



The African Conference on Labour and Environment highlighted the need for improving the means of information dissemination and communication within the trade union movement about environment and sustainable development. This document is a first attempt to provide some news and analysis about environmentally-related issues & trade union sustainable development activities.

Below you will find some information about the latest health and environmental crisis caused by the dumping of great quantities of hazardous wastes in Côte d'Ivoire along with other news and forthcoming events.

## «Probo Koala: facts, reactions & international governance of hazardous wastes »

Cote d'Ivoire's capital was the victim of an ecological and health catastrophe. This draws our attention to the following questions. First, who is responsible for the savage dumping of hazardous wastes in the city? Secondly, how should legal loopholes that permitted this to happen be closed? Here is a short summary of information sources, available, with just a few mouse clicks.

### The facts

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On 19 August, a ship (the Probo Koala) chartered by a Dutch company offloaded 400 tons of gasoline, water and caustic washings used to clean oil drums. The cargo was dumped at Akouedo and at least 10 other sites around the city, including in a channel leading to a lake, roadsides and open grounds. Six people died and close to 9000 others sought treatment since the toxic wastes were dumped on open-air sites around Abidjan.

#### More factual information::

##### In English:

The Independent: <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/article1640485.ece>

Spiegel On Line: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0.1518.437842.00.html>

##### En français :

Le Monde: <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0.1-0@2-3212.36-812351@51-627396.0.html>

Le Figaro:

[http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/20060918.WWW00000469\\_deux\\_francais\\_interroges\\_dans\\_laaffaire\\_des\\_dechets\\_toxiques.html](http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/20060918.WWW00000469_deux_francais_interroges_dans_laaffaire_des_dechets_toxiques.html)

Libération: <http://www.liberation.fr/actualite/monde/204356.FR.php>

### The context: A legal loophole which allows all kind of abuses

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With tough domestic controls of hazardous wastes disposal in developed countries, there are growing incentives for illegal trafficking of wastes towards developing countries.

Under the Basel Convention, any country exporting hazardous wastes must obtain the prior written permission of the importing country, and a permit detailing the contents and destination of the wastes must accompany the cargo throughout its voyage. In the case of illegal trade, the responsible exporter is obliged to take back the wastes and pay the costs of damages and clean up.

African governments took leadership on the issue of transboundary movements of hazardous waste by adopting a number of Instruments like the Basel Convention, but also others at the regional level, i.e. Bamako Convention. A two-pronged approach is needed. First, there is a need to strengthen Conventions and to close the legal loopholes that allow hazardous wastes to be transferred to developing countries. Also, there is a need for improving developing country's capacities to implement

relevant Instruments and Conventions, so as to enable effective responses to emergencies and protect the health and environment of inhabitants.

**More information on international governance:**

Press release from the Basel Convention Secretariat (in English): <http://www.basel.int/press/pr120906.doc>

## Toxic substances

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The disposed wastes around the city of Abidjan were liquid sludge, containing large quantities of hydrocarbons, contaminated with at least three substances: hydrogen sulphide, mercaptans and caustic soda. Both hydrogen sulphide and mercaptans are toxic chemicals. Hydrogen sulphide is a potent poison of the respiratory system. Mercaptans are highly volatile and very strongly smelling chemicals which cause irritation to the eyes and respiratory system and can cause rapid onset of nausea. If people have been exposed to high levels of hydrogen sulphide and mercaptans in the air as a result of the dumping operation, then symptoms such as nausea and respiratory problems could certainly be expected. Experts have also indicated the presence of organochlorine, which could worsen the effects of the pollution because of their persistence in the environment and food chain.

**More information on toxic substances dumped:**

In English:

Greenpeace: <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/news/ivory-coast-toxic-dumping/toxic-waste-in-abidjan-green>

OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs): <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/KKEE-6TEMPC?OpenDocument>

En français:

Greenpeace France: <http://www.greenpeace.org/france/news/12-septembre-2006-dechets-tox>

OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) <http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?MenuID=11867&Page=2200>

Fraternité matin: <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200609051726.html>

## The reactions

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Fortunately, the catastrophe in Cote d'Ivoire has not gone unnoticed. Many organizations (unions, intergovernmental, non governmental) expressed their strong disappointment, highlighting the fact that this forms part of a greater trend that is bound to continue, especially if measures are not taken to improve the international governance on hazardous wastes.

**For reactions from the trade union movement:**

Union Générale des Travailleurs de Cote d'Ivoire: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/In Focus\\_UGTCI.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/In Focus_UGTCI.pdf)

Confédération Dignité - Cote d'Ivoire (En français): [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/In Focus\\_Dignité.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/In Focus_Dignité.pdf)

Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) (En français): [http://www.cfdt.fr/actualite/editoriaux/edito\\_0030.htm](http://www.cfdt.fr/actualite/editoriaux/edito_0030.htm)

Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) (En français): <http://www.cgt.fr/ei/>

# News & Forthcoming Events

## Country by country profiles on environment-related conventions available

During the African Conference, the Central African group asked Sustainlabour to put together a country by country profile with all environment-related instruments adopted by a country.

We are pleased to inform that these profiles are now available for **all** African countries, accompanied by a short description of each of the instruments concerned.

The profiles are available at:

In English: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpP\\_9c.EN.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpP_9c.EN.pdf)

En français: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpP\\_9c.FR.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpP_9c.FR.pdf)

For other instruments and sustainable development data by country, please visit the country by country profiles webpage:

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles>

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**Meetings & Events**

- **The V<sup>th</sup> Session on the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety:** 25-29 Sept 2006, under the theme "Chemical Safety for Sustainable Development". A TU delegation organized a side event on the 25th, « Asbestos, A global threat ». Bro. Bjorn Eriksson (Lo-Norway) and Bro. Yahya Msangi (TPAWU-Tanzania) lead the trade union delegation.
- **OECD Environmental Policy Committee (EPOC) – Poland 26-27 October, 2006** Delegations of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) have participated in recent meetings dealing with OECD partnerships and for integrating sustainable development (news of the outcomes will follow). Also, the results of a OECD business-trade union meeting held last March about workplace implementation of environment protection measures will soon be released and reported on. A TUAC delegation at the EPOC meeting in Poland will recommend for governments to follow up on worker-relevant issues and that these be also taken up by the OECD.
- **UNEP Consultative Meeting on Business and Industry - Paris from 26 – 27 October, 2006** A trade union delegation will engage with representatives of business associations on how to report on and implement sustainable development principles at the industry level. The meeting will also follow up on UNEP industry-related report cards prepared for a most recent CSD meeting, to which TUAC provided a report card of its own: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO\\_4uu.EN.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4uu.EN.pdf).
- **International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU) – 30 October – 3 November, 2006.** This will be a founding Congress for the new ICTU where, on 2nd November, a special event will be organised with leaders of the new organisation and representatives of the WHO, UNEP, ILO and Sustainlabour to set in motion a sustainable development and environment agenda for the next decade.

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**ICFTU Calls for trade union nominations & input**

- **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – Kenya 6-17 November, 2006** Separate calls for nominations have been issued. For information please contact ICFTU Lucien Royer: [royer@tuac.org](mailto:royer@tuac.org)
- **UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum – Kenya, 5-9 February, 2007:** More information will follow.
- **UN Commission on Sustainable Development - 30 April - 12 May, 2007 in New York City.** Call for trade union nominations for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). For information please contact ICFTU Lucien Royer: [royer@tuac.org](mailto:royer@tuac.org)
- **28 April.** Trade unions are invited to provide feedback on suggested themes for the ICD. Three themes proposed so far are Occupational and environmental cancers, Enforcement of occupational health & safety, and Health and Safety of Migrant Workers. For information, contact [royer@tuac.org](mailto:royer@tuac.org)

Sustainlabour will be pleased to receive information on environmentally related activities from your union. Do not hesitate to send it to [arosemberg@sustainlabour.org](mailto:arosemberg@sustainlabour.org)

If you find difficulties in accessing any of the proposed documents, please contact us. We will find together the best way to overcome this problem (sending attachments, hard copies, etc)

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