

**Report on
the IFCS Asia-Pacific Steering Group Meeting
19 April 2001, 9h00 - 12h30
c/o Diamond Hotel, Tokyo**

The meeting was held as a session of the 7th GINC Tokyo Meeting for Information Exchange and Collaboration in Asia on Chemical Management and Pesticide Poisoning during 18 - 20 April 2001. It was organised by the Japanese National Institute of Health and Sciences and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, with the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS).

The IFCS session was attended by government officials from the Forum Standing Committee (FSC) member countries in the IFCS Asia-Pacific region: Japan, China, Iran, Korea and Thailand. Japan, the country of the IFCS Vice President, chaired the session and took on the secretariat.

The participants discussed and generally supported the following draft proposals:

- Terms of Reference of the Asia-Pacific Steering Group;
- Regional follow-up on new Priorities for Action beyond 2000; and
- Regional strategies needed for Forum IV and long-term objectives.

It was agreed that, after amendments made, Vice President would send out the documents to all the countries in the region for their acknowledgment. He would also send out a questionnaire requesting each country to indicate its national priorities and interests. Subsequent follow-up and proposed stepwise capacity building approach would then follow.

On the last day of the GINC meeting, the outcome of the IFCS session was reported. The participants acknowledged the importance of future collaborations with the IPCS activity and for the IFCS Priorities for Actions beyond 2000.

1 Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Asia -Pacific Steering Group

The meeting discussed the draft proposal of TOR that consisted of the aims, membership, terms, activities, tools, sub-regions, schedule for 2001-2003.

First of all, Thailand suggested informing the participants of how many countries belonged to the region, how many governments should represent the region and if they had designated National Focal Point. It was acknowledged that the list of the countries would be later distributed with the documents.

Iran suggested the expansion of the membership of the group because it was wondered if the current FSC members' follow-up could ever cover the large region comprising many countries, among which there were a variety of level of development, productivity, interests, cultures, etc. China proposed that the draft TOR clearly describe the criteria for the selection of the group members. Subsequently, it was agreed that the FSC designated alternate countries - India, Indonesia and PNG - join the group. It was also considered not to exclude the participation in the meeting from any interested countries.

The proposal of sub-regional follow-up seemed reasonable for geographical reasons. It was thought that the regions of the UN systems might be applicable although they differed among the UN organisations and agencies. Thailand offered to provide information on the UN systems. However, it was acknowledged that options could be sought through the follow-up survey for the region, which would be subsequently carried out.

China expressed concerns about resource constraint on planning the Regional Conference twice before the Forum IV. Holding the Conference is in the capacity of Vice President and Japan hoped that the region would need to gather annually to better monitor progress and further encouragement for the regional capacity building. Thailand claimed that such gathering enhance the effectiveness of the regional presentation at the upcoming Forum IV. However, it was noted that the proposed schedule should remain flexible as it is.

Iran and Thailand requested clarification of the timing of the group face-to-face meeting this year. The FSC face-to-face meeting would be scheduled for this October in Trinidad-Tobago. It was therefore recognised that the group would be able to meet during the FSC meeting.

2 Regional Follow-up on new Priorities for Action beyond 2000 (ForumIII)

In order to review the new Priorities for Action and to consider monitoring which priorities each Asian-pacific country would like to achieve best, it was proposed to conduct an annual follow-up survey for the entire region. Views on designating lead members to organise the follow-up action on each programme area were requested as well.

Thailand and Iran supported the proposal that Vice President would send out a letter requesting each IFCS National Focal Point to indicate its national priorities. However, it was not until the outcome of the follow-up survey becomes available that the designation of lead members would be considered. The participants agreed to this views.

It was acknowledged that, as the IOMC had already taken sponsorship for some priorities for actions, collaborations would be considered for the regional follow-ups. Thailand and Japan were reported to be a member of the FSC working group for pesticide poisoning and for capacity building, respectively.

3 Regional strategies and activities needed for Forum IV and long-term objectives

The meeting discussed the draft proposal of step-wise capacity building approach based on the priority survey. A draft plan for regional capacity building inventory with new indicators of progress and with service of matching of interests among countries and interest bodies was presented.

Japan suggested that the scope of the paper should be clearly described. However, Thailand made an alternative proposal of describing separately specific and long-term objectives of the paper.

China and Thailand hoped that regional action plans would be made available as soon as possible. Thailand suggested that a straight-forward and concise questionnaire be sent out at the Step 1. It indicated items of interest such as capacity building - GINC, acute pesticide poisoning, additional chemicals to twelve POPs, PRTR, and illegal traffic. It was expected that the results of the questionnaire, and if possible, the draft regional action plans would be available at the face-to-face meeting of the

group and the FSC that October.

It was recognised that another opportunity of the group discussion was needed between that October and at the proposed Regional Conference of the next year. A teleconference would be an option.

It was acknowledged that the proposed development of capacity building inventory system would be a core strategy of the regional action plans. The long-term objectives are that, once the system established, it will be maintained and updated effectively beyond Forum IV for further improvement of regional chemical management capacity. To raise awareness among countries, it was recommended that status report on the development of the system be made available in the region as appropriate.

4 Report to the Forum Standing Committee and the IFCS

It was agreed that the outcome of the meeting would be presented at the FSC meeting. The report would be compiled shortly after the meeting.

5 Others

Chairman introduced the letter from a FSC member for Australia offering keenness to work in partnership with countries in the IFCS Asia-Pacific region. He would respond with welcome of the offer.

Chairman informed the meeting that he had received from Vice President for the CEE region an inquiry if the four former-soviet countries - Kazafstan, etc. - could belong to the Asia-Pacific region. This issue was beyond the responsibility of Vice President and therefore, Chairman had already returned with suggestions that it would be on the agenda for the next FSC meeting.

Iran mentioned Swedish initiative for the priority A3. It was informed that the face-to-face working group meeting would be planned for September or October, adding that one participant for each region would have coverage of travel costs by the Swedish government. It was agreed that Vice President would ask formalities of the Swedish government.

The Swedish proposal had been discussed at the FSC. The 1st informal face-to-face meeting would take place during the conference on

POPs convention late May. It was informed that Japan would be available for the meeting.

Draft Terms of Reference of the IFCS Asian -Pacific Steering Group

1 Aims

The group will co-ordinate development of regional action plans to achieve the New Priorities for Action Beyond 2000, which was approved at the Forum III. It will make efforts to strengthen partnership and bi-/multilateral assistance among countries of the Asian-Pacific region. Through such efforts, it will aim at increasing the regional capacity for sound management of chemicals.

2 Membership

In principle, the IFCS Forum Standing Committee members and their designated alternates from the region will represent the group. Vice President will convene and chair the group meeting and will be responsible for the report to the FSC and the IFCS Forum. It was considered not to exclude the participation in the meeting from any interested countries.

3 Terms

The current group will remain until and during the Forum IV. After that, new members are expected to take over the responsibility with necessary revision of the TOR.

4 Activities

The group will consider the following activities to attain the objectives:

- conduct survey for the Asian-Pacific countries concerning what issues are of the most interest among the New Priorities for Action beyond 2000;
- conduct matching of the interests of each country and re-grouping of the countries;
- provide examples of bi-/multilateral assistance feasibility within each group;
- follow-up on progress made in each group according to certain indicators;
- report to the FSC and the IFCS Forum;

- plan and steer the IFCS Asian-Pacific regional conference;
- plan sessions at the IFCS Forum with the input of regional issues;
- work jointly with other organisational capacity building projects such as IPCSS'.

5 Tools of discussions

In principle, the group will work with communication by e-mail or teleconference. In principle, it will meet face-to-face annually and before the regional conference.

6 Responsibility expected for each of the group member

Each member will be encouraged to step ahead of other countries concerning activities for the capacity for sound management of chemicals. For example, each will be encouraged to make effective its domestic co-ordination of activities among concerned authorities and other bodies, to complete the performance of the Priorities for Actions in the nation, and to make necessary input to the group.

7 Sub-region

As the Asian-pacific region is very large, it may be reasonable that sub-regional follow-up be flexibly carried out. The group will always consider the feasibility of such sub-regional approach.

8 Proposed interim schedule for Forum IV

- 19/4/2001 Steering Group meeting
- 5-6/2001 Conduct survey of interests ?
- 9/2001 Outcome of the survey and conduct matching of interests ?
- 10/2001 Steering Group meeting (face-to-face) ?
- 4-7/2002 Steering Group meeting & IFCS Asian-Pacific Regional Conference ?
- 7/2003 Steering Group meeting & IFCS Asian-Pacific Regional Conference ?
- 11/2003 Forum IV

Planned development of regional strategies for Forum IV and long-term objectives

Capacity building approach may be a basis of regional strategies. As a tool for the approach, the expansion of the GINC Asia system to have capacity-building-related inventory on chemical management was thought to be feasible at the IFCS Asian regional meeting in August 2000.

The development of capacity building inventory system would be a core strategy of the regional action plans. Once the system established, it would be maintained and updated effectively beyond Forum IV for further improvement of regional chemical management capacity.

In order to attain these objectives, the following step-wise procedures are proposed.

Step 1 Re-identification of each nation's interests for action

With regard to the New Priorities for Action beyond 2000, survey will be conducted on what issues are of the most interests to each country in the region. A questionnaire in a structured and concise format will be sent out to all the countries. The steering members will assist in encouraging them to respond. An example of questions is as follows:

- What issues from A1 to F are of the most priorities to your country ?
- Regarding issues you indicated, what makes them remain incomplete ?
- In order to improve the situation, what kind of assistance will be necessary ?
- If you had capacity of providing assistance to other countries, what issues are in your most interest and what kind of materials would you provide ?
- Whether does your country participate in any programme sponsored by other bodies ? What kind of programmes are they ?
- Whether does your country provide any assistance programmes for other countries ? What kind of programmes are they ?
- etc,

Step 2 Matching of interests from all the countries

Responses will be analysed and put into the inventory, where it is

feasible that recipient countries and donor countries, each having common interests, will be regrouped.

Step 3 Group discussions

Regrouped each group will meet to discuss development plans to step up their situation mutually. All the plans will be gathered and made comprehensive regional action plans by the steering group.

Step 4 Maintenance of the Capacity Building Inventory

The Capacity Building Inventory will be maintained and updated effectively beyond Forum IV for further improvement of regional chemical management capacity. The National Institute of Health and Sciences and other co-operative institutions will play a central role in the operation of the Capacity Building Inventory system.

It is emphasised that the capacity building approach have streamline and consistency for the long-term objective: all the countries in the region would have partnership with one another and as the result, the entire region would have capacity of sound management of chemicals.

Therefore, it seems useful to present these step-wise procedures as specific methodology. To raise awareness among countries, it is recommended that status report on the development of the system be made available in the region as appropriate. At each step, progress will be assessed and reported to each country. The procedures that follow will then be reviewed as appropriate.

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