

## Mercury still rising! World governments fail to agree on global regulations

**(Nairobi, - 9 February 2007)** Anti-mercury advocates conditionally welcomed the results of the 24<sup>th</sup> United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council meeting in Nairobi on 5-9 February. “Environment Ministers failed to set global demand reduction goals and export bans to reduce impacts of mercury around the world,” said Michael Bender, from the Zero Mercury coalition. “The steps they agreed on are inadequate to address the urgency of the global mercury crisis.”

The amount of mercury used and released in the world is increasing. Since UNEP’s Global Mercury Assessment report was released in 2002, overall reductions in mercury use worldwide have not taken place.<sup>i</sup> Mercury use has gone down in industrialised nations, but developing countries have become increasingly reliant on this toxic metal. Air releases have also increased over the past 15 years (see charts below<sup>ii</sup>).

“Once again, a few countries led by US and India delayed real progress, whereas the EU, the African Region, Japan, Brazil, the Philippines, Norway and Switzerland were ready to make a political decision on a legally binding instrument as the way forward,” said Elena Lymberidi from the European Environmental Bureau. “Instead, we have a process to consider options including enhanced voluntary measures, rather than focusing only on a legally binding framework, in the next Governing Council in 2009. We must finally move beyond promising words into real action.”

“These are baby steps, while giant steps are needed!” said Zuleica Nycz, ACPO, Brazil, “Not having a legally binding instrument means that developing countries will not have the necessary incentive to develop national programmes or policies to protect their people from toxic mercury.”

There were some small positive developments:

- Priorities were identified to reduce risks from emissions, demand, and supply of mercury, as well as from contaminated sites.
- There was a call to fill data gaps on supply and demand
- An air emissions report will be developed
- An ad hoc open ended working group will be formed to further discuss priorities and options for reducing supply, demand and emissions. The group will report back to the 25<sup>th</sup> Governing Council.

The NGOs now call on governments to engage in good faith in this newly agreed process to pave the way towards a legally-binding agreement, with the necessary financial assistance and explicit reduction goals.

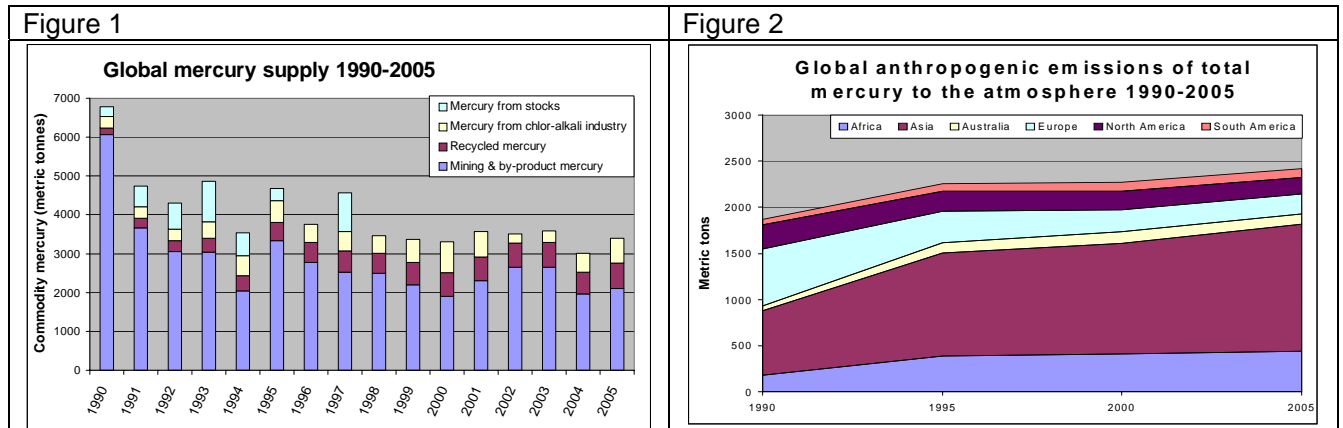
### Notes to editors:-

Mercury is a potent nerve poison and affects the brain and central nervous system. Workers exposed to mercury, eg small-scale gold miners, often suffer from tremors, memory loss and other neurological damage. Those most at risk from methylmercury-contaminated food are babies and small children. The brains of babies in the uterus are the most vulnerable. The greatest risk is to young women, before or during pregnancy, eating fish containing high levels of methylmercury (eg shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and some types of tuna) or miners being exposed during gold mining.

In 2002, UNEP’s own Global Mercury Assessment concluded that: “Despite data gaps, sufficient understanding has been developed of mercury (including knowledge of its fate and transport, health and environmental impacts, and the role of human activity), based on extensive research over half a century, that international actions to address the global mercury problem should not be delayed.” (GMA, key findings, #35, see: <http://www.chem.unep.ch/Mercury/Report/Key-findings.htm>).

For more information please see:

- the [special report in preparation of the 24 UNEP GC](#):  
“NGO Strategy for Addressing the “Global Mercury Crisis” at the February 2007 UNEP Governing Council Meeting  
[http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP\\_developments/070130NGOs\\_addressing\\_Global\\_Mercury\\_Crisis\\_for\\_2007\\_UNEP\\_GC.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/070130NGOs_addressing_Global_Mercury_Crisis_for_2007_UNEP_GC.pdf)
- The [NGOs submission to UNEP](#) “NGOs Proposal for a Global Mercury Strategy at the 2007 UNEP Governing Council Meeting” 24 January 2007,  
[http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP\\_developments/NGO%20UNEP%20GC%20Proposal%20-%202007REV.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/NGO%20UNEP%20GC%20Proposal%20-%202007REV.pdf)
- the Report of the “Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury” campaign on [health implications of mercury contamination](#), <http://www.env-health.org/r/145>



#### Footnotes:-

<sup>i</sup> Both available in a single document at <http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/Trade-information.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Figure 1 is derived from the recently published UNEP mercury trade report prepared for the 5-9 February 2007 Governing Council meeting, and indicates global mercury use has changed little since 1994 as the developed world exports its excess mercury and outdated technologies to the developing world. Figure 2 is based on the work of Jozef Pacyna and his colleagues, and illustrates that atmospheric mercury releases have actually increased, from sources such as coal combustion, smelting of metal ores (particularly zinc and copper), chlor-alkali plants, and waste handling/disposal of products containing mercury.

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