

# Symposium

23-24 March 2017

Benchmark independent scientific analysis in major environmental and health crisis –  
Issues, challenges and responses

More information: [www.we2c.com](http://www.we2c.com)

Webster University Geneva  
Route de Collex 15  
1293 Bellevue - Switzerland

## Introductory note

The waste generated on board of the vessel Probo Koala, mixed with residues from chemical operations performed on board, was dumped in the Abidjan urban area in August 2006, causing a major health and environmental crisis. 10 years after the case is still not closed. In the wake of this incident, a number of institutions and organizations both public and private, including UN specialized agencies, conducted scientific analysis of the polluted sites. This story reveals many divergences. Why? Because the actors involved failed to employ a benchmark scientific analysis method acceptable to all in forming their own opinion or judgement. Each stakeholder selected the scientific analysis that best suited its interests.

Another tragedy merits our attention. The cholera outbreak in Haiti that killed thousands in 2010 shed light on scientific controversies and divergence. It led to scientific manipulation and political high-level denial.

The issues raised by the Probo Koala case, the cholera outbreak and may more demonstrate the paramount importance for urgent action to ensure that independent scientific analysis in time of major environmental and public health crisis are carried out in such a way as to ensure the swift and effective resolution of such crisis.

The aim of this symposium is to bring together eminent figures from the world of science, health, law and social sciences to articulate the issue, clarify the challenges and explore the possible responses that will enable benchmark independent scientific analysis to contribute effectively to the swift and effective resolution of major environmental and health crisis.

## Thursday 23 March 2017

09:00 Welcome

### 10:00 Opening Session

**Pr. Oreste Foppiani**, Head of the Department of International Relations – Webster University Geneva

### 10:10 Introductory remarks

**Pierre Portas**, President WE2C, Former deputy Executive Secretary of the Basel Convention

Interpretations of scientific analysis are promoted by many different actors such as politicians, NGOs, social networks or businesses via a multitude of vectors on the Internet. Some of these vectors may shift the subject of discussion according to particular interests, needs or a specific agenda. Subjective interpretation might override scientific facts.

### 10:30 Round table: Feedback of experiences (from the Probo Koala case)

This story reveals many divergences. Why? Because the actors involved failed to employ a benchmark scientific analysis method acceptable to all in forming their own opinion or judgement. Each stakeholder selected the scientific analysis that best suited its interests. Ten years later, it is not possible to identify the benchmark independent scientific analysis that could have been used by all concerned. Nor is it possible to assess the real impact of this incident on the local population. What happened then?

- 20-minute presentations by the speakers

#### Panel

- **Pierre Portas** (moderator)
- **Maria Neira**, Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health – WHO
- **Denis Bard**, Professor epidemiology and risks assessment – EHESP (France)
- **Joost van Rooij**, Toxicologist, industrial hygienist – Caesar Consult (Netherlands)

11:30 Break

11:45 Round table continuation

13:00 Lunch

## 14:00 Session A: Ethical and legal criteria or parameters of benchmark independent scientific analysis

Introductory remarks by the moderator (15 minutes). Two case study are considered. Module 1 will address the issue of the feasibility of independent scientific analysis having in mind the Probo Koala case. Module 2 will address the cholera outbreak in Haiti.

- **Francisco Rubio** (moderator), Adjunct professor at Webster University (Geneva), member of the Steering Committee of Médecins du Monde Switzerland

**Module 1:** The case of the Probo Koala incident raises a fundamental question. Is it possible to initiate and produce a benchmark independent scientific analysis when a major environmental crisis and human health occur? In the age of Internet, can such an analysis be carried out in the presence of a wide variety of actors whose global reach exposes them to media coverage that could well interfere with the making of the scientific analysis and distort its conclusions? What do we need to make it work?

- 20-minute presentations by the speakers
- Discussion

### Panel

- **Karine Favro**, Professor in public law – Université de Haute-Alsace
- **Juliette Kohler**, Policy and legal advisor – United Nations Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Secretariat
- **Patrick Ramaël**, Magistrate, President of chamber – Court of Appeal of Aix en Provence

**Module 2:** Although legal framework and procedures are in place at the national or domestic level to conduct scientific analysis, such framework is lacking at the international level. Scientific analysis carried out abroad could, consequently, be more easily subject to political influence and opportunism or to vested economic interest, which might not be conducive to the rapid and effective resolution of crisis. The 2010 epidemic of cholera in Haiti, causing the death of thousands of people, witness the distortion of scientific work, evidence and facts.

- 30/40-minute presentation
- Discussion

### Speaker

- **Renaud Piarroux**, Professor and head of service, parasitology and mycology – Hôpital de la Timone

16:00 Break

**16:15 Session B: Possibility of benchmark independent scientific analysis in the context of globalization, media coverage and mass communication**

The influence of media globalization must be matched by strategies designed to convey and underpin the accuracy and veracity of the facts. It becomes difficult to trust information conveyed by public or private vectors whose motivation or business models may distort, transform or ignore information because of vested interests. The common good requires the introduction of strategies to challenge communication dominant feature and to promote the accuracy or reality of information. Who could help and how?

- 20-minute presentations by the speakers
- Discussion

*Panel*

- **Venance Konan**, Journalist, Director of Groupe Fraternité Matin (Ivory Coast)
- **Dietram Scheufele**, Professor, life science communication – University of Wisconsin

18:30 Adjournment

**Friday 24 March****09:30 Round table: Initial conditions for independent benchmark scientific analysis**

It is important to clarify the scope of an independent scientific analysis. The way the scientific analysis is being established will determine the entire process. The initial conditions of the analysis are therefore primordial. From these initial conditions, emerge the process of realization of the analysis, its use and reporting of results. Could such initial conditions be explored and identified?

- Each panelist will be asked to provide his or her own appraisal and remarks (10 minutes each)
- Discussion

Panel

- Karine Favro
- Venance Konan
- Renaud Piarroux
- Patrick Ramaël
- Francisco Rubio
- Dietram Scheufele

10:30 Break

10:45 Round table continuation

**12:30 Responses and the search for solutions**

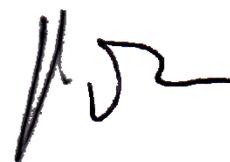
- Remarks by Pierre Portas followed by an exchange of views, suggestions and any proposal for follow up

**13:30 Closing of the meeting**

**Pr. Oreste Foppiani**



**Webster University (Geneva)**  
Oreste Foppiani  
*Head of the Department of Int'l Relations*



**WE 2C**  
Pierre Portas  
*President*