

SECRETARIAT OF THE BASEL CONVENTION

WELCOMING REMARKS

By

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Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and great honour to address the opening of the Regional Workshop on Prevention of Illegal Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste in Asia. On behalf of the Secretariat of the Basel Convention I would like to express our gratitude and deepest appreciation to the host country and the organizers for the excellent organization of the workshop.

After about 15 years of its coming into force, the Basel Convention today is a mature environmental Convention with full operational mechanisms in place catering for the needs of its 169 Parties. These mechanisms encompass a range of control system for transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, the compliance mechanism, the 10-year Strategic Plan from supporting Parties in achieving environmentally sound management of wastes, the Emergency Fund established in support of the Protocol on Liability and Compensation, and last but not least, the Basel Convention Network of 14 Regional and Coordinating Centres. However, the recent tragic incident of dumping of toxic wastes in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, showed that the problem of illegal traffic of hazardous wastes, which was the reason for the adoption of the Convention in 1989, does not show any sign of abating. The Abidjan case is only the tip of the iceberg. The problem today is much more complex and difficult to untangle due to the globalization of the economy and growing international trade in wastes as well as commodities. The important

lesson from the Abidjan case is that we have a serious problem with enforcement and implementation. Enforcement is a major challenge for developing countries that have weak control systems for coping with wastes that may arrive at their ports. In this connection, this workshop could contribute positively towards better understanding of the issues related to illegal traffic as well as improving implementation and control at the national, regional and international levels.

As many of you may recall, following highlights in the international press a few years earlier, the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention in 2002 recognized that the issue of the management of electrical and electronic waste required urgent attention, especially in Asia Pacific. A regional scoping workshop organized by the Basel Convention Regional Centre in Beijing prior to COP6, in Tianjin, China laid the ground work for the ensuing efforts by the Basel Convention Secretariat to address the issue. Since then, much progress has been achieved with regard to e-waste management particularly in this region. Thanks to the strong support of countries in the region, various projects are already being implemented by them in close cooperation with the Secretariat and the Regional Centres. About 2 weeks ago, a regional workshop was conducted in Siem Reap, Cambodia organized by the Basel Convention Regional Centre for South East Asia located in Jakarta. One of the major outcomes of the workshop was the draft technical guidelines on methodology for e-waste inventory and 3R of end-of-life e-products and e-waste. These guidelines would definitely be beneficial in ensuring that e-waste is managed properly and in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.

From the workshop agenda, I see that one of the issues that would be addressed is to clarify the definition and classification of waste, in particular e-waste. We support any discussion that moves towards creating the required level playing field among countries involved, without compromising the requirements of the Basel Convention that hazardous wastes are managed in an environmentally sound manner and as close as possible to the source of generation. The Convention should provide the required transparency and traceability of e-wastes destined for recycling, recovery or disposal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the eight meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention in December 2006, Nobel Prize Laureate Prof. Wangari Maathai,

in her keynote address as well as other speakers at the Opening Session and World Forum on E-waste, appropriately highlighted the serious problem of the ever-increasing production and utilization of electronic and electrical products. While various benefits are derived from the use of such equipment in our everyday life – whether at home or at work – it is now recognized that unless something is done to tackle the proper handling and disposal of end-of-life electronic and electrical equipment, negative effects to human health and the environment would result. Moreover, globalization in trade has made transboundary movement of wastes more complex. As often highlighted in the media, some developing countries in Asia and Africa are becoming targets for such movements often disguised in the form of donations, for example in the case of used personal computers in rural African schools. At the workshop in Cambodia, participants were informed of the difficulty in dealing with the influx of second hand electrical and electronic products. Recognizing these problems, COP8 adopted the Nairobi Declaration on the Environmentally Sound Management of E-waste. Therefore, it is timely that this workshop tries to address an important but difficult aspect on how to clearly define these products and wastes.

Thank you.