



Environmental NGOs and Indigenous Nations Urge Immediate Action to Reduce Global Mercury Pollution at Upcoming UNEP Meeting

(Brussels/Nairobi 18/2/2005) Environmental NGOs and indigenous nation representatives¹ are urging Governments to take action against global mercury pollution by taking immediate steps to reduce mercury contamination, through use and emission reduction, while developing an international binding agreement on mercury. The above mentioned groups will be participating at the UNEP Governing Council (GC) on 21-25 February 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya, where mercury is on the agenda. Some of them will also participate at the Global Civil Society Forum, 19-20 February, Nairobi, which forms the main entry point for Civil Society to participate at the governance level. Its agenda mirrors the GC's agenda.

“We urge the UNEP Governing Council to follow the lead of the EU Mercury strategy, adopted in January 2005,” said Elena Lymberidi, “Zero Mercury Campaign” Project Co-ordinator, EEB. “The European Commission’s advocacy of a global phase-out of mercury primary production, and encouraging countries to stop surpluses re-entering the market, by presenting an initiative similar to the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances, should become the central discussion at the UNEP Governing Council meeting.”

The environmental NGOs and indigenous nation representatives propose and urge support from the State members participating at the UNEP Governing Council for the following concrete measures:

- Improve the tracking of global mercury trade to facilitate transparency and coordinated global action.
- Adopt global goals of a 50% reduction in mercury consumption by 2010 and an 80% reduction by 2015, versus 2000 levels.²
- Prevent the introduction of surplus mercury into the global marketplace by immediately terminating subsidies to primary mercury mines, phasing-out primary mercury production by

¹ Environmental NGOs include:

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), www.nrdc.org, is a private, U.S. not-for-profit environmental organization that uses science, law, and the support of more 500,000 members nationwide to protect the planet’s wildlife and wild places, and to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all living things.,

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB), www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens’ organisations based in all EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. The aim of the EEB is to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable the citizens of Europe to play their part in achieving that goal.

The Ban Mercury Working Group, www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/, is an international coalition of 27 public interest non-governmental organisations from around the world formed initially in 2002 by 2 US based NGOs, the Basel Action Network (www.ban.org) and the Mercury Policy Project (www.Mercurypolicy.org), working to end pollution from the toxic metal -- Mercury.

Greenpeace, www.greenpeace.org

And with the support of NGOs from India (Toxics Link), China (Global Village of Beijing), Brazil (Association for Combats against the POPS), South Africa (groundWork-Friends of the Earth South Africa) and traditional indigenous nations in the U.S. and Alaska (International Indian Treaty Council)

² See environmental NGO comments to UNEP at: http://www.mercurypolicy.org/new/documents/UNEP_Comments_070104.pdf

2010; and storing excess mercury from decommissioned mercury chlor-alkali plants and potentially other sources.

- End the manufacture and trade of mercury-containing soaps and cosmetics, and educate health professionals and populations at risk about the adverse human health effects attributable to use of these products.
- Promote the phase-out of mercury use in batteries, paints, switches, relays, measuring devices, and potentially other products and processes where non-mercury alternatives exist or become available over the next ten years by targeting key countries or regions where production or consumption is substantial, encouraging inventory preparation in such countries or regions, and sharing information on alternative technologies, and relevant laws and standards.
- Develop and implement a global strategy to promote the use of non-mercury and lower mercury use technologies in small-scale gold mining.
- Control the largest global source of mercury emissions by employing best available technology on the larger coal-fired power plants by 2012 and all coal-fired power plants by 2017.
- Encourage voluntary contributions sufficient to support the above mentioned actions, the creation of a mercury unit within UNEP, and ensure the active participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans, ecosystems and wildlife. High doses can be fatal to humans, but even relatively low doses have serious adverse effects on the central nervous, cardiovascular, immune and reproductive systems. Mercury has no respect for national or regional boundaries as it travels great distances through the atmosphere. It has contaminated global food supplies at levels which pose a significant risk to human health, according to medical and public health professionals around the world.

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