

**3R Ministerial Conference on the 3R Initiative
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**THE ROLE OF THE BASEL CONVENTION
IN PROMOTING 3Rs**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to speak before this distinguished audience on the role of the Basel Convention in promoting 3Rs. At the outset, I would like to thank, on behalf of the Convention, the Government of Japan, in particular the Ministry of Environment, for hosting this important Ministerial Conference.

For the benefit of those who may not be very familiar with the Basel Convention, I would like to say a few words about the Convention. The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal is recognized as the world's most comprehensive global environmental agreement on wastes currently in effect. The Convention was adopted in March 1989 under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme. The Convention came into force in May 1992. Currently 165 states and the European Community are Parties to the Convention.

The primary goal of the Convention is to protect human health and the environment against adverse effects resulting from the generation, transboundary movements and disposal operations of hazardous wastes and other wastes. Disposal operations regulated under the Convention include operations that may lead to resource recovery, recycling reclamation, direct re-use or alternative uses, as well as final disposal.

To achieve this goal, the Parties have committed themselves to minimizing the quantity and hazardousness of wastes generated, ensuring their treatment and disposal as close as possible to where they were generated, and reducing their transboundary movements, in a manner consistent with the environmentally sound and efficient management of such wastes.

A central policy instrument of the Basel Convention for achieving these objectives is Environmentally Sound Management, or “ESM”. ESM requires the sound management of goods or substances through their entire life cycle. 3Rs -reduce, reuse, and recycle - are part of ESM and are principles that are put into operation worldwide in the implementation of the Basel Convention. A summary of activities of the Basel Convention relevant to the 3Rs Initiative is available in this room for interested participants.

Due to the different level of development of countries, the application of the environmentally sound management will require the building of the national capacity of developing and countries with economies in transition to handle hazardous and other wastes. The Convention provides a mechanism for capacity building through international cooperation. Gaps between developed and developing countries in environmentally sound management can be narrowed through the access to and transfer of information, know-how and sound and cleaner technologies. For this purpose, Parties to the Convention have established 14 Regional and Coordinating Centres worldwide. These Centres are operating as a regional delivery mechanism for the implementation of the Basel Convention with the perspective of also assisting in the implementation of chemicals conventions such as the Stockholm Convention on POPs and the Rotterdam Convention on PIC. Transfer of know-how and environmentally-friendly technologies is essential for a successful 3Rs

approach. In this regard, the 14 Basel Convention Regional and Coordinating Centres can also assist in promoting the direction of the 3Rs initiative.

Another essential mechanism to assist and complement Governments' efforts to achieve ESM is Partnerships, in particular public/private partnerships at the national and local level. On the 3Rs front, a practical area of involvement for the Basel Convention in recent years has been the establishment of the Basel Convention Partnership Programme in 2002 for engaging industry and non-governmental organizations more closely in our work, to complement actions by Parties to the Convention.

Within this Partnership Programme, the environmentally sound management of electrical and electronic wastes or "e-wastes" is a high priority area, where our early focus has been on end-of-life mobile phones and personal computers and their accessories. These goods are recognized as a means for bridging the information divide between developed and developing countries. However, when they reach their end of life and become wastes, they need to be managed carefully as they contain hazardous elements such as lead, cadmium and mercury. E-wastes are being generated at an alarming rate due to rapid technological innovation, powerful consumer marketing and market forces that often make it easier to discard and replace, than to repair and reuse. According to one estimate, 20 to 50 million tons of e-waste are generated per year world-wide. Hundreds of millions of computers will become obsolete in the next few years. E-wastes have thus become a serious environmental challenge. At the same time, these wastes also contain valuable materials that can be recovered and recycled into useful products.

In December 2002, we launched the Basel Convention Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative together with the world's largest manufacturers of mobile phones. This initiative, which was later joined by major network providers, as

well as recyclers and refurbishers, promotes key waste management principles, including the need to minimize waste during the production process through no-waste or low-waste technologies; the need to reduce hazardous substances contained in the products; the need to reduce the amount of waste requiring final disposal by promoting reuse, recovery and recycling; and the need to ensure the environmentally sound management of those wastes which cannot be recovered or recycled. Consultations are currently underway to initiate in 2005 pilot projects on the collection and recycling of end-of-life mobile phones in several developing countries, in partnership with Parties, industry and local authorities.

Based on the lessons learnt from the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative, work on a global partnership on personal computing equipment has commenced with discussions with leading global players in this field. It is planned that the partnership with its work programme will be finalized in the coming months.

In addition, responding to the specific needs of developing countries, and building upon the outcomes of earlier projects, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention, in consultations with interested governments, has developed a regional project on the environmentally sound management of electrical and electronic wastes, to be implemented in Asia and the Pacific. This project is intended to promote sound refurbishment and re-use of e-wastes, their recycling and recovery to reduce the quantity of such wastes going to landfills nationally and regionally. It would be implemented as a contribution of the Parties to the Basel Convention to the 3Rs Initiative, in close partnership with nine countries in Asia which have endorsed and expressed interest in this project, namely Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. Other stakeholders include industry, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations. The Secretariat will be the main overseer of the implementation of the project. Since this is an important

follow-up to the 3Rs Initiative, it hoped that the G8 member countries would lend their full support for the project, in particular with regard to providing the necessary financial and technical resources which have to be raised in order to ensure its successful implementation and positive outcome. I am encouraged that the Government of Japan, which has spearheaded the 3R Initiative, has indicated strong support towards the implementation of this e-waste project. We hope and encourage other Governments and international organizations, to follow the lead of Japan and offer assistance to the countries concerned through this project to enhance their economic and environmental well being. The active participation of the electronic and electrical industries, both multinational and local in the project is also critical in providing expert advice and contribution.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the national level, there are a number of prerequisites for meeting the objectives of environmentally sound and efficient management. To start with, companies must be willing to invest in cleaner production or sound or proven technologies or processes. To do this, they would expect to operate within an adequate legal framework and be supported by a set of domestic measures facilitating industrial activities and providing incentives for investments in this field. Such a set of coherent measures at the national level could address the broader spectrum of environmentally sound and economically efficient management goals, encompassing reduction, reuse, recovery or recycling activities and disposal operations.

It is the prerogative of governments to ensure that a comprehensive national policy on environmentally sound management exists and provides the necessary framework for industry involvement. Governments, particularly of developing countries, are also encouraged to adopt integrated waste

management policy, to ensure that municipal and industrial wastes are segregated and treated in a coordinated and comprehensive manner, which will provide opportunities for reduction, reuse and recycling. E-wastes, for example, are often mixed and dumped in municipal landfills without proper treatment and exposing people to health risks.

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The Basel Convention seeks to ensure a level-playing field for all concerned stakeholders. The Convention promotes international co-operation and regional action, which represents a critical factor for achieving environmentally sound management. On regional action, for example, in the process of implementation of the Convention, it has been observed that it is neither economically efficient nor viable to establish state of the art recycling facilities for certain hazardous and other waste streams in every country. In this situation, environmentally sound management can be better achieved through regional cooperation based on regional or global certification schemes to be developed. The Convention also provides necessary information, transparency and common procedures that Governments need to achieve environmentally sound management of wastes. I urge Governments and policy makers concerned to take stock of the achievements of the Basel Convention in bridging gaps between developed and developing countries with regard to the environmentally sound management of wastes.

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Parties to the Convention have recognized the global waste challenges ahead. To address emerging issues such as the fast growing generation of used or end-of-life equipment, the Parties have already agreed on a fundamental shift of emphasis from remedial measure to preventative measure such as waste minimization and waste avoidance. At the same time, Parties recognized the

need for and agreed to undertake major efforts, together with all their partners, to mobilize adequate resources to achieve the goals of environmentally sound management at the national and regional level.

Decoupling hazardous and other waste generation from economic growth is a critical challenge in today's globalizing economy. Policies and economic instruments have their role to play in changing patterns of consumption and production so essential in reducing waste generation. Coupled with integrated waste management and the life-cycle approach of goods and substances, such policy and economic instruments will contribute significantly to ESM and 3Rs. In this context, the Basel Convention is and should continue to be a cornerstone of any Government's plan or strategy for applying the 3Rs concept in a comprehensive manner.

Thank you.

29 April 2005