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Governments provisionally agree to ban widely-used toxic chemical at UN meeting

(Geneva, Switzerland) - IPEN congratulates governments for their provisional decision to globally ban production and use of the commonly-used flame retardant, HBCD. This historic consensus decision was made at the meeting of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants by over 100 countries.¹

“We applaud countries for their decision to ban this chemical and not to allow the recycling of products containing it,” said Dr. Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN senior adviser. “This will prevent materials containing HBCD from being recycled into new products and protect people from contamination that would otherwise cause serious damage to their health.”

“Governments also decided to require labeling new building insulation products containing HBCD,” said Dr. Joe DiGangi, IPEN senior science adviser. “This is a common-sense approach that will help countries separate dangerous products and wastes.”

“This global ban will go a long way towards protecting future generations, particularly for Arctic people who are most at risk from this contaminant,” said Tiffany Immingan, Siberian Yupik Youth from Saint Lawrence Island in the Northern Bering Sea. “There is no need to continue manufacturing and using HBCD because so many safer alternatives exist.”

The meeting also saw countries confirm that ecosystem-based pest management should be the priority for replacing a deadly pesticide, endosulfan, which causes irreversible damage to humans and the environment. “This is a great move forward,” said Dr. Meriel Watts of PAN/IPEN. “Ecosystem-based approaches to pest management have been shown to improve farmers’ income, food security and health, and to be better for the environment. This decision is very supportive of farmers, and we call on all governments to now rapidly assist their farmers to change from endosulfan-dependent chemical intensive farming to ecosystem-based approaches such as agroecology and organic farming.”

“IPEN supports the need to increase funding necessary to ensure effective implementation of the Convention to cover the 2014–2018 period. The phasing out of POPs, including the new POPs, in developing and transition countries requires substantial technical and financial support to implement the Convention effectively,” said Dr. Olga Speranskaya, IPEN Co-Chair. “We applaud progressive decisions made at this meeting² and would like to be sure that the active participation of civil society groups and their experts will continue benefiting the implementation of this important Convention on chemical safety.”

Public Interest NGO positions, information and updates about the Stockholm Convention Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland are available at: <http://www.ipen.org/cop6/documents/>. Please also see:

Twitter updates: @ToxicsFree

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¹ Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) is a chemical widely used in building insulation. It is now ubiquitous globally and is found in the Arctic environment, marine fish, seabirds, ringed seals, beluga whales, and polar bears—some of these species are vital for the physical, spiritual, and cultural sustenance of Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. HBCD levels at the top of the food chain are now comparable to other bioaccumulative chemicals such as PBDEs. HBCD affects the ability of our children to learn and grow because it harms thyroid function and neurodevelopment—with some of the effects being transgenerational. It is found in mother’s breast milk and thus passed to the most vulnerable of us, our children. Some breast milk studies show that levels of HBCD are increasing.

² The meeting this week marks the Sixth Conference of Parties to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (COP6). The negotiation is being coordinated by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). For more information about persistent organic pollutants, please see <http://chm.pops.int>