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O R G A N I Z A C I O N E S I N T E R N A C I O N A L E S C O N S E D E E N  
G I N E B R A

HRC 48 Side Event

**THE RIGHT TO SCIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES**

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**SPEAKERS**

- **H.E. Amb. Álvaro MOERZINGER** | Permanent Representative of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay to UN Geneva
- **Felix WERTLI** | Head, Global Affairs Section, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment
- **Marcos ORELLANA** | UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights
- **Laura N. VANDENBERG** | Associate Dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs and Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- **Sarojeni RENGAM** | Executive Director at Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific
- **Monika GAIL MACDEVETTE** | Chief, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP

Good afternoon,

Uruguay expresses its gratitude to the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana for timely convening this side event.

I would like to quote the recent UN Secretary General words at the opening of the 76th UN General Assembly “We see the warning signs in every continent and region. Scorching temperatures. Shocking biodiversity loss. Polluted air, water and natural spaces”. In summary, we face three planetary crises: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Interconnectedness characterizes our time and is reflected in the crisis we face in the XXI Century. These phenomena have multiple ramifications, they require coordinated actions from the States and multiple stakeholders covering different areas, as UN Bodies, civil society, scientists, academy and the private sector. We need to continue working together to address this crisis that know no borders and due to their dimensions, require agile and efficient responses.

In this sense, for better decision-making at the national, regional and international levels, an independent and intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals and Waste should be established. For what purpose? to harmonize, synthesize and evaluate existing scientific knowledge; to facilitate the determination of risks and harmful effects on human health and the environment with a special focus on human rights. International cooperation is of critical importance for developing countries and for the benefit of the international community.

The science-policy panels make a valuable contribution to international negotiations and to the progressive development of international environmental law, which Uruguay promotes since 1981, with the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law. Also, we will be able to strengthening the new framework for SAICM Beyond 2020, the plastic waste management, as well as the global governance of chemicals and waste.

Also, we will be able to accelerate actions to tackle the three current environmental crises at the same time as climate change, protecting biodiversity and preventing and reducing global pollution. We hope to deepen the discussions on the creation of the SPI in the next segment of UNEA-5.

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on “The right to science in the context of toxic substances” that was presented yesterday to the 48<sup>o</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council, and especially, we would like to highlight the interrelation between the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, referred to as “the right to science” and the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment to face the severe toxification of the planet and its people.

He presented a clear picture that the unsound management of chemicals and waste create dangerous sources of pollution for our societies and environment. In fact, most of the global population is exposed to hazardous substances and wastes without their consent, which adversely affect a range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, adequate food and housing, clean air and safe water, a healthy environment and safe and healthy work.

In that sense, several international law instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of everyone to “share in scientific advancement and its benefits”. Also, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expands upon this right and the obligation of States.

The right to science is also reflected in regional human rights instruments and several national constitutions. For instance, as recognized by the Special Rapporteur’s report, in the Americas, the inter-American system provides a comprehensive protection of the right to science. The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, recognizes the right to science in language similar to that of the Universal Declaration. Also, the Charter of the Organization of American States, calls for the sharing of the “benefits of science and technology” among its member States. Lately, the Protocol of San Salvador signed in 1988, further elaborates upon the right to science.

Uruguay legislation recognizes the State’s obligation to prevent the exposure of people to hazardous chemicals and waste and protect them from their risks and harmful effects.

Yesterday, the UN Secretary General stressed that “science is under assault”. In that sense, we need to take positive action against disinformation, which directly violate the right to science, through global cooperation and solidarity, by disseminating scientific knowledge in a transparent manner and communicating it in plain language, allowing the public to receive the best available scientific evidence, which improves the realization of this right.

Likewise, we would like to highlight the importance to protect scientists that are often subject to intimidation, harassment, threats, and persecution, and to promote the exercise of academic and scientific freedoms as well as the right to freedom of expression, which are indispensable for scientific research.

The Special Rapporteur, in the introductory paragraph of his report, expresses: “Science provides the international community with knowledge about the risks and harms posed by hazardous substances on human health and the environment and thus enables the elaboration of evidence-based policies to address those threats. Science-based policies protect the range of human rights that are compromised when individuals and communities are exposed to hazardous substances and waste.”

As an example of the positive link between science and policy, we can describe our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Uruguayan government has taken decisive actions based on science and on the recommendations of the WHO. Transparent and constant communication, ensuring the population the right to information, public participation and responsible freedom of the population have characterized our management of the crisis.

In this case, all decisions taken were based on the permanent advice of 58 multidisciplinary science experts, members of the Honorary Scientific Advisory Group (GACH) which was created during the health emergency. Several disciplines debated, cooperated and conducted an interdisciplinary dialogue of broad scope. This avoided doubts from the public opinion and allowed to organize successful vaccine campaigns.

Thank you very much