



PRESS RELEASE

World Governments Support Breakthrough Agreement on Mercury

[Nairobi, Kenya 20 February 2009]– Defying expectations, world environmental ministers agreed today to begin negotiating a treaty to control global mercury pollution. The decision represents the consensus of the more than 140 countries gathered here for the 25th UNEP¹ Governing Council meeting.

“This consensus is a huge breakthrough,” said Elena Lymberidi – Settimo of the European Environmental Bureau and the Zero Mercury Working Group. “The treaty will ensure that the EU and other countries of the world make a serious commitment to reduce global mercury emissions, supply and demand.”

The treaty will include actions to reduce mercury supply, its use in products and processes, and atmospheric mercury emissions, which will ultimately reduce human exposure to mercury globally. The preparations for negotiations on the global treaty will start later this year, with discussions beginning in earnest in 2010 with a view to wrapping up by 2013.

‘Developing a treaty is a critical first step towards solving the global mercury crisis’, said Michael Bender of the Zero Mercury Working Group, ‘

The agreement was made possible by a dramatic shift in the U.S. position by the Obama administration, which now supports the creation of a legally binding agreement. The Bush administration had stubbornly opposed any legally binding measures.

Richard Gutierrez of the Philippine NGO Ban Toxics noted, “We are optimistic that the global community is now well on its way towards establishing a treaty to control mercury pollution and effectively safeguard the fish we eat from this poison.” A study released by the Zero Mercury Working Group this month highlighted the dangers from eating mercury-laden fish, now much more widespread than previously thought.

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that makes its way up the food chain into humans, and puts developing foetuses and young children at risk.

For further information:-

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¹ United Nations Environment Programme

Editor's notes:-

For a digital version of this press release go to

http://www.eeb.org/press/2009/090220UNEP_NGO_PR_Mercury_Decision-final.pdf

**Final draft text: UNEP Governing Council Decision 25/X
Chemicals management including mercury**

http://www.eeb.org/activities/chemicals/Chemicals_management_including_mercury-COWdraft190209.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 the Zero Mercury Campaign's website, www.zeromercury.org, and

See also at www.zeromercury.org

PR: [Mercury in Fish is a Global Health Concern](#)
[10 February 2009]

[ZMWG Report: Mercury in Fish, a global Health Hazard](#)
[10 February 2009]
Executive summary in [EN](#), [FR](#), [ES](#), [PT](#), [CHI](#)

[PR:New Study Raises Concern over Mercury Pollution from Burning Products](#)
[4 February 2009]

[ZMWG Report: MERCURY RISING, Reducing global emissions from burning mercury-products](#)
[4 February 2009]

<http://www.zeromercury.org/press/081205NGOS-PR-CouncilConclMercury-UNEP-GC25final.pdf>

EEB letter to Environment Council [18/11/2008]
<http://www.eeb.org/activities/General/Eversion-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

European Environmental Bureau, (EEB), www.eeb.org, is a federation of over 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in all EU Member States as well as in 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 **Zero Mercury Working Group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of over 75 public-interest non-governmental organisations worldwide formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The group's aim 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."