



Press Release

“EU champions a global treaty on mercury”

Brussels (5 December 2008). Environment and health public interest organisationsⁱ warmly welcomed yesterday's conclusions of the Council of EU Environment Ministers addressing the global mercury challenges in preparation for the UNEP Governing Council in February 2009, in Nairobi.

The EU Council concluded that a comprehensive global multilateral environmental agreement is needed to phase out the use and emissions of mercury and to allow for possible inclusion of additional substances of global concern in the future.

“It is high time that a global legal framework is adopted to reduce mercury supply, use and emissions from all sources of concern, said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Coordinator ‘Zero Mercury Campaign’ at the European Environmental Bureau. “We cannot afford to lose momentum. The EU should show global leadership and pursue the creation of an International Negotiating Committee (INC) to start work immediately on a mercury treaty. ”

Mercury has been on the agenda of UNEP since 2001. Progress has taken place since then, both at political level and on the ground with several projects addressing the mercury crisis. At the October 2008 meeting in Nairobi (the Ad Hoc Open Ended Working Group on Mercury), government representatives took an important step forward by generally agreeing to a comprehensive set of elements to be included in a global framework. The elements include, among others, actions to reduce mercury supply, its use in products and processes, and atmospheric mercury emissions. In addition, an overwhelming majority of countries supported a new legally-binding instrument on mercury.

The Civil Society of the European Region including NGOs, trade unions, youth, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, and local governments, in a common statementⁱⁱ, are also calling for a thorough legally-binding global instrument on mercury.

The public interest organisations now urge the EU and other like-minded countries to ensure that such conclusions become reality in February next year, by continuing dialogue among key governments and stakeholders, and work actively towards resolving remaining differences.

Editor's notes

See also

- <http://www.zeromercury.org/press/081205NGOS-PR-CouncilConclMercury-UNEP-GC25final.pdf>
- EEB letter sent to Environment Council [18/11/2008] - <http://www.eeb.org/activities/General/E-version-Environment-Council-5December2008-181108.pdf>
- ZMWG comments to the UNEP draft decision on mercury [27/11/2008] http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/081127_ZMWG_comments_on_UNEP_draft_decision_GC25_Mercury-final.pdf

Mercury is a global pollutant that travels long distances. Its most toxic form – methylmercury - accumulates in large predatory fish and is taken up in our bodies through eating fish, with the worst impacts on babies in utero and small children. For more information, see Zero Mercury Campaign, www.zeromercury.org and “Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury” <http://www.env-health.org/r/145>

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ⁱ The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. 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 **Zero Mercury Working group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 75 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the EEB and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The aim of the group is to reach "Zero' emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally."

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), <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 of 41 member groups (6 international organisations, 11 European networks and 24 national/local organizations) including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, 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, environmental and religious 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.

ⁱⁱ http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/BI%20RCM_Europe_Regional_Statement.pdf