

Statement of Women's Major Group on Chemicals & Waste Management
May 12, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chair

The Women's Major Group is very concerned about the health effects on women, children and communities from chemicals in our food and consumer products, and released into the environment due to human activities.

We are also concerned about the direct and often negative impacts of waste, and the chemicals embedded within waste products.

Chemicals found in households and workplaces lead to increased levels of cancer, including breast cancer in women. But the impacts go beyond women's health to their children. Even small amounts of chemicals travelling through the placenta harm developing children and adversely affect their future capacities.

Our bodies should not be used as testing grounds for chemicals. Hundreds of thousands of chemicals are used in everyday products without adequate testing for irreversible long-term health effects. Nano-materials have potentially dangerous unknown health risks, but are already used in products such as sunscreen and children's clothing.

Developing countries should be supported in creating necessary legislation to protect the health of their populations. Chemicals management should look at the full life cycle of products and be based on the precautionary principle, and the public's right to know about potential risks. Such principles will also aid in the movement toward a zero waste society.

We call on governments to create financial mechanisms to prevent and clean up waste damage, for example, through charges and fees for return-and-recycle programs. Waste policies should be based on a hierarchy that considers resources and health, with priority given in the following order: 1) avoid; 2) reduce; 3) reuse; 4) recycle and 5) safely dispose.

The Women's Major Group also supports ratification of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, and recommends support for best practices in sustainable methods of waste management that provide income-generating opportunities for women.

Thank you.