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CONVENTION ON LONG-RANGE TRANSBOUNDARY AIR POLLUTION

Working Group on Strategies and Review

(Thirty-third session, Geneva, 24-27 September 2001)

(Item 7 of the Provisional agenda)

ELEMENTS FOR A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Report prepared by the Chairman and Rapporteur of the open-ended group of experts
in collaboration with the secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

1. The Executive Body, aware of the extraordinary amount of useful scientific and technical information developed over the 20 years since the adoption of the Convention, has considered, for a number of years, the importance of developing a comprehensive communications strategy to make better use of this information and improve the flow of information to the Convention's various audiences.
2. At its eighteenth session, the Executive Body decided to set up an open-ended expert group to draft elements for a communication strategy for the Convention. It invited Mr. R. Guardans (Spain) to coordinate, in collaboration with its Bureau and the secretariat, the work of the expert group, which was expected to present draft proposals to the Working Group on Strategies and Review at its thirty-third session (ECE/EB.AIR/71, para. 79).

II. ORGANIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

3. The expert group met in Geneva from 24 to 25 April 2001. Its meeting was chaired by Mr. R. Guardans and Mr. S. Hart (Canada) was nominated Rapporteur. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following Parties to the Convention: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States of America. Members of the UNECE secretariat also attended.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Objectives for a Communications Strategy

4. The expert group agreed that the objective of the communications strategy should be to raise the awareness of the problems of air pollution, as well as to make more visible the contribution of the Convention in its successful abatement. It considered, moreover, that the communication strategy should address the necessary information flows, targeting the various audiences of the Convention, and use all appropriate communications technology and techniques.

B. Specific activities considered

5. Taking into account the resources available in the secretariat and from Parties, the following items were discussed, conclusions agreed, and recommendations proposed:

Goal 1: To improve the accessibility and usefulness of the Strategies and Policies Review

6. The group agreed that the biennial exercise of collecting information from Parties on air pollution strategies and policies could be improved in terms of both facilitating Parties' effective completion of the questionnaire and enabling users to access and make use of the replies.

Recommendation: Solicit the assistance of Parties to develop specific software to facilitate processing of the Strategies and Policies Review, questionnaires and replies.

Goal 2: To make better use of the Internet and other electronic means for exchanging information generated by the Convention on, inter alia, emissions, control technologies and costs, and effects on health and the environment

7. The group agreed that more effective and interactive use of the Internet and associated techniques could enhance the visibility and usefulness of the information as well as the methodologies generated by technical subsidiary bodies to, for example, academic communities and environmental policy forums.

Recommendation: Secretariat to canvass views on the existing Internet pages related to the Convention. Make use of national experts to collate proposals for further development under Goal 4. Modify and update existing Convention web site to ensure it is user-friendly and appropriately informative about the nature of the Convention and its achievements.

Goal 3: To strengthen the involvement of international / global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Conventions's process

8. The group agreed that access to the Convention's meetings and information should be made more transparent to the public and civil society and that wider participation should be encouraged in order to promote the effectiveness of the Convention.

Recommendation: Establish a wider list of NGOs that could be interested in the Convention and make efforts to inform them of meetings and to give them other available information.

Goal 4: To identify environmental-communications expertise within Parties and, as appropriate, within other national and international organizations that could help the Convention communicate better with its various audiences

9. The group agreed that a lack of applied communications expertise hindered the ability of the Convention to transmit effectively its work and results. It was also agreed that established environmental communication experts employed by Parties had hitherto neglected problems of long-range transboundary air pollution.

Recommendation: Hold a workshop bringing together communications experts and the Convention's subject matter specialists to assist in devising innovative solutions to these issues.

Goal 5: To improve communication with the general public with a view to bringing to its attention the positive health, environmental and economic impacts of the Convention's work over the past two decades

10. The group agreed that there were insufficient publications and other print media for adequately communicating the work and achievements of the Convention.

Recommendation: Update the Gothenburg Protocol brochure and explore the feasibility of translating it into other languages; in parallel, develop a pocket-sized booklet on emission trends with information on each of the Parties.

Goal 6: To improve communication with public opinion leaders with a view to reinforcing the positive health, environmental and economic impacts of the Convention's work over the past two decades

11. The group considered that the Convention's visibility and profile should be greater considering its undoubted achievements and that pressure from leaders of public opinion could act to promote ratification of some of the Convention's protocols.

Recommendation: Commission, within the budget and resources of the Convention, specific feature and editorial articles that could be used in major newspapers and technical journals.

Goal 7: To promote appropriate coverage of Convention matters in local, national and international media

12. The group considered that there was a need for readily available information that could be used by Parties in press conferences and news briefings at local, national and international levels.

Recommendation: Assemble and, where necessary, prepare generic material that can be used to meet the above requirement.