

WSIS Forum 2010

AL C7: Environment:

Summary of the Interactive Facilitation Meeting on Electronic Waste (e-waste)

Following an introduction into the objectives and control mechanisms set up by the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the e-waste related activities under the convention were described. A Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative was launched in 2002, followed by a broader Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment (PACE) since 2009. Under the PACE, guidelines on refurbishment and reuse and on recycling are under development as well as pilot activities in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Under the chairmanship of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Secretariat of the Basel Convention, the Interactive Facilitation Meeting discussed the political background, programmes and activities on e-waste. Different perspectives were presented by the International Labour Office (ILO), a representative of the Ministry of Environment, Nigeria, the public interest non-governmental organization Basel Action Network (BAN), and the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR). Uncontrolled dumping of obsolete e-products and material recovery processes without adequate protective measures have resulted in environmental pollution while exposing millions of people to toxic substances and emissions. The technology for environmentally sound dismantling and disposal of e-waste exists, but it has to be linked to the product life-cycle to become economically viable.

Efforts to bridge the digital divide need to follow the life-cycle approach to avoid problems for the health of workers and the general public as well as for the environment. This includes provisions for take-back systems, collection and dismantling, as well as environmentally sound facilities for extraction, recycling and disposal of the computing equipment components.

Partnerships were discussed to link environmentally sound management of end-of-life computing equipment in ICT development programmes, including procurement, infrastructure strengthening and education on national, regional and international level.

More information is available on the website of the Secretariat of the Basel Convention (<http://www.basel.int/>), the Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment, PACE (<http://www.basel.int/industry/compartnership/index.html>), or directly from the Secretariat of the Basel Convention (matthias.kern@unep.org).