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PRESS RELEASE

Environment Council makes positive but cautious steps towards ending mercury pollution at EU and global level!

[Brussels 24/06/2005] Environment and health groups¹ welcomed the conclusions of the Council of the EU Environment Ministers on the Community Strategy on Mercury as a courageous and positive step forward towards reducing global mercury pollution.

“The EU Governments gave a green light to the Commission to take actions as proposed in the Community strategy concerning mercury, including an EU mercury export ban by 2011 at the latest”, said Elena Lymberidi, Zero Mercury Campaign Project Coordinator at the EEB, *“However, there are no good reasons to allow exports until that date ;a ban by 2008 is feasible!”*

Consistent with the export ban, the Council confirmed the need for parallel action to ensure the safe storage of mercury including that from decommissioned chlor-alkali production facilities, sending a global message stressing the need to break the mercury cycle by stopping any surpluses of mercury from re-entering the market.

“This agreement banning mercury exports demonstrates strong EU leadership on global mercury issues. It also sets the stage for international negotiations on mercury, where the possibility of a legally binding instrument and other global mercury strategies will be discussed.” said Michael Bender, Ban Mercury Working Group.

With respect to strategic actions at international level, the NGOs commend the Council for recognising that a viable EU mercury strategy is most effective within a global strategic framework. In this regard, the Council has stressed the need for the EU to continue and strengthen its international efforts to reduce mercury emissions and exposure on a global scale with a view to reaching a global phase-out of primary production, preventing surpluses re-entering the market, as well as to phase out mercury use and trade, taking into account the availability of alternatives. Underlining the need for EU support to developing countries, or countries with economies in transition, in promoting actions to reduce mercury emissions from coal combustion, among others, is also of great importance.

The NGOs further welcome the fact that the Governments brought new issues to the table, underlining that:

- the use of mercury in vaccines must be addressed;
- viable techniques for further reducing mercury emissions from fuel combustion and replacing mercury in gold mining should be developed;
- it is necessary to consider the social problems arising from the closure of mercury mines – rehabilitation of contaminated sites and community assistance.

The Council omitted however, giving its opinion on the need to better control dental amalgam waste and emissions from crematoria, whereas on all other issues the conclusions simply supported the Commission's original intentions in the proposed strategy, without giving a clear direction, a timeframe and the scope for concrete action. *“On several issues there was and still is space for stronger measures, such as on protection against exposure , broadening the scope of marketing restrictions on the use of mercury in certain measuring and control equipment, and on thermostats”* said Lisette van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor for EEN / Health Care Without Harm / International Chemical Secretariat.

As a further step, the Environmental and Health NGOs now call upon the Environmental Ministers to stay vigilant and to rapidly implement all relevant actions stemming from the EU Strategy on mercury.

For more information

Elena Lymberidi, EEB, www.eeb.org, mercury@eeb.org, T: +32 2 289 1301

Genon K. Jensen, EPHA Environment Network (EEN), www.env-health.org, genon@env-health.org, T: +32 2 2333875;

Lisette van Vliet, EEN / Health Care Without Harm /International Chemical Secretariat, www.env-health.org, www.noharm.org, www.chemsec.org, lisette@env-health.org, T: +32 2 2333877

Kevin Brigden, Greenpeace, www.greenpeace.org, kbrigden@diala.greenpeace.org, T: +44-1392-263782

Michael Bender, Ban Mercury Working Group, www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/ Mercurypolicy@aol.com, T: +1 802 2239000

Linda Greer, NRDC, www.nrdc.org, lgreer@nrdc.org, tel: +1 202 2896868

ⁱ Environmental and Health NGOS include

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.

European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN), <http://www.env-health.org/> is an international non-governmental organisation advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being. Member groups and organisations represent health, environment, women, health professionals and others. The group has a diverse membership, 29 members with 5 international organisations, 10 European networks and 14 national/local organisations, including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors and nurses, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), www.noharm.org, is an international coalition of hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, and environmental and environmental health organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment.

Greenpeace, www.greenpeace.org, is an international independent, campaigning organisation that uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and force solutions for a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace's goal is to ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity

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.

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)