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[Stockholm, Sweden, 7th June 2010] As delegates from more than 100 countries today begin negotiating a treaty to control global mercury pollution, a coalition of environmental NGOs and indigenous nation representatives from around the world are calling on them to curb the rising tide of mercury pollution worldwide. Mercury has contaminated global food supplies at levels, which pose a significant risk to human health, and exposure to methylmercury places the developing fetus and young children most at risk.

"Toxic heavy metal exposures, especially mercury are all around us, and continue to rise. No matter if you are rich or poor or from one country or another, mercury knows no boundaries. Sweden is the first country in the world with a principal ban of mercury in products. Now we want the other countries to follow our lead" says Mikael Karlsson, President of SSNC.

"Developing a strong treaty is a critical first step towards solving the global mercury crisis," said Michael Bender, co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group.

Mercury is toxic heavy metal that is never broken down in the environment, and instead, it accumulates in our air, water, and food supply, becoming more concentrated as it moves up the food chain and poisons people the world over. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, mercury travels around the world and deposits both near and far from the sources where it is released. Indeed, many small countries with no significant sources of pollution are exposed to mercury pollution arising from great distances elsewhere.

Indigenous peoples and island communities, dependent on fish as a vital protein source, are particularly at risk.

"Like many other island cultures, we in the South Pacific cannot stop the increasing mercury contamination of our traditional foods, like the fish we are so dependent on," said Imogen Ingram, Island Sustainability Alliance, Cook Island and member of IPEN. "With over 60% of the world population depending heavily on protein from fish, the international community must act urgently."

"First and foremost, we need a treaty that reduces mercury levels in the environment to the point where people can safely eat fish and other food sources for generations to come," said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group

The environmental movement wants the mercury treaty to reduce the global availability of mercury through

- the phase out of mercury mining, restrictions to its supply and trade,
- safe terminal storage of mercury already in circulation.
- phase out the use of mercury in products and processes,
- address the growing mercury emissions from the combustion of coal.
- all countries will need to take action and assistance to developing countries through awareness raising, capacity building, and the provision of financial and technical resources will be essential.

Without urgent coordinated action by the international community, the levels of toxic fish and cases of mercury contamination among communities could increase, further harming vulnerable populations in the future." said Professor Jamidu Katima, IPEN Co-Chair based in Tanzania

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i Environmental and indigenous peoples NGOs include :

The **Swedish Society for Nature Conservation**,(SSNC) is a non-profit environmental member-based organization with 181,000 members. SSNC have the power to make changes by spreading knowledge, mapping environmental threats, creates solutions, and influences politicians and governments both nationally and internationally. SSNC is also the owner of the world's most advanced Eco-label: Good Environmental Choice.

The **Zero-Hg Working Group (ZMWG)**, www.zeromercury.org , is an international coalition of more than 80 public interest environmental and health non-governmental organizations from over 45 countries from around the world that strives for zero supply, demand, and emissions of mercury from all anthropogenic sources, with the goal of reducing mercury in the global environment to a minimum.

International POPs Eliminations Network (IPEN), www.ipen.org , is a global network of over 700 health and environmental organizations in more than 100 countries working together for a Toxics-Free Future.