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CONFERENCE ON
**Small Island
Developing States**
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ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

SIDS4 Conference Side Event

Protecting SIDS from chemicals and waste: integrated action for healthy environments and sustainable development

27 May 2024, 14.00-15.30, Room 7

Organized by:

**Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions; Government of Antigua and Barbuda;
Global Environment Facility (GEF); World Bank;
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for the Caribbean (BCRC Caribbean);
The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP);
The Ashley Lashley Foundation**

Background on the event (one paragraph)

SIDS aspire to a thriving future built on healthy environments and a sustainable blue economy. But that dream is under attack from a hidden enemy: pollution from chemicals and waste. This toxic tide not only harms the stunning natural beauty that defines these islands, but also threatens the health of their people and the future of their economies. This problem is linked to the climate and biodiversity crises, hitting SIDS especially hard. Pollution and ocean acidification lead to coral bleaching and habitat loss, threatening the survival of sea life and the livelihoods of communities dependent on them. Pollution has dire consequences for human health in SIDS. Exposure to harmful chemicals in agricultural runoff, sewage discharge and industrial waste lead to short and long-term ailments. Pollution also endangers economic resilience. The degradation of pristine beaches and coral reefs, from e.g. plastic waste, leads to decreased revenues from tourism and fishing, key pillars of SIDS economies and livelihood. The good news? There's still time to fight back. By strengthening international agreements and national laws to reduce harm from toxic chemicals and improve waste management, SIDS can turn the tide. We need solutions that not only clean up the mess, but also create a circular economy where waste becomes a resource and provide jobs.

Key Issues discussed (5-8 bullet points)

- Plastic pollution has become highly visible but it is the tip of the iceberg in terms of threats posed by chemicals and wastes. Insufficient attention is paid to this issue at the international level even though it is recognized by many SIDS as a priority area for action.
- SIDS territories include immense areas of ocean, the protection of which can deliver significant global environmental benefits. Pollution is the foremost threat to oceans such that protecting SIDS from pollution should be a priority for all.
- We need to protect the integrity of life-supporting systems to achieve a poverty-free planet. Better understanding of the health impacts of chemical use is needed to support urgent decision making, action and financing.
- More sustainable consumption and production patterns are essential to win the fight against pollution, notably in sectors crucial for SIDS economies such as tourism. This can be achieved by integrating circular economy principles and approaches in tourism development plans and designing out plastic and waste in tourism business processes.
- SIDS are committed to combatting pollution and improving waste management and recycling towards the achievement of SDGs 3, 6 and 12 and have ongoing initiatives including new laws for data collection on waste generation, projects on take-back systems for plastic waste packaging, landfill improvements, strengthening analytical capacities for laboratories.
- Models for action are being deployed through programmes dedicated to SIDS from the GEF and the World Bank, which also provide fruitful avenues for South-South cooperation.

Key recommendations for action (5-6 bullet points)

- Enhancing political will in SIDS to recognize the importance of addressing pollution from chemicals and wastes and prioritize action on such is essential.
- Environmental degradation in SIDS must be tackled in a more integrated way, addressing pollution and its impacts on other environmental threats and societal benefits. To be effective, governance systems at the national and international levels should be shaped to implement this more holistic approach.
- Developing and implementing legislation and policies for pollution control in SIDS, including under the framework of international treaties such as the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions, remain crucial to drive action on the ground.
- Data collection should be improved to make visible the impacts of pollution on health and ecosystems and convince decision makers of the urgency for action.
- Innovative approaches and business models for waste management are particularly important in SIDS to achieve economies of scale and a circular economy, including in resource-intensive and polluting sectors such as tourism.
- Financing and the engagement of the private sector, including small and medium enterprises, are needed to support infrastructure development and the development of solutions to pollution.
- It remains essential to engage the public in the fight against pollution, including young people who are eager find solutions that are adapted for SIDS.