

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents

Bureau

Forty-fifth meeting

Geneva (online), 2 December 2020

Minutes of the meeting

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

1. The Chair opened the online meeting of the Bureau and welcomed participants. The Chair thanked the secretariat for its efforts in adjusting the arrangements for the upcoming eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (hereinafter Conference) to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the Bureau, especially the Vice-Chairs, for their time and efforts in preparing for the Conference. She also thanked Germany for financially supporting the Conference and its preparatory events.

2. The secretariat (Director of the ECE Environment Division) welcomed the Bureau and congratulated its members on their achievements in preparing for the Conference, including their background work and cooperation with the secretariat. He recalled the advance information session (online, 30 October 2020, 9:30–12:30 CET) and seminar on mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond (online, 1 December 2020, 9:30–12:30 CET) as exemplary preparatory events, and thanked Germany for providing financial support to the Conference and the seminar. He also thanked the Chair for her role in facilitating, in cooperation with the Vice-Chairs and the secretariat, the preparatory events and consensus-building in advance of the Conference, making its six-hour agenda possible. The Director encouraged Parties to take decisions at the Conference to ensure progress in implementing the Convention's long-term strategy until 2030 (ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1).

3. The following Bureau members were present: Ms. Torill Tandberg (Norway), Chair; Mr. Michael Struckl (Austria), Vice-Chair; Ms. Jasmina Karba (Slovenia), Vice-Chair; Mr. Evgeny Baranovsky (Belarus); Mr. Pavel Forint (Czechia); Mr. Camille Siefridt (European Union); Ms. Wivi-Ann Wagello-Sjölund (Finland); Mr. Gerhard Winkelmann-Oei (Germany); Ms. Suzana Milutinovic (Serbia); and Mr. Martin Merkofer (Switzerland). Mr. Leo Iberl (Germany), Chair of the Working Group on Implementation (WGI), also attended the meeting. The meeting was serviced by the ECE secretariat.

4. The Bureau adopted the agenda (CP.TEIA/2020/B.3/Agenda) without changes.

2. Preparatory events for the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties

5. The Bureau took stock of the two preparatory events for the Conference: the advance information session (30 October 2020) and the seminar on mine tailings safety (1 December 2020). These events were organized as separate online events due to the shortened duration of the Conference and included English and Russian interpretation. The secretariat welcomed the high attendance rates of the events, both of which included over 80 participants from Parties and beneficiary countries to the Assistance and Cooperation Programme. The secretariat informed the Bureau of the additional efforts, human resources and skills on its side required for an effective organization and servicing of these events, in comparison to organizing in-person meetings.

6. The secretariat informed the Bureau of the feedback it had received on the two events. For the advance information session, participants had conveyed positive feedback, including their increased understanding of the upcoming Conference proceedings and the draft operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (ECE/CP.TEIA/2020/11). The Chair stated that this event was successfully held online and resulted in important outcomes for Conference participants.

7. The secretariat informed the Bureau that the seminar brought together many stakeholders and featured statements from countries that participated in mine tailings safety activities under the Convention. The secretariat positively noted the attendance of partner organizations, particularly since the European Union had proposed an additional paragraph (11) to the updated draft decision on strengthening mine tailings safety (ECE/CP.TEIA/2020/L.1) indicating that activities of other international organizations should be taken into account when strengthening mine tailings safety. The seminar conclusions related to the background document on mine tailings safety (ECE/CP.TEIA/2020/2) and the updated draft decision on strengthening mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond (ECE/CP.TEIA/2020/L.1, based on the original ECE/CP.TEIA/2020/3). The Chair explained that one key outcome of the seminar was recognizing the importance of the UNECE safety guidelines, and emphasized that work done to develop this area now would make future operations safer. She highlighted the results of tailings projects under the Convention, notably the mapping activities, and welcomed the discussions and perspectives shared. The secretariat noted that the conclusions would be presented to the Conference for notetaking, prior to the adoption of the decision, and annexed to the Conference report.

8. The Bureau concluded that the two preparatory events were very well-prepared and important sessions in preparation for the Conference.

3. Preparations for the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties

9. The Bureau reviewed the practical arrangements and substantive preparations for the Conference, which had been planned as a hybrid meeting in the Palais des Nations in Geneva and online with the web-based platform Interprefy, 7–9 December 2020, from 10:00–12:00 CET each day.

(a) Practical arrangements

10. The secretariat updated the Bureau on the practical arrangements for the Conference. The secretariat noted that the meeting could not run overtime due to timing restrictions with interpretation. In line with the public health restrictions of Switzerland, the hybrid meeting room in the Palais would allow up to five delegates to attend in person, in addition to the secretariat; however, no requests to attend in person had been submitted to the secretariat at the time of this Bureau meeting. The secretariat encouraged participants to connect to the Interprefy platform from 9:00 CET on the first day, particularly those who wished to speak, to test their connection, microphone and speaker settings. The secretariat recalled encouraging delegates planning to intervene at the Conference to send their statements in text to the secretariat in advance to best prepare for the meeting.

11. The Chair informed the Bureau that she would entrust the secretariat to check quorum, specifically the names of Party representatives listed on credentials, at the opening of the meeting, at the beginning of each day and at times of decision-making. She stated that she would encourage Parties to remain connected for the duration of the meeting. The secretariat explained that the advance circulation procedure in the draft operating procedures allowed for better preparations for the Conference to be made, as Parties' positions on five draft decisions and documents for adoption were known in advance (see Section 3(d)). The resulting updated draft decisions and documents, along with the report on the implementation of the Convention, were envisaged to be adopted by the Conference. The secretariat also explained that all the decisions taken during the Conference would be reviewed and endorsed during each day of the meeting. At the end of the first and second days, a list of the decisions taken would be circulated with a deadline of 6:00 CET the same day for Parties to submit comments, with the objective for Parties to confirm agreement on the mornings of the second and third days.

12. The Chair thanked the secretariat for developing draft operating procedures and stated their importance help the meeting run smoothly. She further encouraged Bureau members to encourage their delegations to submit their planned statements in advance of the Conference.

(b) Representation and credentials

13. The secretariat reported on registration and credentials received from Parties and others up to date through the procedure outlined in the draft operating procedures. The total number of registered participants, including from the secretariat, was 134, at the time of the Bureau meeting. The total number of copies of credentials received from Parties, through the Permanent Missions, was 32. The total number of originals of credentials received from Parties was 8. Some countries mentioned their originals might arrive to the secretariat later due to objective delays, to which the secretariat recalled was in line with the draft operating procedures. The secretariat also informed the Bureau that quorum could be expected at the Conference with reference to the copies of credentials submitted up to date.

14. The Chair requested the secretariat to remind Parties to submit their credentials to the secretariat as soon as possible. The secretariat recalled that it was legally required to accept copies and the originals at the opening of the meeting or as soon as possible thereafter. Given the circumstances of remote participation, the submissions of credentials through Permanent Missions was important to enable the acceptance of the advance copies, contrary to earlier meetings of the Conference of the Parties where only originals were required. The Vice-Chair informed the Bureau she would take on the reporting of credentials at the Conference.

(c) Election of officers and members of the Bureau, Working Group on Implementation and Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents

15. The secretariat updated the Bureau on the submissions received of candidatures for nomination of Bureau membership for 2021–2022 and Working Group on Implementation (WGI) membership for 2021–2024. The secretariat received 10 nominations for Bureau membership, including two new members (see ECE.CP.TEIA/2020/INF.2). This includes candidatures representing Austria, Belarus, the European Union, Finland, France, Norway, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland. The Chair and secretariat expressed its appreciation and thanks to the long-standing outgoing members from Czechia and Germany. The Chair recalled that she had circulated to the Bureau a proposal for the officers, which the Bureau had welcomed: Norway for the Chair; and Austria and Switzerland for the Vice-Chairs. The secretariat welcomed the expected continuity of the majority of the Bureau members and the two new candidatures from France and the Russian Federation, which would improve geographical representation.

16. The secretariat received 10 nominations for WGI membership, including three new members (see ECE.CP.TEIA/2020/INF.3). This includes nominations from Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland. The WGI Chair and secretariat expressed thanks to the outgoing members representing Germany (WGI Chair), Croatia and the United Kingdom, and welcomed the candidatures for new membership from Estonia, the Republic of Moldova and Slovakia. The Bureau recalled that, unlike elections of the Bureau officers, the election of the WGI Chair and Vice-Chairs would be conducted within the group at its first meeting following the Conference. The nominee from Sweden had indicated her readiness to act as the new WGI Chair.

17. The Chair shared information on an expression of interest received from Serbia regarding the election of the Co-Chair of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG) for the next biennium 2021–2022. The current Co-Chair for the Industrial Accidents Convention (Germany) had previously shared information of not being available for the role as of 2021. In accordance with the JEG strategy, the Bureau recalled it would elect a new Co-Chair during its first meeting in the new biennium in early 2021. Serbia announced to the Bureau its intention to nominate Mr. Bojan Srdic, current member of the JEG, as a candidate for the Co-Chair of the JEG. The Bureau welcomed this announcement. The secretariat shared information that the Co-Chair of the JEG would then attend the parts of the Bureau meetings when issues pertaining to the JEG's work would be discussed, mostly remotely, while nominating a standing Bureau member to liaison on JEG-related matters.

18. The Chair and the secretariat thanked the outgoing Bureau, WGI and JEG members. The secretariat also thanked the outgoing members for their dedicated and constructive approaches, cooperation with the secretariat and leadership and long-standing support to the Convention's governing bodies and the JEG. The outgoing WGI Chair expressed thanks for an interesting and fruitful experience leading the group. The outgoing Bureau member (Germany), who was also Co-Chair of the JEG, thanked the Bureau and recalled how the ECE region had changed in his time working under the Convention. He described the importance of the Convention as a platform to exchange ideas and strategies and to enhance industrial safety. He stated that Germany would continue to support the Convention.

(d) Draft decisions/documents for adoption and list of decisions taken

19. The Chair invited the Bureau to report on any items for discussion and decision-making at the Conference, in particular items which had not been previously flagged to the Chair and the secretariat through the advance circulation procedure.

20. The secretariat informed the Bureau that two Parties, namely the European Union and the Russian Federation, used the advance circulation procedure in the draft operating procedures to comment on the five draft decisions and documents that were circulated. The Chair reported that, following the submission of comments under the advance circulation procedure, informal discussions were held with these two Parties, in cooperation with the Vice-Chairs and the secretariat, which were fruitful and resulted in revised submissions by both Parties.

21. The secretariat informed the Bureau that updated draft decisions and documents had been made available on the Conference webpage and the updated documents had been formally translated. In addition, a second version of each document indicating the comments and revisions submitted by Parties had also been made available.

22. The Chair invited the Bureau to discuss the anticipated decisions taken by the Conference, based on the draft list of outcomes and decisions taken, prepared by the secretariat. The Bureau had no comments on the document.

(e) Preparatory online meeting on the amendment

23. The Bureau recalled that the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties requested that informal meetings be held between Parties on the proposed amendment to the Convention. The Chair, with support from the secretariat, shared information on the informal consultation scheduled to take place the following day between the Russian Federation and Parties that formally submitted the amendment in 2016, notably the European Union, the Republic of Moldova, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland. The Chair informed the Bureau of her understanding that none of the Parties had mentioned a change in their positions. The Chair recalled the request entrusted to her and the Vice-Chairs at the last Conference to facilitate consultations with Parties and ask them whether their positions had changed on the proposed draft amendment. Since no changes had been reported, the Chair and Vice-Chairs informed the Bureau that they no longer saw a need for tabling this issue until Parties' positions change. Therefore, the Chair indicated her intention to request that Parties communicate any changes in their positions in amending the Convention and, only following such communications, consultations on and reconsideration of the amendment would be held, and to agree the related language during the informal consultation meeting. The Bureau and secretariat agreed with this way forward.

4. Workplan and financial resource requirements

24. The secretariat presented updated information on the contributions received from several Parties for the 2019–2020 workplan. In comparing the contributions and the workplan, the secretariat informed the Bureau that much progress had been made and Parties provided majority of funding for the workplan they adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

25. The secretariat provided an outlook for financial resources for the next workplan (2021–2022). At the time of this Bureau meeting, only a limited number of countries, had confirmed the pledges they were intending to make. The secretariat invited confirmations of pledges for predictability in financing the workplan and recalled the importance of contributing financial resources to ensure the scale of the work programme be met. The total amount of envisaged and confirmed pledges to date

amounted to less than half of the workplan budget. The secretary underlined that while both earmarked and unearmarked contributions are welcome, unearmarked contributions would give more flexibility for implementation.

26. The Chair encouraged Bureau members to work with their own authorities and reach out to other Parties to ensure that financial contributions could be made at a higher scale. She also encouraged maintaining the small group on financing in the next biennium, which the Bureau agreed with. The secretariat welcomed all support provided and contributions of all amounts, which make a difference and contribute to the secretariat being able to implement the growing number of activities in workplans over the biennia, in pursuit of the long-term strategy. Multi-year contributions were particularly important in terms of sustainability and predictability, such as the multi-year contributions made by France, Norway, the Russian Federation and Switzerland. It was important to sustain these contributions and to provide additional contributions as such from donors that were not yet contributing, such as the European Commission, for the European Union.

27. The Chair urged and invited Parties to renew and further participate with financial contributions to the Convention's activities. The secretariat also invited the Bureau members to confirm their regular contributions following the meeting or at the Conference.

5. Other business

28. No other business was discussed.

6. Date and venue for the next meeting of the Bureau

29. The Chair closed the meeting on 1 December 2020, with the understanding that a new composition of the Bureau would be elected at the Conference. She proposed for the next Bureau meeting to be held online during the week of 22 February, including a joint segment with the Working Group on Implementation.