



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 June 1999

Original: English

Substantive session of 1999

Geneva, 5–30 July 1999

Item 13 (g) of the provisional agenda*

Economic and environmental questions: transport of dangerous goods

Reconfiguration of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General wishes to bring to the attention of the Council a letter dated 12 January 1999 which he has received from the President of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (see annex) and which concerns the reconfiguration of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods.**

* E/1999/100 and Add.1.

** See also E/1999/43, para. 1, draft resolution II, and paras. 18–25.

Annex

Letter dated 12 January 1999 from the President of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety to the Secretary-General

I write to ask you for your assistance in helping me to achieve a significant step forward on global chemical safety. The background to the issue is rather complex so I hope you will forgive me for explaining it all in some detail but I am sure that it will assist you in taking the matter forward.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The Conference produced a blueprint for action entitled Agenda 21, and chapter 19 deals with the environmentally sound management of chemicals. The work required to achieve the goals of chapter 19 has progressed through the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), which was set up in 1994. Much progress has been made towards fulfilling these goals through work carried out under a number of programme areas. This progress has been reported regularly to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Programme area B of chapter 19 concerns the global harmonization of classification and labelling of dangerous chemicals and has the objective of making a globally harmonized classification and compatible labelling system, including material safety data sheets and easily understandable symbols, available, if feasible, by the year 2000. Originally started by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1991 as a follow-up to its 1990 Chemicals Convention (No. 170), the practical work required to achieve a globally harmonized system has made great strides forward under the management of a Coordinating Group established by ILO under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). A set of harmonized classification criteria has now been elaborated and the work has been strongly supported by participants in IFCS.

The IOMC Coordinating Group has also considered how the harmonized system can be most effectively implemented and has been advised by IFCS that a non-binding mechanism is appropriate even though a binding mechanism should not be ruled out in the future. The IOMC Coordinating Group looked closely at a number of options and considers that the most realistic way forward is to use the existing framework of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, which is a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council. The IOMC Coordinating Group was mindful that some countries do not want to create additional new international committees but at the same time acknowledged that the technical work of the Committee of Experts should not be disrupted in any way by these proposed changes.

The details of the proposed implementation mechanism and proposed changes to the scope and configuration of the Committee of Experts are set out in the enclosure. This question was discussed at the third meeting of the Intersessional Group (ISG3) of IFCS, held in Yokohama, Japan, from 1 to 4 December 1998. ISG3 endorsed the proposed implementation mechanism and asked me to write to you so that the Economic and Social Council could consider this restructuring at its substantive session of 1999. I have also been informed that at its twentieth session (Geneva, 7–16 December 1998), the Committee of Experts drafted a proposal for a Council resolution agreeing in principle to the envisaged reconfiguration of the Committee of Experts. The proposal will be included in the biennial report of the Committee of Experts which will be considered by the Council. The IOMC Coordinating Group has, of course, been very sensitive to the wishes and needs of the Committee of Experts and has fully involved the Committee and its secretariat in all developments. Further, ISG3

requested the IOMC Coordinating Group, in close cooperation with the Committee of Experts, to draft terms of reference for the proposal so that these could be considered by the Council together with the draft resolution recommended by the Committee of Experts.

I hope that my explanation also conveys to you the strong commitment of participants, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to taking the issues forward in the way I have described. I therefore would be grateful if you could accede to my request and so pave the way for an important step forward to complete one part of programme area B, albeit a little later than what we originally planned. I would hope that with your cooperation we could achieve an implementing mechanism for the biennium 2001–2002. The global implementation of harmonized classification promises to bring benefits for both health safety and the environment and to enhance trade opportunities.

If necessary, additional technical details can be obtained from Isaac Obadia, Secretary of the IOMC Coordinating Group, at the International Labour Office.

(Signed) **J. R. Hickman**
President, IFCS



Enclosure