

STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA AT THE INTERACTIVE THEMATIC DISCUSSION ON CHEMICALS IN THE 18TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(NEW YORK, 04 MAY 2010)

Madam Chair,

We would like to thank the panelists for their interesting presentations, in particular we thank Ms Guthrie for highlighting some of the challenges experienced by developing countries as South Africa could identify with most of the challenges highlighted.

South Africa would like to associate itself with the views of G77 & China expressed yesterday. South Africa has taken a number of actions to promote environmentally sound management of chemicals – key amongst those actions has been the signing and ratification of the Stockholm Convention, and accession to the Rotterdam and Basel Conventions as well as the Montreal Protocol. We have a range of legislative instruments that are aimed at giving effect to these Multilateral Environmental Agreements as well as translating them into domestic policy. What we have learnt about chemicals management is that it requires a multi-stakeholder approach and that is why Mr Chairman, South Africa has established a National Multi-stakeholder Committee for Chemicals Management to facilitate co-ordination in respect of implementation of the MEAs. Our involvement in the African Stockpiles Programme (ASP) as well as collaborating with other countries in the region, has heightened the strength of the partnerships we have between government and key stakeholders, which include industry and civil society.

There are still major challenges to chemicals management that remain unresolved:

- a) The lack of comprehensive risk assessment presents a major challenge. The risks presented by the chemicals out on the market are not all understood in the developing world.
- b) South Africa is of the view that the implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of classification and labelling of chemicals, at the national, regional and international levels, in a manner that is aligned with the precautionary approach will go a long way in fast tracking environmentally sound management of chemicals. We believe it is crucial that information is made available to all users of chemicals, communities and policy makers.

This will prevent and reduce the frequency of incidents, particularly in rural areas where communities are most vulnerable.

Madam Chair one of the key mechanisms to facilitate the environmentally sound management of chemicals is access to reliable data. A centralized chemical information system accessible to all stakeholders including the small and medium enterprises, and the region, is needed to address information gaps, as well as for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. This will contribute to improved knowledge and awareness of the risks posed by chemicals.

To address these challenges, there is a greater need for technology transfer, financial support and capacity building to enable countries, especially developing countries to make informed decisions as early as possible in life cycle management of chemicals. We believe the existing funding streams for chemicals need to be significantly increased in order to make a difference to the life cycle management of chemicals and to meet the internationally agreed goals of sound chemicals management.

I thank you.