

## **Opening Statement by Gabriela Löw Representative of the Swiss Government**

### **Check against delivery**

- **Honourable Minister Maged Goerge, Egyptian Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs**
- **Excellencies**
- **Experts and participants attending this seminar**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you on behalf of the Government of Switzerland to this subregional workshop promoting implementation of the Stockholm Convention and synergies with other chemical related agreements. First, I would like to express my gratitude to our hosts, the Government of Egypt, for their hospitality and their support for this important regional event. Furthermore, I specially thank the experts from UNEP Chemicals and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency for their excellent preparation and organisation of this seminar.

Ladies and gentlemen, following the Rio conference in 1992 there has been considerable success with issues related to chemicals and waste. Since then, governments have agreed on important international legal instruments and frameworks for the sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes. However, much remains to be done. There are still gaps in the international regime; such as synergies, coherence and mutual supportiveness between the existing international instruments should be further improved; and most importantly, many countries lack the capacity for an effective implementation of international commitments on chemicals.

I would like to highlight three important global events and processes, which have given great attention to the sound management of chemicals and wastes since the Rio conference. These are the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the process for the development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and UNEP.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa in September 2002, ministers and heads of state from around the world outlined the path for sustainable development of our planet. One of the significant outcomes was the adoption of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Paragraph 23 of this plan expresses a clear commitment to the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and of hazardous wastes, with a view to sustainable development. It also calls for a rapid ratification and implementation of the Rotterdam (PIC) Convention and of the Stockholm (POPs) Convention; for an implementation of the Globally Harmonised System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS); for partnerships for the sound management of chemicals and wastes; and, last but not least, it calls for reduction of the risks posed by heavy metals. Based on these points and on the relevant decisions of UNEP's governing bodies, a process was launched to develop a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

Switzerland is convinced that only increasing awareness and the exchange of information between all stakeholders can improve the environmentally sound manner of handling hazardous chemicals and wastes in the future. Consequently, the concerns of our partners from developing countries about the sound management of chemicals are taken very seriously by the Swiss Government. Therefore, through the United Nations Institute for Training and research (UNITAR), we are supporting different bilateral projects on the GHS and national implementation plans related to the Stockholm Convention, and we were and are running a series of seminars and workshops with UNEP Chemicals, addressing the various problems in the proper implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) related to chemicals and waste, including this regional seminar in Cairo. Moreover, Switzerland is supporting the active involvement of developing countries in preparing the SAICM process, by financing the regional meetings in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, in preparation for PrepCom2.

Ladies and gentlemen, we now have three multilateral environmental agreements that are directly relevant to international policy on chemicals and waste: the Stockholm (POPs) Convention, the Rotterdam (PIC) Convention, and the Basel Convention on hazardous wastes. The work of these three conventions is inextricably interlinked and they are mutually supportive.

In this context, the first Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam (PIC) Convention, which took place in September 2004, entrusted Switzerland and Italy with hosting the permanent Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention within UNEP Chemicals in Geneva and the FAO in Rome. Switzerland is very honoured by this decision, which wisely offers the PIC Secretariat the best opportunity to exploit synergies with other international organisations that are based in Geneva and Rome and work in the environmental field. Thus Switzerland is privileged for Geneva to host UNEP Chemicals, the Basel Convention Secretariat, the interim POPs Secretariat, the industrial chemicals section of the permanent PIC Secretariat, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemicals Safety (IFCS), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to mention just a few such organisations. Furthermore, most countries already have permanent missions in Geneva, so they can follow the work of this important multilateral environmental agreement closely, without incurring additional costs.

Switzerland therefore hopes, that the governments present here and Parties to the upcoming first Conference of the Parties to the POPs Convention (which is to take place in May 2005 in Punta del Este, Uruguay) will give their support to the Swiss offer to host the permanent POPs Secretariat in the International Environment in Geneva.

Ladies and gentlemen, in view of our responsibility towards future generations, Switzerland is happy to share its knowledge with all of you for the sake of a safer, cleaner world. I am therefore very glad to have this opportunity to work with national chemical experts and with UNEP, UNIDO, GEF and Basel Convention specialists here in Cairo and to make my own contribution to your important and highly

appreciated work.

I am sure that this seminar will be a success for all of us, and look forward to fruitful discussions with you over the next few days.

Thank you very much.