

Press Release

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Governments fail to agree on effective global chemicals management

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) is disappointed about the weak agreement governments reached at the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) in Dubai last night. The outcomes of the conference will fail to protect women and their communities from the long-term effects of man-made chemicals.

"In addition, we sincerely doubt whether the world community will be able to comply with the Johannesburg target to make chemicals safer by 2020 with such a weak set of outcomes. This is a political fiasco given that the outcomes of this process are not legally binding and voluntary to start with." comments Daniela Rosche, WECF chemicals policy coordinator.

According to Elena Manvelian, Director of Armenian Women for Health and a Healthy Environment, and representative of the WECF network in Dubai, the weak outcomes are "the consequence of a stalemate brought about especially by the obstructive approach of the US delegation. The US has been working against precautionary measures to address the global chemicals crisis throughout the entire process."

Yesterday afternoon at the end of conference, it looked as if 10 years of preparations had gone out of the window, due to the US obstruction. But a number of committed governments insisted to continue negotiations until late at night. "SAICM has been saved, but only a skeleton of it is left", says Daniela Rosche. She adds "the US, however, is sending a clear message to women worldwide that its priority lies with short-term economic interests at the cost of protecting the health of women, their communities and especially future generations".

At the ICCM, governments were among others unable to agree on the much needed financing mechanism for developing countries and economies in transition to implement the ICCM outcomes. For example any reference to the World Bank as a funding mechanism has been deleted from the final text. To Women in Europe, this is unacceptable because in many of these countries virtually no chemicals management exists. As a result, women and their communities continue to be exposed to hazardous chemicals without their knowledge on a daily basis.

The negotiations for a global chemicals management regime have been going on officially since 2003 under the so-called Strategic Approach for Chemicals Management (SAICM) process organized by UNEP and other UN agencies. SAICM is the first and direly needed worldwide effort to bridge the existing gap in chemicals legislation between developed and developing countries taking among others into account the trans-boundary nature of chemicals pollution.

Given the urgent need for global chemicals management, WECF calls on the EU member states and the European Commission to ensure the agreed system will be strengthened in the follow-up process. "We will not be able to allow children to be born without a heavy body burden of man-made chemicals, when we agree on voluntary measures. The political reality shows that governments either act only when its too late or when they are legally obliged to do so" says Rosche.

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For more information on what WECF wants from SAICM, please visit www.wecf.org

Women in Europe for a Common Future is a network of organisations and individuals working for sustainable development, protection of human health and the environment, and poverty reduction. Our international network consists of members and partners in Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

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