but was unsure of the benefit for countries not engaged in such activities. Some suggested that country representatives might serve more in the capacity as observers whom IGOs could consult with from time to time on questions related to PRTR development and capacity building. Others felt it was important to maintain a relationship of equality among the participants in the meetings and did not, therefore, wish to draw a distinction between members and observers, as this could inhibit some experts from attending the meeting as mere observers.

18. Mr. Dombrowsky thought that although the group was needed primarily to provide a venue for IGOs, it was important for Member States to keep abreast of capacity building activities and to maintain a venue which would maximize opportunities for their attendance. Mr. Mehlhorn found value in sharing information on the international level and urged that participation be open to Member States. Holding back-to-back meetings with the OECD Task Force was convenient for its members. Mr. Chung supported inviting all OECD Member States to the meeting.

19. The Vice-chairman suggested that a practical approach should be taken to the question of whether to hold meetings of the Coordinating Group back-to-back with OECD Task Force or UNECE meetings. He also supported holding Coordinating Group meetings annually.

20. Mr. Amand supported creation of a “capacity building marketplace” for non-Member countries of the OECD. If the meeting aimed to coordinate PRTR capacity building internationally, some felt a wider audience of industry, NGO and country representatives, including those from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asian countries, should be invited.

21. After discussion of various options and conceptions of membership, it was agreed that all members be considered equal participants in the meetings of the group. Coordinating Group meetings will be organized by a voluntary bureau consisting of the three founding Intergovernmental organizations (UNECE, UNEP and UNITAR) and any country delegation that would like to be a part of the Bureau, as well as other groups that are considered “participants”.

22. Some participants expressed concern that the group should stay focused on promoting of capacity building activities. Thematic meetings of the Coordinating Group could be opened to NGOs, including representatives from industry associations, on a case-by-case basis. The Bureau would circulate a list of candidate NGOs including industrial groups, to existing participants, before inviting their participation in future meetings. Participation should be subject to participants providing their own funding, unless bilaterally they could agree with some other sponsors.

23. Bearing on the question of membership was the question of what types of decisions the group might be requested to take. The Chairman suggested that IGOs should keep ownership of capacity building activities and have a more formal role in the decisions of the group. If there are any decisions to be made with regard to, for example, IFCS or ICCM, this could be undertaken by IGOs with the input of participants. For the remainder of the Group’s activities, formal decisions would not be required.

A revised version of the draft Terms of Reference, including the list of participants, is annexed to this report. Participants are invited to review the revised draft and submit their comments to the Secretariat (michael.stanley-jones@unece.org).

IV. Progress Reports on major PRTR activities

A. OECD

24. Mr. Harjula gave an update of the activities of the OECD PRTR Task Force, which would hold its ninth meeting on 21 –23 March 2006. The Task Force had prepared reports on scoping studies on releases from products [ENV/JM/PRTR(2006)2] and [ENV/JM/PRTR/RD(2006)1], and the crosswalk for reporting waste transfers [ENV/JM/PRTR(2006)3]. (For the draft summary report of this meeting, see the OECD document ENV/JM/PRTR/M(2006)1.)

B. UNITAR

25. Speaking on behalf of his organization, Mr. Halpaap reported on capacity building activities undertaken by UNITAR. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, UNITAR has engaged in a dialogue on PRTRs with the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CACED). With the support of the Government of Switzerland, UNITAR had launched a project in Togo to develop a PRTR system built around a river watershed, as an example of how PRTRs might be tailored to national needs. The Institute had also developed a concept for a regional PRTR in the Western Cape of South Africa. UNITAR had been approached by the government of Thailand to undertake a two-year process in PRTR design linked to the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, in cooperation with the United States Environmental Protection Agency. In the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region, it had supported a project to promote PRTR awareness raising in Kazakhstan in which 35 NGOs were involved. To promote coordination of international capacity building activities, UNITAR plans to contribute in future to a list of all countries having an interest in PRTR development.

26. Several participants expressed interest in having an authoritative list of PRTR capacity building projects, with which donor countries and international organizations could gauge interest in national PRTR development and track resources being spent to meet capacity building demands. The Vice-chairman suggested that by 2007 an indication of SAICM activities would become available. Mr. Chung asked if an inventory of country readiness to develop a PRTR could be developed. Mr. Stanley-Jones offered to circulate the PRTR capacity building activities matrix developed by UNECE, UNEP, UNITAR and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe at the request of the UNECE Working Group on PRTRs. Mr. Mehlhorn suggested that the capacity building matrix be circulated and completed by Coordinating Group participants.

27. UNECE will circulate a revised version of the matrix and develop a proposal for including an index of PRTR "readiness" for review and comment by the meeting participants.

C. United Nations Environment Programme

28. Mr. Pereira Gonzalez provided an update on PRTR activities within UNEP. Following conclusion of a PRTR awareness-raising workshop with ASEAN countries in 2004, UNEP and the Government of Malaysia were developing an Memorandum of Understanding to support a pilot PRTR project in a specific industrial area. During 2006 and 2007, project partners expect to design a national PRTR.

29. UNEP had received requests from several countries to include PRTRs as part of their National Implementation Plans to track pollutants and report to the Stockholm POPs Convention. In support of the SAICM Global Programme of Action, Governments had launched the Quick Start Programme (IOMC). A trust fund administered by UNEP had been established. PRTRs fall under three of the areas of the SAICM priority areas of work. UNEP was working with SAICM to ensure PRTR taken as a priority, and working with countries to prepare their proposals. Each country will be eligible for 250,000 under Quick Start for all programme areas in SAICM. The SAICM secretariat valued PRTRs as an indicator of progress on implementation of Strategy.

D. United National Economic Commission for Europe

30. Mr. Stanley-Jones reported on UNECE's activities. Luxembourg and the European Community had ratified the Kiev Protocol on PRTRs. The Protocol is expected to enter into force in 2007. The ratification of the instrument may coincide with the Sixth Environment-for-Europe Ministerial Conference, scheduled for 10 -12 October 2007, in Belgrade (Serbia and Montenegro). In preparation for the third meeting of the Working Group on PRTRs, 17-19 May 2006, designated experts had developed a draft decision on a compliance mechanism and the secretariat had prepared analytical papers on financial arrangements and subsidiary bodies to the Protocol.

31. In February 2006, the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat assumed coordination of the joint University of Geneva-UNECE project to develop a dynamic cost model of national PRTR implementation. Initial field trials of the model had been carried out at installations in Norway and Sweden. The study did not model the cost of reporting on diffuse sources, however. Some participants cautioned that the results of field trials undertaken in advanced industrial states could lead to overestimation of PRTR implementation costs. UNECE had secured an electronic forum for discussion of the study in the PRTR Virtual Classroom and promised to invite participants to contribute to the review of the model once its calibration phase had been completed in 2006.

E. European Commission

32. Mr. Mehlhorn briefly updated the group on European Commission's activities, notably the adoption of a Regulation implementing the European PRTR in February 2006 and development of PRTR guidance material for European Union Member States.

F. Canada

33. Mr. Chung noted that Canada had helped Mexico overcome PRTR implementation challenges and that Mexico will publish its first year of data in June 2006. Mexico was looking for help on how to communicate and provide appropriate context to ensure public understanding of PRTR information. He identified the reconciliation of past years' emission data collected through other types of reporting systems with data collected through a PRTR system as a priority area of research.

E. ECO Forum

34. Ms. Mara Silina (European Environment Bureau) reported on the activities of the European ECO Forum, an umbrella of public interest non-governmental organizations working on implementation of the UNECE Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs. With support of the Government of Norway, ECO Forum had organized a seminar in Moscow (Russian Federation) promoting involvement of NGOs and industry in PRTR development on local level, 18-19 November 2005. The seminar concluded that very little knowledge existed on the local level with industries on how to implement the Protocol. Information needed to be provided in the Russian language at minimum, and in national languages and miniature scale local projects should be used to foster PRTR awareness and experience. NGOs had actively participated in the PRTR Virtual Classroom discussion forum held in the Russian

language, through the support of UNITAR, and encourage the multiplication of this experience in other countries.

35. The Chairman invited any other body wanting to submit a summary about their PRTR activities to submit these to the Secretariat for incorporation into the report. The report of the International PRTR Coordinating Group should serve to facilitate the exchange of information, without duplicating information reported in other forums, such as the OECD PRTR Task Force. The Vice-chairman encouraged the Group to think through the division of labour on reporting PRTR activity, keeping in mind that the present meeting's focus is on capacity building aimed at developing countries and on international activities.

V. FURTHERING DEVELOPMENT OF A GLOBAL PRTR INTERNET PORTAL

37. The Chairman invited comments on ongoing relationship between PRTR high-level portal and the work of the Coordinating Group. Mr. Stanley-Jones contrasted different visions of the proposed portal, distinguishing especially a static portal requiring minimum maintenance and a dynamic portal which could serve as the corporate website of the International PRTR Coordinating Group. To avoid duplication of effort, he suggested that the PRTR Virtual Classroom be integrated into the structure of the future portal. Mr. Harjula agreed that the Virtual Classroom should be integrated into the high-level portal and reported that the OECD Task Force would discuss the invitation by the IOMC Co-ordinating Group to manage development of the portal at its next meeting (21-23 March 2006). The Vice-chairman explained that the Virtual Classroom has inactive components as well as provided interactive services. UNITAR would agree to move the Classroom's links to a higher-level portal, leaving his organization to focus on providing interactive services. If no OECD Members State were interested in hosting the higher-level portal, UNITAR would consider hosting the portal

38. Several participants supported development of a global high-level portal. Mr. Dombrowsky said the United States is exploring the availability of resources to support development of the portal. Mr. Chung proposed a small group of volunteers be created to develop some options for the general structure of the portal. Mr. Mehlhorn commented that the OECD PRTR Task Force's meeting provided an available structure under which the volunteer group could be convened. The Vice-chairman offered to prepare a "thought starter" on the portal. In the interim, UNECE offered to publish the report of the present, following its adoption by the participants, on its web site.

39. The Group welcomed the UNITAR to develop a starting piece on the high-level portal. It requested that UNECE publish the documents of the meeting.

VI. SECRETARIAT, FUTURE VENUE AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

40. UNECE offered to serve as secretariat until the next meeting of the PRTR Coordinating Group. The Group reached agreement that UNECE would continue to serve as secretariat. The Chairman invited participants who may wish to serve as secretariat for the next term (i.e. after the second meeting) to submit proposal to the Bureau ahead of the 2007 meeting.

41. Mr. Dombrowsky asked how the Group might coordinate a future request for affiliation with SAICM. The Chairman said such an initiative would have to come from the Member States of the ICCM, which would hold its second meeting in 2009. Until then, it would not be possible to conclude a formal agreement with SAICM.

42. The Coordinating Group agreed to hold its next meeting back-to-back with the OECD PRTR Task Force in February 2007.

43. The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Government of Belgium for their generous hosting of the meeting and closed the meeting.

Annex I

Terms of Reference

REVISED DRAFT

I. POLICY BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

1. Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, as agreed by Heads of States at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, provide specific references to the establishment of national emission inventories and the right of the public to access this information. Through Chapter 19, which addresses the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals, Agenda 21 recommends that "governments and relevant international organizations with the co-operation of industry should improve databases and information systems on toxic chemicals, such as emission inventories programmes". Chapter 19 also points out that governments should "consider adoption of community-right-to-know or other public information dissemination programmes as possible risk reduction tools". In the absence of such requirements "industry should be encouraged to adopt, on a voluntary basis, community right-to-know programmes ... including sharing of information on causes of accidental and potential releases ... and reporting on annual routine emissions of toxic chemicals to the environment."

2. The Inter-governmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) through its third meeting (Forum III) which took place in Salvador, Brazil, in October 2000, reaffirmed the importance of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) as an environmental policy tool to promote the sound management of chemicals. A priority for action and a PRTR action plan were adopted at Forum III. The Global Plan of Action of the Strategic Approach to the Sound Management of Chemicals (SAICM) includes activities dealing with creation and promotion of pollutant release and transfer registers. The International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) will undertake periodic reviews of the Strategic Approach. The functions of the Conference will be *inter alia* "[t]o receive reports from all relevant stakeholders on progress in implementation of the Strategic Approach and to disseminate information as appropriate" (SAICM/ICCM.1/3).

II. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRTR COORDINATING GROUP

3. The overall objective of the International PRTR Coordinating Group is to improve coordination between international organizations, governments and other interested parties on their ongoing and planned efforts related to the further development and implementation of PRTR systems in developing countries or countries with economies in transition. The International PRTR Coordinating Group operates on the basis of consensus. It will, through activities implemented by its participants, either individually or jointly:

- promote mechanisms to harmonize activities and avoid duplication of efforts;
- increase, through collaboration, co-ordination through information exchange between its members, the efficiency of international efforts to bring together expertise on PRTRs;
- enhance coordination of PRTR international [outreach, training and capacity building] activities;
- facilitate the exchange of information on ongoing and planned PRTR activities of its members;
- enhance the network of PRTR resource institutions and individuals; and
- coordinate the preparation of reports concerning international PRTR activities to be submitted for consideration to relevant fora, e.g. the IFCS and SAICM.

III. PARTICIPATION AND STRUCTURE

4. The International PRTR Coordinating Group operates on an interim basis as a self-standing independent body. Consideration of operating under the auspices of another international body will be kept under review as international chemical management coordination evolves.
5. Coordinating Group meetings will be organized by a voluntary Bureau consisting of participants of those organizations that are active in international PRTR activities, including UNEP, UNECE and UNITAR, as well as representatives of countries, regional organizations and other groups that are considered participants.
6. Intergovernmental organizations, governments, and international industry, labour and public interest nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have significant activities in the area of focus can be invited to participate by the Bureau. Industry, labour and public interest NGOs are responsible for coordinating representation and membership within and among their respective nongovernmental organization groupings. As deemed beneficial to effectively carrying out the work, the Bureau may invite other groups with significant activities in the area of focus to participate, following circulation of a list of such proposed groups to the participants of the Coordinating Group and taking into account any comments received on the proposed list of invitees.
7. Each participating organization, government or group shall be requested by the Secretariat to designate a representative. In designating a representative to the Coordinating Group, members should take into account the need for consistency and involvement. Participants may, subject to prior discussion with the Chairperson and Secretariat, be accompanied at meetings by advisors where their expertise is specifically required.
8. The group will meet at least once every year to establish a schedule of activities and identify issues to be addressed during the year and to monitor progress made on issues and actions previously considered. Priority issues will be determined by taking into account the interests and priorities of Coordinating Group participants.
9. Whenever possible, meetings of the Coordinating Group will be organized around major international PRTR events to make effective use of limited travel resources.

10. The Coordinating Group will be serviced by a Secretariat. The main functions of the Secretariat will be to:

- facilitate communication and information exchange among members of the Coordinating Group;
- maintain records of group membership and activities to ensure meeting procedures are consistent;
- prepare meeting records;
- draft progress reports and other documentation relevant to the work of the Coordinating Group; and
- ensure that the international PRTR high-level web portal contains up-to-date information on the Coordinating Group and in particular the terms of reference, list of members and the designated representatives.

Depending upon the agreed activities of the Coordinating Group, the Secretariat could be requested to take on additional functions, resources permitting.

11. A Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson of the Coordinating Group will be elected annually on a rotating basis through a consensus-based process from the designated representatives of the participants. In the absence of the serving Chairperson for a meeting, the Vice-Chairperson will serve as meeting chair. In consultation with the Secretariat, the Chairperson will call meetings of the Coordinating Group, provide input for the meeting agenda and represent the Coordinating Group, as appropriate, on issues which have been previously agreed by the group.

12. Ad hoc working groups may be established under the Coordinating Group in order to coordinate specific activities.

13. Each member of the Coordinating Group will cover the costs of his/her own participation in the meetings of the Group. The resources required for the Secretariat of the Coordinating Group will be provided by the organization(s) designated to carry out the secretariat function. Resources required for undertaking any specific activities that the Coordinating Group might agree to undertake will be considered on an ad hoc basis.