

Statement of the Republic of Korea
UN Commission on Sustainable Development -18
Chemicals
5 May, 2010 New York

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Chemicals are directly related to human health. Thus, while they have played a central role in economic growth, improving standards of living, and protecting public health, their risk assessment is essential.

In order to protect workers, my government is assessing the risks of new chemicals and notifying concerned businesses of the risks. The information is also made available to the public at any time through the information network of the Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency (KOSHA).

Among the chemicals circulated in Korea from 1988 to 2009, approximately 600 chemicals were assessed and designated as chemicals that require management. Moreover, chemicals designated as toxic through this process are classified and labeled as such and the information of their risks is published.

At the same time, my government is working with major industrial complexes, petro-chemical complexes, and manufacturers and importers of chemicals by enhancing their awareness of risks of chemicals, holding seminars, providing professional educational courses, and producing and distributing leaflets.

Mr. Chairman,

Our Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) system has been implemented since 2000. Until now, the information on chemicals was made public only by the type of chemical and industry. However, in order to induce businesses' voluntary emission reductions and to secure the public's right to information, from 2008 the emissions of each business started to be disclosed. In June this year, the emissions of a total of 4,010 businesses will be disclosed.

As a result of our continuous monitoring of dioxin emissions, it has been confirmed that the policies such as the "dioxin emission standards" were effective. In 2007, the proportion of dioxin

emissions in the air above Korea decreased by 81% compared to 2001, when its emissions were first recorded.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to make proper assessments of health impacts of large-scale development projects and to come up with countermeasures, my government introduced in January 2010 a "health impact assessment system."

In addition, in order to create a healthy and safe society without the threats of environmental diseases, we prepared the "10-year Comprehensive Plan for Environmental Health" with the goal of becoming an environmentally advanced nation through minimization of the population at risk. To carry out the plan, around USD690 million will be invested over 10 years.

Mr. Chairman,

In 1987, the WHO designated asbestos as a class 1 carcinogen. We prohibited manufacturing, import and use of some types of asbestos beginning in 1997, and in 2009 all types of asbestos were prohibited. However, there are people suffering from diseases related to past use of asbestos. In this regard, the "Asbestos Damage Relief Act," which mandates provision of a designated level of medical expenses and living allowances to the patients suffering from asbestos-related diseases, was enacted in March of this year and will be enforced in January 2011. Under the act, the "Asbestos Damage Relief Fund" will be established, and it is expected that by 2015 more than 3,000 asbestos disease sufferers will receive economic benefits.

Mr. Chairman,

As the Stockholm Convention designates PCBs as major persistent organic pollutants and the international community is making full-fledged efforts to eliminate them, the Republic of Korea is also pursuing early elimination of PCBs through promotion of chemical treatment and incineration.

A voluntary agreement was signed in November 2004 between NGOs, the Ministry of Environment, and the Korea Electric Power Corporation, which is a user of transformers, the main source of PCBs, forming the PCB policy council. The council was formed in 2005 to prepare a

"Road Map for Proper Disposal/Treatment of PCBs." For eco-friendly treatment/disposal of PCBs-containing waste, four chemical treatment (including cleaning treatment) facilities and three high-temperature incineration facilities are in operation.

Mr. Chairman,

We have to enhance regional and global monitoring of the impacts of long-range transboundary materials through international cooperation. There is also a need to scale-up education and training programs for developing countries' in order to enhance local monitoring capacity and ensure proper treatment of concerned materials.

Lastly, I would like to cite one other key issue. A GHS comparative study conducted by Korea, Japan, China on 20 chemicals from 2008 to 2009 showed that each nation's experts used different materials for classification of the same chemical so some results were different. It is possible that this trend is similar in other regions as well.

As such, my government hopes that GHS comparative studies between nations and regions are further facilitated and there will be more global efforts for coordination of classification and labeling of chemicals. We also hope that other nations will also establish the GHS so that the information on chemicals can be more easily shared and that trading of chemicals can be further promoted based on that.

Thank you.