

**Report of
Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas (HEMA) Information Session**

*Trinidad Hilton & Conference Centre
Port-of-Spain, Trinidad*

**June 2, 2004
9:00 am – 12:30 pm**

Introduction

The current Chairs and Caribbean representatives of the Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas (HEMA) Working Group (reconstituted from the HEMA Task Force), convened an information session about the HEMA initiative on Wednesday, June 2, 2004 from 9:00am – 12:30pm at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel, Port-of-Spain, during the Second Caribbean Environmental Forum (CEF-2). Logistics for the meeting (& funding for certain participants) were arranged by the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute.

The purpose of this information session was to:

- Build awareness of this major health and environment initiative in the Americas;
- Present Caribbean-specific project initiatives that had been identified by the HEMA Task Force as priority activities;
- Identify linkages between current and future activities of relevant international / regional organizations and HEMA goals; and
- Explore possible sources of financial and technical support for priority activities.

Background

The origin of the HEMA Task Force goes back to the 2001 Quebec City 3rd Summit of the Americas. At this Summit, hemispheric leaders recognized the link between environment and human health and requested Health and Environment Ministers in the region to meet with a view to identifying priority areas for renewed emphasis and cooperative initiatives. The following March, in 2002, the first meeting of Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas (HEMA) took place in Ottawa, Canada. At this meeting, Ministers agreed to establish a Task Force to maintain momentum in the realization of the goals articulated by Ministers and to make proposals on a follow-up process. Ministers also agreed to meet every four years prior to the Summits of the Americas. As such, the next HEMA ministerial-level meeting is planned for 2005, which is set to occur before the 4th Summit of the Americas meeting in Argentina.

The HEMA Task Force is comprised of two senior health and environment officials from each of the five sub-regions of the Americas (Southern Cone, Andean Region, Central America, the Caribbean and North America), along with two representatives from Argentina (the future host of the next Summit of the Americas), and the two Canadian co-chairs. The United Nations Environment Program's Regional Office in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNEP/ROLAC), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Organization of American States (OAS) support the HEMA process and the work of the Task Force (now designated as a Working Group).

Since the First Ministerial-level meeting in 2002, the Task Force has been working to advance the integration of health and environment at the national, sub-regional and hemispheric levels. In

addition to conducting an inventory of health and environment initiatives underway in the Americas, the Task Force has identified fifteen projects that will assist in the achievement of the goals articulated by Ministers in 2002. Some Caribbean-specific projects have also been developed. The HEMA initiative was most recently endorsed by Leaders in the Americas at the Special Summit of the Americas, held in Monterrey, Mexico in January 2004. There, in the Declaration of Nuevo León, leaders stated:

" We believe that ensuring environmental health for our people is an investment for long-term well-being and prosperity. We are encouraged by the new alliance between our Ministers of Health and Environment in the Americas and we instruct them to develop a cooperation agenda to prevent and minimize the negative impacts to the environment and human health. "

The Meeting

The Information Session was Chaired jointly by Barry Wint, Chief Medical Officer, Jamaica (in his capacity as one of the Caribbean representatives on the HEMA Working Group) & Ray Edwards, Director General, Health Canada (in his capacity as Co-Chair of the HEMA Working Group). A List of Participants and Agenda are attached to the Report.

Brief remarks to welcome all participants were made by Vincent Sweeney, in his capacity as organizer of the meeting and as one of the Caribbean representatives on the HEMA Working Group. He noted the presence of the Minister of Health & Environment from Grenada, Honourable Anne David-Antoine, and particularly thanked her for taking the time to bring high level recognition to the meeting. He also noted that, notwithstanding her recent assumption of the Health & Environment portfolio, she was aware of the HEMA initiative and suggested that her presence indicated her interest in its future. Mr. Sweeney also took the opportunity to introduce all participants.

Minister David-Antoine, in response, highlighted some relevant activities in which her country had become engaged. These included a new waste management strategy for the country. Minister Antoine also spoke to the timeliness of the meeting and its importance to the region.

Ray Edwards presented a condensed "Introduction to HEMA", outlining the origin, purpose, process, and how priorities had been identified thus far for the hemisphere. He also sought to place HEMA within the Caribbean context and identified next steps, leading to the Summit of the Americas in Argentina. A copy of the slides is attached.

Following the presentation on HEMA, remarks were made by the various agencies represented, starting with the three main supporting institutions, UNEP, PAHO and the OAS. Ricardo Sanchez-Sosa, Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America & the Caribbean (ROLAC), highlighted a number of areas of work of ROLAC which were contributing to the HEMA initiative. These included:

- GEO-Health methodology being elaborated, with use of pilot projects and involving all sub-regions. This will lead to a State of the Environment & Health report, including responses required and recommendations
- Development of a Directory of Environmentally Sound Technologies (with CEHI) for Solid, Liquid, and Hazardous Waste in Caribbean SIDS. This would be followed-up with the development of an integrated waste management programme, using a small island (which was yet to be identified)

- The Global Programme of Action for Land-based sources of Marine Pollution, in collaboration with UNEP – CAR/RCU and the White Water 2 Blue Water (WW2BW) initiative
- The Pollutant Release & Transfer Registry, in Mexico, and with support from Canada

The representative from UNEP CAR/RCU (Jamaica) also informed the meeting of the relevance of many of the Demonstration Projects to be funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the *Integrating Watershed & Coastal Area Management (IWCAM)*. CAR/RCU noted that these addressed the HEMA Agenda and confirmed their interest in collaboration.

Dr. Avril Siung-Chang, on behalf of Luis Galvao, PAHO/SDE, confirmed that PAHO was very supportive of the HEMA initiative and that as an organization they see the inextricable links between health and the environment. In fact, PAHO's programming is consistent with the HEMA initiative, and also with Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration. She noted that PAHO was primarily working at the country-level but also had relevant regional and hemispheric programmes such as the Solid Waste Assessments. A regional solid waste management Report is expected to be presented at a Workshop during the Inter American Congress of Sanitary & Environmental Engineers (AIDIS) in August 2004.

Jan Vermeiren, on behalf of the OAS, noted that up until the last Summit of the Americas in 2001, the OAS had never approached health and the environment jointly, except perhaps through the natural hazards mitigation programme. He acknowledged that the OAS had hosted the Donor Information Session in Washington earlier this year and noted that a document on “benefits to be derived from HEMA Priorities” is to be prepared. He asserted that “environment” alone does not “sell” and linking it to health, trade etc. may strengthen the awareness of the issues and their importance. Finally, he indicated that notwithstanding the primarily political agenda of the OAS, they should be able to facilitate further HEMA work through various Committees. In this regard, a Summit of the Americas follow-up office had been established and might be used to approach donors (e.g. EU and Japan).

The representative of the European Union commended the efforts to bring the various agencies together at CEF-2. He noted that the EU is hamstrung by differing arrangements for the Caribbean and Latin America (such as Lome' and Cotonou) but also that the recent EU/LAC meeting in Guadalahara suggested the need for more coherence between the Latin American and Caribbean programmes. He pointed out some of the various relevant initiatives that the EU was supporting in the Caribbean, which included:

- SIDS Programme of Action
- Global Water Partnership in the Caribbean (through the leadership of the Netherlands), and including Water Governance
- Public Health initiatives, notably for Public Health laboratories in Jamaica and at CAREC
- Disaster Preparedness (e.g. weather radars)
- Clean Manufacturing

He further warned that future projects must be well thought out, concrete, and genuinely environmentally sound if they are to receive support from the EU. In this regard he noted that there was no shortage of related studies but the “substance” was of concern. He also cited that the European Investment Bank had already lent extensively for the water and environment sectors and noted that the Regional Indicative Programme for the Caribbean (for 4-5 years, with a value

of US\$65M) was already “spoken for”. In this regard, CARICOM will need to dislodge existing requests in order to allow for HEMA. His recommendations included to work towards the next Regional Indicative Programme or through bilateral discussions (once they are country priorities) in order to source EU funding, and at the same time focus on small successes in order to move forward.

The representative from CIDA highlighted some CIDA Caribbean initiatives related to HEMA. These included the Adaptation to Climate Change in the Caribbean (ACCC) project which was presenting its results during the CEF-2. Other initiatives included the support for HIV/AIDS which had an environmental/nutritional component, and capacity building, such as the Environmental Action Programme (ENACT) in Jamaica which was an 8-10 year project with a successor planned. He noted that political issues in Canada and Haiti had diverted funds away from environmental issues and that there was a trend within CIDA towards security, drug-trafficking and HIV/AIDS, with environment receiving lower priority. Nevertheless he recommended that the HEMA Working Group contact CIDA to discuss inclusion of health aspects into environmental programmes and suggested that dialogue was needed between CIDA and Federal Ministries in Canada, as well as with CARICOM in order to identify HEMA priorities within the aid portfolio for the region. In response, Ray Edwards confirmed that although CIDA had met with Health Canada, there was little optimism for support being available in the short-term but that longer-term expectations were more realistic. The CIDA representative also informed that after the last Summit of the Americas, a hemispheric “desk” was established by CIDA but that not much on the HEMA Agenda had been addressed thus far.

The representative from UNDP indicated that they had no specific focus on health but concentrated more on environment and development. Their main themes in the OECS were Poverty, Environment and Governance. Specific activities focused on water, land degradation (including water, sanitation & runoff to the marine environment), disaster risk reduction, the GEF-Large Marine Ecosystem project and the IWCAM project.

The representative from the FAO emphasized that they were not donors but only provided catalytic funds, in addition to technical assistance. Some of the key activities of the FAO of relevance related to land degradation assessments, sustainable land management, land resource information systems, water quality, water use efficiency, water policy, integrated pest management, “Green” manure, and food safety (e.g. CODEX Alimentarius).

Next Steps

The meeting was provided with a set of pertinent actions, based on Priority Areas of Focus, prepared by CEHI. These are attached. The proposed actions were consistent with the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on Sustainable Development’s Plan of Implementation, but with a focus on the Caribbean. They deal with: waste management, sanitation, integrated water resources management practices; sound management of chemicals and air quality. These pertinent actions were not considered in detail but were used to inform possible future collaborative efforts among the agencies present.

The agreed next steps were to:

1. Circulate the Washington Donor Information Session Report to all relevant donors/partners (**Action: Health Canada**)
2. Circulate Caribbean Inventory/Matrix of Activities relevant to the HEMA Agenda to all relevant donors/partners and continue dialogue on gaps in Matrix (**Action: CEHI**) UNDP

agreed to seek input through Focal Point meetings (*Action: UNDP*) and UNEP CAR/RCU agreed to seek input from their Intergovernmental meetings of UNEP (*Action: UNEP CAR/RCU*)

3. Identify linkages to other initiatives such as WW2BW and possibly utilize websites etc. to support promotion of HEMA (*Action: ALL*)