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LONG-RANGE TRANSBOUNDARY AIR POLLUTION

Working Group on Strategies and Review
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Item 6 on the provisional agenda

A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE CONVENTION

Recommendations from the workshop on communications
prepared by the Chairman and the organizing committee
in collaboration with the secretariat

Introduction

1. In accordance with the work-plan for the implementation of the Convention (ECE/EB.AIR/77/Add. 2, annex XIII, item 1.10), a workshop on a communication strategy for the Convention took place in London on 9-11 April 2003 to agree on concrete recommendations for enhancing the visibility of the Convention and its achievements.
2. Experts from Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom and the United States of America participated in the workshop. Representatives from the European Environment Agency, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (Germany) and the Stockholm Environment Institute (Sweden), were present. A member of the Swedish NGO secretariat on Acid Rain was present. Two members of the Convention's secretariat were also present.

Documents prepared under the auspices or at the request of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution for GENERAL circulation should be considered provisional unless APPROVED by the Executive Body.

3. Mr. R. Ballaman (Switzerland) chaired the workshop.

I. BACKGROUND

4. At the request of the Executive Body at its eighteenth session, a meeting of an open-ended group of experts had been held in Geneva (24 April 2001) to develop elements for a communication strategy. One of the goals was to identify environmental communications expertise to help the Convention communicate better with its various audiences. The group had agreed that a lack of applied communication expertise hindered the ability of the Convention to transmit its work and results effectively. It had also agreed that environmental communication experts had neglected problems of long-range transboundary air pollution. The group recommended a workshop, bringing together communication experts and the Convention's subject matter specialists who could help develop ways to communicate the work and results of the Convention (EB.AIR/WG.5/2001/3, para. 9). The recommendation had been endorsed by the Working Group on Strategies and Review at its thirty-third session (EB.AIR/WG.5/70 para. 67(b)), and the Executive Body, at its nineteenth session, had welcomed the possibility of a workshop (ECE/EB.AIR/75, para. 33(c)).

5. At its twentieth session, the Executive Body had noted with appreciation the offers of Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States to convene a workshop on communications (ECE/EB.AIR/77, para. 48 (n)). The Stockholm Environment Institute at York (SEI-Y) played a lead role in developing content, commissioning papers and organizing the workshop. The Government of the United Kingdom arranged the venue.

II. STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

6. After presentations by the authors of pre-circulated papers, experts discussed ideas according to three themes, exploring the following associated questions:

(a) The Convention and its stakeholders: who are the stakeholders and how can we actively engage them?

(b) Reporting to the Convention: how can we use the internal reporting system and its outputs to better communicate the Convention?

(c) Enhancing synergies beyond the Convention: what message does the Convention want to convey and how can we effectively convey it?

7. After working in groups on each of the three subjects, the workshop discussed the issues in plenary and made the following recommendations.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The workshop recommended that the main objective of developing a communication strategy for the Convention should be to support the Convention and thus help raise awareness of the problems of air pollution, as well as to make the contribution of the Convention to air pollution abatement more visible.

9. The workshop agreed on a wide range of recommendations, which fell into one or more of the following categories: stakeholder participation, media relations, global synergies, the Internet, and Convention outputs. The workshop noted the recommendations would need to be prioritized and the question of resources addressed. A mechanism to determine the effectiveness of measures once implemented should also be considered.

A. Activities identified for possible immediate action

10. Some recommendations required more immediate attention to ensure their effective implementation:

(a) *Examine the need for, and the interest of Parties in leading, a task force, expert group or network of experts on communications.* This could be either a new body or a new network of focal points for existing bodies, with the purpose of proposing new activities, and monitoring and supporting those already started;

(b) *Plan a media event to mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention in 2004;* explore the possibility of linking the event to a ministerial conference or another high-level forum that would maximize press coverage and visibility; produce an anniversary book or booklet to mark the anniversary, including, for instance, data on emission trends, effects of air pollution and highlights of the Convention's achievements; draw on the forthcoming substantive reports by the Working Group on Effects (The Assessment of Recent Air Pollution Effects and their Recorded Trends) and EMEP (The Assessment Report of Measuring and Modelling in Europe) to develop media-friendly information; provide similar information on North America;

(c) *Explore options for establishing a global forum to provide a framework for interregional collaboration and to improve the outreach activities of the Convention in Africa, Asia and Latin America.* The Executive Body may wish to take steps towards bringing the various active regional networks together, possibly by means of a workshop.

B. Promote stakeholder participation in the work of the Convention

11. The workshop discussed the need to promote stakeholder participation in the activities carried out under the Convention by developing better links with policy advisers, decision-makers,

and the scientific, research, business, NGO communities, as well as the general public.

Specifically, the workshop recommended targeted efforts to:

(a) *Continue to build partnerships with other initiatives*, promoting harmonization of data and technical activities between regional and other networks, such as the European Commission's Clean Air for Europe programme (CAFE), to draw on their experience of liaising with stakeholders and to avoid redundancy; clarify reporting procedures of other relevant international agreements and organizations and develop proposals to avoid duplication of efforts and reduce the response burden of Parties;

(b) *Raise the profile of the Convention among the NGO community* and civil society by representing NGOs and their constituents more fully in meetings and the work of the Convention; and

(c) *Promote the work and achievements of the Convention* by providing expertise for related meetings; encourage national experts to promote the work of the Convention at conferences, etc., using outputs from the Convention, including information specially prepared for specific audiences on its web site.

C. Enhance media relations to increase the visibility of the Convention

12. The workshop discussed the lack of visibility of the Convention and its achievements, noting the importance of identifying a target audience and clarifying the message to be conveyed. Target audiences included: policy advisers, decision makers, the media, the public and the scientific community. While the media had a responsibility to convey complex scientific issues in a manner comprehensible to the public, the Convention could play an important role in attracting the media through a well-honed communication strategy. Moreover, it was necessary to transform the culture surrounding the Convention's work so that all outputs were considered for their communication potential. The workshop discussed, moreover, ways to refer to the Convention by name and acronym, and suggested: "the Air Pollution Convention" and "LRTAP". Specifically, the workshop recommended targeted efforts to:

(a) *Pursue proactive media relations*, making media a high priority for the Convention and engendering an increased professionalism to media relations, acknowledging it as a separate area of expertise under the Convention. This could imply the part-time or temporary appointment of a press officer, free-lance services provided on an ad-hoc or continuous basis, or assistance provided by Parties as contributions in kind;

(b) *Develop relations with the press and present materials in a media-friendly format*. The Geneva press corps, and in particular journalists focused on environment and health, were considered good starting points; it would also be important to reach specialized publications on

environment, science, health and air pollution; materials should be presented in a journalistic style, with a particular focus on human health and environmental impacts;

(c) *Regularly produce media-friendly syntheses of key outputs* of the Convention's work; consider a wider distribution of ECE Weekly, or the use of one-page executive summaries of important reports or documents, targeted toward non-experts. Both could be made available on the Convention's web site;

(d) *Plan the timing of press releases and media events strategically*; raise the profile of the Convention by coordinating press releases and events with related events of high visibility, such as a United Nations world conference, a ministerial conference or an environmental NGO forum;

(e) *Develop a newsletter on the Convention*, after assessing its potential readership, possibly aimed at interregional communication;

(f) *Make available visual resources* such as films, videos, digital video disks (DVDs), for media relations (e.g. video footage showing environmental impacts such as low-level ozone damage to forests, to be used as supplementary material to television news reports); and

(g) *Develop an online database of relevant media contacts*, including not only environmental correspondents, but also journalists covering business, urban and rural affairs.

D. Create global synergies to promote the Convention and share its achievements

13. The workshop discussed the possibilities for developing a network of information experts for geographical and topical outreach, including linkages between air pollution and climate change. Efforts should be made to extend the expertise under the Convention to ECE member countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as to provide assistance to countries that wished to ratify the Convention and its protocols. The workshop examined, moreover, synergies between the Convention and related activities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and proposed activities to facilitate this work. Specifically, the workshop recommended targeted efforts to:

(a) *Raise awareness of existing and potential outreach activities* involving technical collaboration. The Executive Body may wish to: invite its subsidiary bodies, task forces and expert groups to encourage the participation of atmospheric pollution experts from other regions, for instance, by informing them about Convention meetings and workshops on a regular basis and inviting them when possible; collaborate with funding agencies and other existing projects to make effective use of available funding;

(b) *Encourage the sharing of experience* and develop guidance information to aid the accession of non-Parties; take advantage of the experience gained by Parties in their implementation of the Convention and its protocols;

(c) *Address communication gaps with other regions*, in particular with the Mediterranean region; explore ways and means to bridge these gaps, while encouraging stronger participation from Parties in the Mediterranean region.

E. Optimize Internet capabilities to make the Convention more accessible

14. The workshop discussed the importance of the Internet in improving communications of the Convention, both as a provider of information and for its interactive potential with stakeholders. The workshop noted the importance of improving the Convention's web site to make it more attractive, user-friendly and targeted toward the appropriate audiences. The web site could be enhanced by the secretariat, or through targeted funding or contributions in kind from a Party providing an expert. Specifically, the workshop recommended targeted efforts to:

(a) *Improve the visual imagery of the site*; add a search engine, a separate (URL) address with a domain name similar to the name of the Convention, and other improvements to make the site more user-friendly;

(b) *Introduce a subscription system*, allowing visitors to the web site to receive electronic news updates, including press releases and information on the Convention;

(c) *Develop presentations about the Convention* that could be downloaded from the web site for use by experts in other meetings. These could include PowerPoint presentations, as well as graphic presentations such as tables, charts or maps, reflecting general information about, for instance, the status of ratification of protocols, the results of Convention meetings and workshops, news about the Convention and other air pollution issues.

F. Make more effective use of Convention outputs

15. The workshop discussed the current reporting system under the Convention whereby Parties reported on their emissions, strategies and policies for air pollution abatement, and critical loads and levels. Convention outputs included publications presenting aggregated information on emission trends and abatement policies, as well as information on individual Parties. The workshop agreed that the current system of reporting to the Convention and better use of its outputs by Parties, the media, civil society and other stakeholders could improve the visibility of the Convention, as well as promote stakeholder participation. Specifically, the workshop recommended targeted efforts to:

(a) *Promote public and media access to data* produced through its internal reporting system, recognizing the wealth of information generated by the Convention; information should be made widely available to scientific researchers, NGOs and specialized journalists; data and information reported to the Convention, and used to determine compliance, should be collected, shared and made accessible, in a user-friendly form;

(b) *Assess existing sets of indicators related to air pollution*, with possible input from the EMEP Steering Body and the Working Group on Effects, showing successes and impacts of the Convention and its protocols; reflect indicators using geographic information systems (GIS) to illustrate national and regional differences;

(c) *Make Convention manuals/documents and interlaboratory comparisons more readily available*. This should begin with an inventory of documents already available, as well as information on contact points, languages available, revision dates, etc.