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**CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
TO THE CONVENTION ON THE TRANSBOUNDARY
EFFECTS OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS**

First meeting, 22-24 November 2000
(Item 2 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STEERING GROUP
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TWO UN/ECE REGIONAL
COORDINATING CENTRES AND THEIR FUTURE ROLE
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONVENTION */**

Introduction

1. This document summarizes the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the meeting, held in Warsaw on 26 – 27 January 2000, of the Steering Group responsible for the coordination of the activities of the UN/ECE Regional Coordinating Centre for Industrial Accident Training and Exercises (located in Warsaw) and the UN/ECE Regional Coordinating Centre for the Prevention of Industrial Accidents (located in Budapest).

*/ Reproduced as received from the Chairman of the Steering Group except for minor editorial changes.

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I. SUMMARY

2. The Steering Group agreed that both Centres, under its oversight, had accomplished much during the past five years providing training, information, and other support to the countries in the region, despite difficulties in attracting the financial and other support that had been expected at the outset. The Steering Group expressed its appreciation to the two Governments involved for their support to the Centres 1/.

3. As the mandates of the two UN/ECE Regional Coordinating Centres and of the Steering Group will terminate, as a matter of procedure, once the Conference of the Parties meets for the first time, the Steering Group recommends to the Conference of the Parties not to extend their mandates past its first meeting, but to invite the two Centres to continue their valuable work as national centres if the Governments of Hungary and Poland so decide. The Steering Group believes that the two Centres would be well placed and capable of undertaking specific assignments from the Conference of the Parties in the future.

4. In the light of the needs of the Parties and other UN/ECE member countries, the Steering Group at its last meeting in Warsaw also provided recommendations to the Conference of the Parties on what tasks should be undertaken to facilitate the implementation of the Convention and what mechanisms or tools are best suited for carrying out the tasks. In developing a future programme of work, the Steering Group emphasized the importance of taking into account the efforts undertaken among international bodies as well as the fact that Parties and non-Parties will have different needs. The Steering Group recommended that the mechanisms for carrying out a future work programme should be pragmatic and take into account past experience and suggested they could include ongoing or ad hoc arrangements and might involve the establishment of new subsidiary bodies or existing national structures. Finally, the Steering Group stressed the importance of bilateral or regional agreements as well as of national structures for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

II. BACKGROUND

5. The preamble to the Convention affirms the need “to promote active international cooperation among the States concerned before, during and after an accident, to enhance appropriate policies and to reinforce and coordinate action at all appropriate levels for promoting the prevention of, preparedness for and response to the transboundary effects of industrial accidents.” The preamble also notes the importance and usefulness of both bilateral and multilateral arrangements in this regard.

6. From their first meeting, the Signatories to the Convention recognized the need for a multilateral programme of work to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, in particular focusing on the countries in economic transition. Therefore, a Task Force was established to further elaborate how to proceed and to organize a survey to determine the priorities of countries. A Workshop was held in Poland in May 1993 to review the results of the survey and to reach conclusions on priorities for future work.

7. Following a request by the Signatories, and based on the Workshop and survey results, the Task Force developed a comprehensive and action-oriented programme of work, which was presented to the Meeting of the Signatories.

8. To carry out this programme of work, the Signatories at their third meeting, in March 1994, welcomed offers by Poland and Hungary to establish "regional coordinating centres" in order to focus activities, to coordinate the efforts of the countries in the region, and to establish information and clearinghouse activities. The mandates of the Centres were agreed to and included as part of the report of the third meeting (ENVWA/WG.4/6). At the same time, the Steering Group was created to, inter alia, coordinate and oversee the activities of the two Centres and assist in attracting resources 2/.

9. During the past six years, the Centres have undertaken a range of activities to support the implementation of the Convention, including training courses and workshops, translation of important documents into Russian, preparation of periodic newsletters and circulation of documents of interest.

10. However, the Centres have struggled to meet the objectives set out in their work programmes and mandates. In addition to the initial difficulties in getting organized, the primary barrier to meeting their goals was the inability to attract the necessary financial resources and contributions in kind, in particular, to support those activities that involved participation of other countries in the region.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STEERING GROUP

11. The Steering Group recognized that it should provide the Conference of the Parties with guidance concerning further activities related to the implementation of the Convention, in the light of its experience during the past six years. In working out its recommendations, the Steering Group took into account **the following premises:**

(a) This Convention was unusual in the fact that the Signatory countries took the initiative to implement an extensive programme of work before the Convention entered into force. To accomplish this, the Governments of Hungary and Poland offered their services, in the form of the Regional Coordinating Centres, to support all countries in the region;

(b) The Centres have provided a valuable service to the UN/ECE community, through the numerous training and information-sharing activities. The Centres have persevered in their efforts to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, despite the failure to obtain consistent and long-term financing from other countries and administrative difficulties;

(c) The mandates of the Centres and the Steering Group, established at the third meeting of the Signatories, expire once the Conference of the Parties is convened. The Centres and the Steering Group were established by the Signatories to help member countries, and particularly the countries in transition, to ratify and implement the Convention. Once the Convention has entered into force, the Conference of the Parties will consider what activities

should be undertaken in the light of the obligations of the Parties. Whether there should be a work programme designed to assist non-Parties to develop the laws and programmes necessary to become Parties stands as a separate matter;

(d) The focus of the Convention being transboundary effects of industrial accidents, bilateral (or, as appropriate, regional) arrangements with countries potentially affected in the event of an accident are of particular importance;

(e) As stated in the preamble to the Convention, there remains a continuing need for active international cooperation for effective accident prevention, preparedness and response. Furthermore, it is valuable to encourage consistency in approaches among countries;

(f) The good working cooperation between the UN/ECE Convention and other international bodies/instruments, including the European Commission (EC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), during the past several years was acknowledged.

12. Based on the above, the Steering Group makes the following **specific recommendations** to the Conference of the Parties:

(a) The Conference of the Parties should **congratulate and express appreciation** to the Centres for all their contributions in helping countries to implement the Convention. The experience of the Centres should therefore be taken into account when decisions are made concerning future activities under the Convention;

(b) As the situation has changed during the past five years, the Conference of the Parties should not extend the mandates of the two Coordinating Centres; however, given their experience and significant contributions, it should invite them to continue their valuable work as national centres, if the two host Governments so decide;

(c) At its first meeting the Conference of the Parties should consider what activities might be needed to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, in the light of current priorities. In this regard, the Conference of the Parties should take into account the changes that have occurred during the past five years which may affect efforts related to industrial accident prevention, preparedness and response (including economic, technological and political changes). In addition, it should take account of the experience gained by the two Centres and the Steering Group, including the fact that work should proceed in a step-by-step fashion;

(d) When considering the activities that might be needed, the Conference of the Parties should take into account the fact that Parties and non-Parties will have different needs and priorities. There are fairly well-defined tasks for Parties related to the implementation and enforcement of the provisions of the Convention; non-Parties may have greater interest in issues related to establishing national laws and programmes which are consistent with the Convention. Furthermore, the needs may differ between those countries that have established (or are planning

to establish) laws/policies consistent with the “Seveso II” Directive, and those countries that have a different approach to the issues of industrial accident prevention, preparedness and response;

(e) The Conference of the Parties should include among the activities needed a mechanism for the identification of hazardous installations covered by the Convention;

(f) The Conference of the Parties should include among the activities needed a uniform format for the collection of the reports that Parties are required to make periodically on their implementation of the Convention;

(g) The Conference of the Parties should include among the activities needed mechanisms to facilitate a regular sharing of documentation of common interest, experience in implementing the Convention, and information on events related to the Convention (“information-clearinghouse function”). Efforts should be made to ensure that important or valuable documentation, reports and other written materials are made available in Russian. Any information-clearinghouse mechanisms should take into account (and have links with) other related international efforts, including those of OECD, EC, etc.;

(h) The Conference of the Parties should be pragmatic and take into account past experience when considering how to carry out the programme of work and establish subsidiary bodies and mandates to implement its programme of work. The mechanisms for carrying out a future work programme could include ongoing or ad hoc arrangements and might involve the establishment of new subsidiary bodies or existing national structures. The Conference of the Parties should learn from the difficulties encountered by the Centres in attracting financial and other support, and should also take into account the fact that the arrangements under the Convention should be more formal than before the Convention entered into force. It is also important for any subsidiary bodies to have clear mandates and administrative/financial arrangements;

(i) Any programme of work, and related institutional arrangements, should reflect the need to minimize duplication of effort among international bodies, and should take into account available resources and tools;

(j) The Conference of the Parties should encourage UN/ECE member countries (Parties and non-Parties) to establish bilateral (or, as appropriate, regional) agreements to address concerns at their borders with countries potentially affected in the event of an accident;

(k) The Conference of the Parties should encourage UN/ECE member countries (Parties and non-Parties) to establish/maintain national structures to focus on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention within their jurisdiction. These national structures can, as appropriate, undertake projects on behalf of the Conference of the Parties;

(l) The Conference of the Parties should consider delegating the authority to review between its meetings the progress being made in the activities designed to facilitate the implementation of the Convention to its bureau, or other subsidiary body. This body could, for

example, consider whether the existing arrangements are appropriate in view of current needs/priorities and whether there is a need for additional activities.

Notes

1/ In addition, the Steering Group expressed its appreciation to the authorities of the Russian Federation for hosting the previous meeting of the Steering Group in Moscow on 11-12 June 1999, and the visit to the Russian Rescue Training Centre in Noginsk.

2/ The Steering Group was composed of its Chairman from the United States, representatives from each of the two Centres, from several additional interested countries including Germany, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Slovenia and Switzerland, and from the European Commission. The UN/ECE secretariat also participated in the Steering Group.