



International PRTR Coordinating Group

Special session

Date: Thursday, 22 April 2010
Time: 15:00-18:00
Location: Room XII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

REPORT

I. Opening Remarks

The Chair explained the reasons for convening the meeting that had been outlined in the invitation letter. These included the will to involve in this group the countries in transition and developing countries that do not normally attend the ordinary meetings that are held back-to-back with the OECD Task Force meetings in Paris.

The Chair then presented the agenda items and launched a tour de table to let all participants present themselves.

II. Review of PRTR capacity development needs of countries

Government representatives and other stakeholders, in particular from countries with economies in transition, had an opportunity to make interventions of 2-3 minutes to outline their specific capacity development needs related to the design and implementation of national PRTR systems.

Belarus explained that PRTRs were very useful systems to provide information on industrial releases to the public. They also outlined the difficulties in developing PRTR systems that can be summarized under these points:

- Collect reliable information,
- Select pollutants to report about,
- Find synergies with the reporting mechanisms under other conventions,
- Share experience with countries that have already developed a PRTR system in order to speed up the process,
- Find technical and financial assistance.

Armenia explained that it is very difficult for them to ratify the Protocol. The major problems were the necessity to change the national legislation, by perhaps working with other parties, to train officials and other people in the private sector, to improve the old laboratories that dated back to the Soviet times, to guarantee a correct accounting system for reporting.

The Regional Environmental Center (REC) outlined the main problems that governments faced in Southeastern Europe: lack of complete data, lack of quality control, permanent fluctuation of the list of facilities due to changes in ownership or bankruptcy.

The Hungarian NGO “Clean Air Action Group” presented some problems in their country, arguing also that no responsible person for PRTR existed in the government. The European

Union intervened to rectify this, stating that a responsible person existed and was active on the matter.

The Aarhus Centre in Tajikistan reported that a week earlier they decided they would have regular public hearings in Tajikistan where members of the public would come and meet the authorities and pose questions that a new focal point would be able to answer.

The Aarhus Centre in Georgia outlined the problems that Georgia was facing with regard to the establishment of a PRTR system. They had problems in collecting the necessary information due to the lack of a systematic format or mechanism to collect this information. Moreover, the reliability of the data collected posed other concerns in the country due to the lack of quality control and inspections at all stages.

Poland explained the problems they encountered in reporting carbon dioxide emissions to the European PRTR. These problems were then solved.

The Russian NGO “Volgograd Ecopress Information Centre” informed that a new group on statistics had been created in Russia to amend the legislation on statistics or to harmonize the available data. They also warned that strict controls on the data declared were encouraging people to report unreliable data.

“Friends of the Earth Europe” informed that health information for the general public was a very critical issue in the United Kingdom.

The secretariat reminded the group about the capacity-building section of the Geneva declaration adopted at the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol. It also reminded that a questionnaire would be sent to the parties about capacity building needs. Once addressed by the parties, this questionnaire would be reviewed by the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol in order to find the actions that would be needed.

Belarus expressed its appreciation for workshops or seminars to share experiences from other countries that had already implemented PRTR systems. With regard to this issue, the European Union reminded that it was important to set a PRTR system before launching it: not only the IT structure was important but also how to be used by the public was to be determined. The 2011 International Workshop could be of major interest with this regard.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) reminded that an online matrix related to the Aarhus Clearinghouse listed all PRTR capacity-building activities undertaken and was regularly updated. The European Union supported this matrix. The secretariat encouraged parties and other stakeholders to access directly the matrix to update the information. If they wished to do so, they could be easily provided with the codes to enter and edit the matrix. The REC underlined that it was useful to include capacity-building activities at any stage, starting from the proposal phase.

III. Activities and services of international /regional organizations and governments aimed at meeting PRTR capacity development needs

Representatives from international, intergovernmental and regional organizations and national governments had an opportunity to present their ongoing and planned activities and services to support PRTR development.

UNEP informed about the 2009 Governing Council decision on the need for a legally binding text on mercury reporting. The text would be finalized in 2013. A note had been drafted in the previous year to investigate how PRTR could be used as a mercury reporting mechanism.

UNEP also informed, on behalf of the SAICM Secretariat, that SAICM had a funding mechanism for initial activities. Many developing countries had been involved. The fund was open to governments and, on exceptional cases, to NGOs. Two application rounds existed every year. They said that the PRTR process might find this information very interesting.

UNEP further explained that activities were carried out, also with the help of regional centers, to raise awareness about the three conventions (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions) and help countries implement them.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) outlined the main activities related to PRTRs. The Quick start program funded by SAICM allowed countries to have a short-term funding of PRTR-related activities in their early stage.

The mercury emissions inventory implemented in Chile, Ecuador, Panama and at that moment also in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, followed the UNEP toolkit and would soon have a strategy to find relations with PRTR reporting mechanisms.

The medium-sized GEF project concerned 6 countries that were designing a PRTR and 7 countries that were designing PRTRs in parallel to regional PRTRs. Among these countries, Chile was also strengthening water monitoring.

Poland underlined the necessity to find synergies between the PRTR Protocol and the three UNEP conventions (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm). It also noted that, since UNECE conventions (including the PRTR Protocol to the Aarhus Convention) might be expanding to a global level, they could be used for all chemical treaties, including mercury reporting.

The REC mentioned their activities related to the ENVSEC project to strengthen PRTRs in Southeastern Europe, a small pilot project in Albania in one enterprise and trainings in Southeastern Europe (especially Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro) and Turkey on how to use PRTRs.

The Aarhus Center in Kyrgyzstan reported on its plans to promote the Protocol in the country as agreed at the meeting in Istanbul earlier in 2010.

The NGO “Ecoscope” from Azerbaijan reported that, through a meeting at the Ministry, they were aware that Azerbaijan was ready to ratify the Protocol and that it would need technical assistance and training to implement the Protocol.

Armenia expressed its hope that the regional seminar on PRTRs would take place in Belarus.

“ECO Forum” stated that they had spent a lot of time in cooperation with other NGOs in pilot projects that had often no impact since the results were lost.

IV. Possible further measures to strengthen PRTR capacity development

This agenda item featured an open discussion on the extent to which existing support programmes and services were sufficient in addressing PRTR capacity development needs effectively. It also provided an opportunity to explore possible measures, including possible global action to take

stock of the implementation of international targets for PRTR development and ensure effective capacity development to reach these targets.

At the request of the Chair, participants commented on the need to extend activities to other regions.

Belarus suggested that activities could start at a regional level (ie. UNECE level) to then develop to a global one. Later on activities at a subregional level could be also addressed.

UNEP underlined the importance to know where OECD countries were in their work in order to correctly frame the activities and to have a PRTR in OECD countries that did not have it yet.

UNEP also underlined that 38 and more registers were online. Hence, it was interesting to know where PRTRs would go in the future. It noted that PRTR stood at the crossroads of two outstanding points of the Rio + 20 conference: an interest for article 10 not only at a regional level but also at global level, as demonstrated by some concrete interest expressed by some countries; the success of the environmental governance agenda under agenda 21. UNEP also noted ECE suggestion that Rio + 20 would be the suitable forum to discuss developments and set further goals for PRTRs. It further underlined that PRTRs covered both agenda topics set for the Rio + 20 conference: environmental governance and green economy. It also suggested that the next summit on sustainable development should be looked at by countries interested in PRTR activities.

The Aarhus Center in Georgia expressed the importance to share experiences of Eastern European countries that had recently implemented PRTRs because of the similarities of their systems rather than with other Western European countries.

France agreed with Belarus with the proposal to share the experience accumulated. It also proposed to look at the OECD experience to understand what elements were comparable.

Spain noted the importance to involve all stakeholders involved in the process (the public, the authorities that validate the data, the industry).

The secretariat underlined the importance of the involvement of the industry in the PRTR process and noted strenuous efforts that it made to involve them. It also noted that comparability of the different PRTR systems used should be enhanced in the future. It further suggested that a multi-led approach to use the protocol on different levels was very important.

V. Next meeting

The following meeting was confirmed to be the fifth ordinary meeting to be held in Paris on 18 May 2010.