

## **Civil Society condemns the EU's conduct in undermining an otherwise effective worldwide ban of toxic chemical PFOA**

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**For immediate release**

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An international group of chemical and health NGOs have come together to publicly express deep regret and disapproval of the EU delegation's behaviour and actions at the [COP9 of the Stockholm Convention](#).

Whilst governments agreed to a global ban on Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) – an extremely persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic chemical - a large number of [unjustified five-year exemptions](#) were included.

### **The EU's unjustified justification**

Against recommendations from the POPs Review Committee (the United Nations (UN) International Expert Group) for the Stockholm Convention, and despite the wide availability of safer alternatives, it was the European Union that last week requested the unjustified 5 year global exemption for PFOA use in manufacturing medical textiles.

The report of the POPs Review Committee ([UNEP/POPS/POPRC.14/6/Add.2](#)) identifies several potential alternatives for use in medical textiles, including those that meet regulatory requirements and are currently in use. In addition, no specific application related to medical textiles has been identified that absolutely requires the use of PFOA.

During the COP9 discussions, even representatives of the fluorochemicals industry repeatedly opposed this exemption request (and others) due to the wide availability of existing alternatives to PFOA - a substance known to contaminate groundwater and drinking water worldwide, that is also linked to cancer, endocrine disruption, and harming foetal development.

### **The EU's flagrant disregard for international protocol**

The European Union nominated this substance for listing under the Stockholm Convention and participated throughout the evaluation process where this exemption was deemed unjustified. Still, the EU requested this additional exemption at the meeting.

Not only does this show a very disturbing disrespect of the UN's careful review process it also illustrates the EU's flagrant disregard of the accepted protocol for listing exemptions under the Stockholm Convention.

*In requesting this exemption, the EU has effectively lowered the bar in global chemicals management and brought other countries in line with its own weak regulation. This will have a significant direct impact on the amount of PFOA released into the environment, as PFOA and PFOA-related substances are used in significant amounts in the treatment of medical textiles. - Dorota Napierska, Chemicals Policy & Projects Officer – HCWH Europe*

This did not go unnoticed at COP9, and several Parties to the Convention and members of the POPs review Committee voiced criticism of such conduct, the open violation of the expert committee's decisions, and undermining the integrity of the UN review process.

*With the additional exemption, the EU disregards the work of the expert Committee and further contamination of products and working environment by highly toxic chemicals that are destined for global elimination. - Jitka Strakova, Arnika - Toxics and Waste Programme*

The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) recently set the Provisional Tolerable Weekly Intake (TWI) levels for PFOA at 6 nanograms per kilogram of body weight, and concluded that a considerable proportion of the population already exceed the new TWIs.

We, the undersigned, therefore publicly express our deep regret and disapproval of the behaviour of the EU – which so often likes to present itself as a model region in terms of environmental protection legislation - during the COP9 of the Stockholm Convention. Not only does this decision fail to protect the environment and human health, the way in which the exemption was introduced also undermines this important global process and the protocols that underpin it.

We call on the EU to change its behaviour and to truly embrace its powerful mandate demonstrating strong and democratic leadership in protecting the environment and the health of its 508 million citizens.

### **Signatories**

- Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe – [www.hcwheurope.org](http://www.hcwheurope.org)
- Arnika - Toxics and Waste Programme - Czech Republic
- Breast Cancer UK

- Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
- The Danish Ecological Council
- ECOCITY - Greece
- Ecologistas en Acción - Spain
- European Environmental Citizens' Organisation for Standardisation (ECOS)
- Federation SEPANSO - France
- Friends of the Earth (BUND) Germany
- Fundacion Alborada - Spain
- The Future in our Hands - Norway
- Générations Futures – France
- GLOBAL 2000 - Austria
- Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) - Europe
- Hogar sin Tóxicos - Fundación Vivo Sano – Spain
- Society for Earth - Poland
- Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) International
- ZERO - Association for the Sustainability of the Earth System - Portugal

**ENDS**