

Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability:
Ambition and Action towards 2030
7-8 July 2021

Summary Report

This report provides a synthesis of the discussions held during the Berlin Forum. It is intended to complement the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) reports and other materials available on the Berlin Forum's website (<https://www.bmu.de/en/berlin-forum-on-chemicals-and-sustainability/>).

1. Participation

Some fifty high-level speakers contributed to the Forum. These included UN Secretary-General António Guterres, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Virginijus Sinkevičius, the EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, as well as ministers from many countries, executive heads of major intergovernmental organisations, as well as leaders from the private sector and non-governmental organisations from all corners of the globe.

A full list of our distinguished participants can be found in [Annex 1](#).

Over 800 people registered for the livestreamed Forum from around the world. As host of the meeting, Germany was delighted by the level of interest and engagement shown.

2. Objectives

The two-day virtual event was held against the background of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This had unfortunately forced the postponement in 2020, and again in 2021, of the 5th session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) and its intersessional process (IP) of in-person negotiation of recommendations for the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and the sound management of chemicals and waste (SMCW) beyond 2020.

Until those critical in-person negotiations can resume, the objective of the Forum was to give a fresh high-level profile to the urgent challenges and opportunities in relation to the SMCW and their contribution to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this respect, a key intent of the Forum was to inspire and complement ongoing multi-stakeholder preparations for ICCM5.

3. Structure

The Berlin Forum consisted of two integral parts:

- A Ministerial Dialogue, held on 7 July and moderated by German Environment Minister Svenja Schulze, was opened with keynotes from UN Secretary-General António Guterres, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Virginijus Sinkevičius, the EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, followed by contributions from ministers and heads of intergovernmental organisations. Participants focused on three themes:
 - Health and justice
 - The 2030 Agenda and the sound management of chemicals and waste
 - Circular economy and sustainable chemistry.

The Ministerial Dialogue also heard a presentation and panel discussion on the High Ambition Alliance (HAA).

- A Stakeholder Dialogue, held on 8 July and moderated by Rolph Payet and Minu Hemmati. Building on the previous day's contributions and themes, the Stakeholder Dialogue deepened the discussion of three main subjects:
 - Sound management of chemicals and waste within the context of the SDGs and a science-policy interface
 - Strengthening and enhancing implementation and
 - Creating new paths.

Speakers included senior representatives of intergovernmental and government organisations as well as leaders from the private sector and non-governmental organisations. In addition, registered participants following the livestream were given the opportunity to ask questions, make comments, and contribute through a series of online polls ([Annex 2](#)). These contributions were used to further enrich the discussion.

4. Outcomes

Five key take-aways stand out from the Berlin Forum:

- **Chemical Pollution Crisis:** Increased production and dissemination of chemicals is, and will continue to be, a major threat to human and planetary health unless urgent action is taken. The poorest and marginalised populations are the most vulnerable and seriously affected.
- **Implementation Failure:** Despite many advances in the sound management of chemicals and waste, the global community has not met its agreed targets. The 2020 goal was not accomplished. Under a business as usual scenario, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs will likewise not be achieved. There was a common understanding among all participants that immediate, decisive, and extensive action is urgently needed.
- **Work on SMCW Continues:** Notwithstanding the overall lack of necessary progress, constructive and creative work to advance the SMCW is continuing at the local, national, regional and international levels. Several inspiring examples and commitments were profiled during the discussion.

- **Solutions Exist:** Laws, policies, institutions, technologies, and knowledge exist, which, by scaling-up and making better use, offer opportunities for major and early improvements. A new and more ambitious global instrument is needed to make these solutions available to all and to accelerate and embed the necessary transformational change.
- **ICCM5 is Crucial:** In this respect, the ICCM5 conference – which Germany announced it remains committed to hosting – presents a historic opportunity to agree on an enhanced SAICM and SMCW instrument that enables governments and stakeholders to work together more effectively and to urgently protect human health, the environment and achieve the SDGs.

5. Chemical Pollution Crisis

Key points raised in Forum discussion over both days included the following:

- **Chemicals are Essential:** Humankind is dependent on chemicals and will remain so. Chemicals have the capacity to do great good but, if not correctly managed, cause significant and sustained harm.
- **Existential Challenge:** The chemical pollution crisis as part of the global pollution problem is an existential threat equal to those of climate change and biodiversity loss and, in many respects, is linked to both. Conversely, the SMCW could assist in effectively addressing these threats.
- **Pervasive and Persistent:** Measurable quantities of hazardous and long-lived chemicals are now everywhere: in land, water, air and in all our food and bodies. For example, contamination with lead is particularly devastating, especially for children. Waste, including plastic waste, is another and more visible example of the problem.
- **Threat to Life and Health:** Known health impacts include at least 2 million unnecessary deaths in 2019 as well as other serious health impacts according to WHO, and the trend is on the rise. The ILO estimates that 1 billion workers are exposed to hazardous substances on an annual basis, almost 1 million of which lose their lives as a consequence.
- **Human Rights and Justice:** The most seriously affected people worldwide are workers, the poor, marginalised communities, women, and children. While this continues to be a problem in more developed countries, developing countries and emerging economies, having less capacity, suffer the most. A rights-based approach would be essential for protecting the most vulnerable.
- **Future Trends:** The \$5 trillion chemicals sector is expected to double by 2030 and quadruple by 2060, with most of the growth being in the developing world. Hazardous

chemical emissions from production plants, products and related releases ignore national borders.

6. Implementation Failure

Turning to the existing SMCW instruments, some key observations included:

- **Existing Intergovernmental Instruments:** There are many examples of concerted international action to advance the sound management of chemicals and waste. These include international conventions such as Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Minamata as well as various ILO, FAO and WHO Conventions, standards, and regulations, and regional treaties such as the African Union Bamako Convention. The multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral, voluntary SAICM framework and the ICCM were themselves products of high-level intergovernmental decisions. Individually and collectively, these have done much to raise awareness, improve information flows and enhance performance. However, the coverage and scope of these instruments is not complete. Many issues of international concern remain to be addressed, particularly in the context of the rapidly growing and evolving chemical and waste sectors.
- **2030 Agenda and the SDGs:** The 2030 deadline is ‘just around the corner’. Notwithstanding the SMCW instruments and activities mentioned above, the global community has not been sufficiently successful in reducing production and use of hazardous chemicals, nor in reducing their adverse impacts. This is especially the case in developing countries and emerging economies. We are clearly not on track. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will not be achieved if current practices continue. Business as usual is not an option.
- **Regional and National Action:** At the regional and national levels, significant pioneering work has been done to address SMCW issues. Examples include SMCW-related legislation, policies, and programmes. Nonetheless, serious gaps remain, especially in developing countries and emerging economies. The continuing lack of poison centres is one of many examples of systemic gaps mentioned.
- **Cross-sectoral Coordination:** A commonly experienced problem is that of sectoral silos. Examples include countries where the policies of the agriculture or industry ministry conflict with those of the health and environment ministries. The lack of policy coherence, synergy and consistency contributes significantly to weak chemicals management in many countries.
- **Emerging Issues of Concern:** The digital economy and e-commerce are examples of the rapid and profound changes taking place in business and trade practice. Online sales of banned, regulated, or restricted chemicals are occurring with little or no regulatory monitoring or control, sometimes carrying serious health risks for consumers. This is also adding to and amplifying long-standing challenges of the waste trade, where electronic waste, plastic, lead and other products containing heavy metal are placing severe burdens on the already limited SMCW capacities, especially in many developing countries.

- **Science and Policy:** Unlike in the areas of climate change (IPCC) and biodiversity (IPBES), there is no internationally accepted mechanism to provide policy makers across all sectors with access to the best and latest authoritative science on chemicals and waste. Any effective future international chemicals and waste management arrangement or instrument needs to include such a mechanism. Various options are possible and need to be explored. The contributions of reports such as the *Global Chemicals Outlook* and *WHO reports on the public health impact of chemicals* underline the crucial importance of good science for effective policy making and implementation.
- **New Global Cooperative Framework:** The SAICM instrument has provided important lessons. It is clear, however, that stronger and more meaningful global rules are needed, together with an enhanced global framework for cooperative SMCW action. While the need for a legally binding treaty was mentioned, most discussion focused on the importance of a more comprehensive and effective successor to the cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder SAICM instrument, building on its many strengths.

7. Work on SMCW Continues

While insufficient progress has been made in achieving agreed international targets, the Forum Dialogue underlined that there continues to be a shared commitment by developed countries, emerging economies and developing countries to continue work, both on SAICM specifically and also more generally on the sound management of chemicals and waste. International and stakeholder organisations also continue to be active in exploring solutions.

- **National and Regional Measures:** Several speakers profiled ongoing work at the national level to improve research and data, introduce and implement new legislation, policies and practices. This work provided valuable new information and ideas on how SMCW might be further improved, including in relation to the better uptake and use of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS).
- **Resources:** A recurrent message from developing country and emerging economy participants was that developing SMCW regulatory systems and action plans, and achieving progress was often limited by domestic capacity. Increased development support will be crucial, including the provision of information, training, technology, and finance.
- **Commitments:** In this context, the Forum welcomed announcements by Denmark, Germany, and the UK on providing additional funds to the [UNEP Special Programme on Institutional Strengthening for the Chemicals Cluster](#), by the European Commission on additionally supporting partner countries in the African Region in implementing GHS, as well as the commitment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to continue its crucially important support for the chemicals and waste cluster. It was also noted that other countries and organisations were continuing existing programmes of support.

- **Mutual benefits:** Developing countries and regions underlined the importance of additional external assistance in building capacity and extending national and regional initiatives. It was also noted, however, that this was a two-way street: developed countries and organisations had much to learn and benefit from experience gained in working with developing economies.

8. Solutions Exist!

In this area, the main points to emerge in the Forum discussions included the following:

- **International Institutions:** Huge volumes of expertise and experience exist within many intergovernmental organisations. These include the Inter-Organization for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) member organisations, the Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) secretariats, and some regional institutions. National research also provided exciting new information relevant for wider use. Increased collaboration and information sharing between these organisations offer significant potential to scale up the widespread building of SMCW capacities and adoption of best practice.
- **Transformational Policies:** Many countries, both developed and developing, are already embracing key industrial and economic development concepts that are essential for the SMCW. These include those promoting a non-toxic circular economy, increased materials and energy efficiency, full life-cycle approaches, and green and sustainable chemistry.
- **National Strategies:** Each country and region face different challenges. Experience shows that targeted national strategies strengthen chemicals and waste management, including through integration in national development plans, sharing information, scaling-up successful projects, and building the necessary political will with accompanying resource allocation and capacity.
- **Green and Sustainable Chemistry:** The concept of “benign by design” that also includes the manufacture, trade, use, re-use, recycling, and disposal of chemicals will be critical to achieving the SMCW. In many applications, non-chemical or less harmful chemical substitutes and alternative approaches exist. Green and sustainable chemistry needs to be mainstreamed in both governmental and private sector policies and practices, as well as at the science and education level. The [International Sustainable Chemistry Collaborative Centre \(ISC₃\)](#), set up by the German Environment Ministry and hosted at GIZ, is an example initiative providing leadership and support for further developing and mainstreaming green and sustainable chemistry.
- **Industry Incentives:** The private sector can help deliver positive change on many fronts, including jobs, economic growth and critical goods and services. This will involve industry embracing green and sustainable chemistry, accepting extended producer responsibility, and providing more transparent value chains. It will be critical for governments to work with industry to develop policies and encourage business plans that include incentives to boost, support and enable these trends.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** As SAICM had demonstrated, the multi-sector and multi-stakeholder-based approach to solution-finding and implementation offers exciting potential to scale up and accelerate the SMCW. Increased cooperation and collaboration between governments, the private sector, academia, labour, and civil society organisations will be essential. Strong arguments were made for greater inclusion of labour, women, indigenous people, and youth in SMCW decision-making and implementation processes.
- **Support and Solidarity:** A greater sense of global solidarity and mutual support is needed. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, an effective response needs to recognise that ‘no one is safe until everyone is safe’. The same applies to chemical safety, where pollution does not stop at borders. The global community must do better in identifying and supporting the most vulnerable and affected communities and supporting them build SMCW capacity. It is in our collective interest to recognise that human health and environmental protection cannot be achieved by national and regional measures alone. While developed economies have achieved a relatively high standard of SMCW, the work is not yet done: working with others who need support is essential to achieve our shared goals.
- **New Vision Needed:** Several speakers argued that – in addition to a new global instrument – an inspiring and over-arching new vision is needed. With a common core theme of social and environmental justice and equity, examples included calls for a ‘toxic free future’, a ‘safe planet for all’, and ‘One World, One Health’.
- **Multiple Tools and Incentives:** The SMCW requires action across multiple sectors by many different stakeholders. It is a cooperative endeavour by many, requiring alliances and partnerships to ensure effectiveness, such as the experience shared by members of the HAA with the Berlin Forum. Recognition and support for effective action can provide important additional profile, learning and momentum. Awards, such as the Future Policy Award, that profile and recognise the pioneers and ‘quiet heroes’ of new and effective SMCW approaches, can inspire others to adopt and adapt.

9. ICCM5 is Crucial

Against this background, there was a shared sense that the ICCM5 event offers a not-to-be missed opportunity to integrate the considerations mentioned above and develop a strengthened international SMCW instrument as a successor to SAICM, together with a new strategic roadmap that raises both the political profile and action ambition on SMCW, and that enables and supports accelerated implementation.

Closing views and comments aired at the Berlin Forum included:

- The shared hope that in-person negotiations could be resumed as soon as possible with the expectation of adopting a strong and meaningful instrument for the sound management of chemicals and waste at ICCM5.

- An understanding that an effective global response to the COVID-19 pandemic would be crucial to the resumption of international negotiations.
- The view that the successor SAICM and SMCW instrument needs to build on – and not weaken – the commitments made in Johannesburg in 2002 and Dubai in 2006.
- The recognition that assistance to build developing country welfare and economies is of paramount concern, as a matter not only of human rights, justice, and equity, but also of common interest to us all.
- The assessment that the issues of SMCW need to be placed on the agenda of the UN General Assembly as a standing item. In this way, the chemicals crisis will receive the ongoing high-level attention that it needs and warrants.

Looking ahead, the Forum welcomed Romania's continuing offer to host IP4 and Germany's commitment to host ICCM5 at the earliest possible date.

Annex 1

**Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability:
Ambition and Action towards 2030**

Ministerial Dialogue - List of Participants

Organisation (Country)	Name/Function
Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions	Rolph Payet Executive Secretary
Global Environment Facility	Carlos Manuel Rodriguez CEO and Chairperson
International Labour Organisation	Guy Ryder Director General
Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury	Monika Stankiewicz Executive Secretary
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	Masamichi Kono Deputy Secretary General
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Council	Michelle Bachelet High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Council	Marcos Orellana Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes
Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention	Rémi Nono Womdim FAO Executive Secretary of the Rotterdam Convention
United Nations	Antonio Guterres Secretary General
United Nations Development Programme	Achim Steiner UN Undersecretary General and Administrator of UNDP
United Nations Institute for Training and Research	Nikhil Seth Executive Director
World Health Organization	Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Director General



African Union	Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission
United Arab Emirates	Abdulla Al Nuaimi Minister of Climate Change and Environment
Austria	Leonore Gewessler Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
Belgium	Zakia Khattabi Minister of Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal
Brazil	Fábio Mendes Marzano Secretary for National Sovereignty and Citizenship at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Canada	David Morin Director General, Safe Environments Directorate
Colombia	Carlos Eduardo Correa Escaf Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development
Republic of Congo	Arlette Soudan-Nonault Minister for the Environment, Sustainable Development and the Congo Basin
Denmark	Lea Wermelin Minister for the Environment
Estonia	Tanel Kiik Minister of Health and Labour
European Union	Virginijus Sinkevičius European Commissioner for Environment Oceans and Fisheries
Finland	Krista Mikkonen Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
France	Karine Boquet Deputy Director at the Ministry for an Ecological Transition
Georgia	Levan Davitashvili Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture
Germany	Angela Merkel Federal Chancellor
United Kingdom	Rebecca Pow MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs



India	Prakash Javadekar Union Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Information & Broadcasting and Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises
Japan	Yutaka Shoda Vice Minister for Global Environmental Affairs
Jordan	Mohamed Kashashneh Acting Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment
Netherlands	Stientje van Veldhoven Minister for the Environment
Norway	Sveinung Rotevatn Minister of Climate and Environment
Norway	Maren Herselth Holsen State Secretary at the Ministry of Climate and Environment
Philippines	Juan Miguel T. Cuna Undersecretary for Field Operations and Environment
Poland	Agnieszka Dudra President of the Bureau for Chemical Substances
Romania	Barna Tánczos Minister of Environment, Water and Forests
Russian Federation	Michael Ivanov Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade
Slovenia	Janez Poklucar Minister of Health
South Africa	Mamogala Musekene Deputy Director General
Sweden	Johanna Lissinger Peitz Ambassador for Stockholm +50, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Environment <i>High Ambition Alliance</i>
Switzerland	Katrin Schneeberger Director of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)



United States of America	Marcia Bernicat Senior Official for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment and Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, U.S. Department of State
United States of America	Michal Freedhoff Assistant Administrator, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Uruguay	Gerardo Amarilla Undersecretary of Environment
Viet Nam	Tran Hong Ha Minister of Natural Resources and Environment
Zambia	Godwin Fishani Gondwe Director of Environmental Management in the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Environment
IKEA	Therese Lilliebladh Requirement Manager Chemicals <i>High Ambition Alliance</i>
International Trade Union Confederation	Sharan Burrow General Secretary <i>High Ambition Alliance</i>

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Stakeholder Dialogue – List of Participants

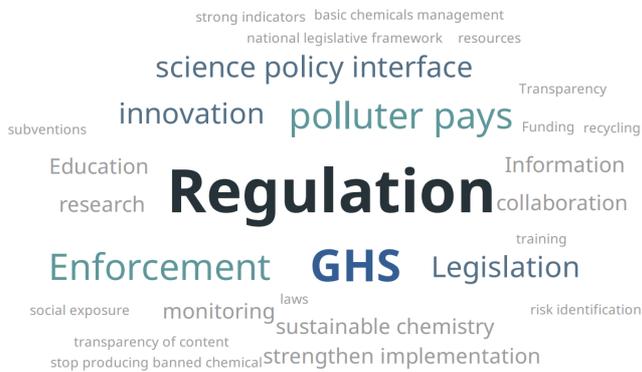
Organisation (Country)	Name/Function
Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions	Rolph Payet Executive Secretary <i>Moderator</i>
Adelphi	Minu Hemmati Consultant <i>Co-Moderator</i>
Global Environment Facility	Carlos Manuel Rodriguez CEO and Chairperson
United Nations Development Programme	Haoliang Xu UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Director of Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
United Nations Environment Programme	Sheila Aggarwal-Khan Director, Economy Division
United Nations Institute for Training and Research	Nikhil Seth Executive Director
African Union	Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission
Canada	David Morin Director General, Safe Environments Directorate
Germany	Svenja Schulze Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
Germany	Jochen Flasbarth State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
Germany	Gertrud Sahler ICCM5 President
BASF	Martin Kayser Senior Vice President
Global Alliance on Health and Pollution	Richard Fuller Chair of the Board



Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit	Tanja Gönner Chair of the Board
Royal Society of Chemistry	Tom Welton President
International Pollutants Elimination Network	Tadesse Amera Co-Chair

Annex 2

Word cloud based on responses from registered participants following the Berlin Forum livestream, 8 July 2021, to the following question: *“Taking into account what you have heard from our panellists and from your own experiences, what would you identify as the key existing measures that need further action to be implemented universally?”*



Annex 3

The full screen of high-level speakers on 7 July, as produced by ENB

