

**Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants**

Geneva, Switzerland

4-8 May 2009

Opening Remarks

by

Donald Cooper

Executive Secretary

Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

The Convention's focus on protecting human health and the environment from dangerous, long-lasting chemicals by restricting and ultimately eliminating their production, use, trade, release and storage reflects international concern regarding the impact of toxic and hazardous chemicals and pesticides on human health and the environment. A concern, shared not only by scientists, technical specialists and environmentalists but by each of us who call this planet - home.

Distinguished Delegates, this week presents an opportunity to make a difference in the way Toxic and Hazardous Chemicals are managed throughout the world. This fact has been

recognized by all of you as reflected in a record number of participants at the COP from all stakeholders including:

- a. Parties and Non-Parties
- b. Ministers
- c. NGOs
- d. Others, including Industry and Civil Society

The COP marks a new chapter in the history of the Stockholm Convention. For the first time, nine new chemicals are proposed for listing in the Annexes of the Convention marking a potentially significant expansion of the scope of the instrument. More importantly, it signifies the global importance of the Convention and the value Parties place in the benefits gained from the agreement. It shows that parties are actively using the tool they negotiated and are finding it of value in their national plans to protect the health of their citizens and the environment. This commitment has been realized in the face of very challenging economic times for everyone.

I wish to applaud the monumental efforts made by the Parties to the Stockholm Convention and its very supportive family of stakeholders. You have continued to participate very actively in the operations of the Convention and its Subsidiary bodies, negotiated strongly for national positions and shown a willingness to accommodate the views of others facilitating the arrival at recommendations for COP decisions by consensus.

This achievement has not been easy or without setbacks. It has tested the patience and stretched national delegate mandates to the limit; however, it has been won through hard work and sustained effort. The debate will continue throughout the week; however, the efforts of everyone involved in producing the documents before you have paid off in providing a very good basis on which to hold those debates.

I wish to say to the Countries who have not yet joined the Family of Parties to the Stockholm Convention that the history of operations under the Convention demonstrate it's

effectiveness as an instrument which provides fairness and value to its Parties. Your views and national positions would be welcome and we look forward to your continued work with us this week as observers but hope that you will join us as Parties at the next COP.

It has now been 17 years since the adoption of the Agenda 21 in Rio. Tremendous progress has been made towards the objectives set out in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 on the sound management of toxic chemicals. Sound chemicals' management plays a significant role in reducing infant mortality rates, improving maternal health, combating malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Although chemicals play an important role in human development, without good management practices throughout their life-cycle, they also pose significant risks to human health and the environment. Distinguished Delegates, we know that sustainable development practices, underpinned by the sound

management of chemicals, can be fostered to minimize harmful exposure to chemicals, thereby reducing the impact on human health and the environment. Amid a global climate of an economic slowdown and food insecurity, we need to refocus, and to redouble our efforts to ensure that this goal is met.

Partnerships are the cornerstone of the Convention's success. Partnerships enable knowledge-sharing and collective action to increase the effectiveness and quality of our work. The Stockholm Convention works collaboratively with a diverse range of partners including the private sector, grassroots organizations, professional associations, other United Nations agencies and national governments.

The Convention's foundation is underpinned by UNEP which provides the Secretariat. The levels of cooperation between UNEP, its Divisions and the Stockholm Convention Secretariat has increased significantly and continues to grow in an atmosphere which recognizes the advantages of each

institution. The reward has been a major increase in the capacity of the Secretariat to deliver its program of work to multiple stakeholders over a much shorter period of time.

The level of cooperation amongst the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel Conventions has grown significantly over the past year in both formal and informal programs. If it is the decision of the Parties to move forward with the Synergies proposal, the Secretariat will be able to build on this high level of cooperation to quickly bring into effect any decisions taken.

Distinguished Delegates, we need no reminder that seeking safer alternatives to chemicals such as DDT is one of the key pillars of the Stockholm Convention. There is an ongoing need to balance the health and environment risk posed by DDT and its effectiveness against the threat of malaria through current authorized uses under the Convention. It is hoped that the discussions this week will provide new guidance on how the Parties wish to proceed with this ongoing initiative.

Distinguished Delegates, the program of work to be funded through the Voluntary Special Trust Fund set out in the proposed budget for the Stockholm Convention for the 2010-2011 biennium is ambitious. However, its proposal to you is based on a number of indicators:

- a. The Stockholm Convention has been able to raise the full amount to fund its entire program of work under the Voluntary Special Trust Fund since it came into force. It is expected that the level of global support is there to continue this trend for the next biennium.
- b. UNEP and its Resource Mobilization Office have given a commitment to assist with raising the necessary funding to complete the full program of work. This effort has already proven successful in raising significant resources.
- c. The Stockholm Secretariat has been approached and is in discussions with some Parties about their provision of major funding for the Program of work on a continuous and sustained basis.

Later this week, the High Level Segment will meet under the leadership of some 80 Ministers to debate and progress a defining issue of our time – ‘Meeting the Challenges of a POPs-free Future’. With your vision and guidance, we will meet these challenges and tackle them head on.

Chemicals transcend all segments of society and cross all borders. Chemicals permeate every aspect of life. From subsistence farmers, to the national policy-makers and the international conglomerates, POPs affect us all on a global scale.

POPs, Ladies and Gentlemen, have a broad and far-reaching effect beyond the interest of scientists. The Stockholm Convention needs to reach out to a public affected by the impact of chemicals on human health and the environment.

Distinguished Delegates, as this fourth COP opens, I wish to express my pleasure at the level of support and commitment

from the Parties, a commitment which is also reflected in the impressive level of participation at this COP. I am honoured to serve you as the Executive Secretary of the Stockholm Convention and to have the privilege of working with you this week and for the duration of the next biennium. I wish to assure you that the Secretariat is ready to provide whatever support you need to facilitate your deliberations and will continue to work hard to meet your expectations. The Secretariat looks forward to receiving the direction of the Parties during this Conference of The Parties meeting and I extend my very good wishes to all participants for a most successful meeting.