

PRESS RELEASE

□ CLOCK TICKING: TIME RUNNING OUT TO ADDRESS THE GLOBAL MERCURY CRISIS

[2nd July 2012]; Punta del Este, Uruguay -- Governments meeting at the 4th of only 5 negotiations are running out of time to meaningfully address key issues before finalizing a legally binding treaty on mercury, say NGOs. Most major policy issues remain unresolved and the Zero Mercury Working Group, a global coalition of NGOs, expressed concern over the lack of progress at such a late stage.

“There has been no substantial progress with respect to the biggest sources of mercury pollution, emissions to air, nor in reconciling the different positions of governments,” said Michael Bender, ZMWG co-coordinator “This issue is critical to diffuse the ticking mercury time bomb.”

Issues as straightforward as the phase out of mercury in products and processes and supply

and trade did not progress any better.

“Time is running out on deciding which products to phase out and by when,” explained Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, co-coordinator of ZMWG. “Nor has any substantive progress been made on banning primary mining or ending the toxic trade in mercury.”

Barely visible in the draft treaty are core requirements for the environmentally sound management of elemental mercury and mercury waste, which are contingent on future decisions. At the same time, the issue of contaminated sites has only been minimally addressed and no support given to the polluter pays principle.

One small light in the dark tunnel of the negotiation was a resolution on reducing mercury use in small scale gold mining through developing national action plans. Yet even this small advance was overshadowed by the loophole on determining who are “significant” users of mercury. Unless this is defined, large users may walk away from their responsibility.

Regrettably, countries from the north are united in opposing a separate health article in the treaty to help countries assess and reduce exposure to mercury. This is something that China, the Latin American and African regions have all called for.

“This is an example of north – south double standard over whether health issues will be addressed equitably, even though the whole reason for negotiation is to protect human health,” stated Rico Euripidou from Groundwork, South Africa, a member of the ZMWG. “Mercury is a basic human rights issue, as it affects millions of people. Health strategies to address reducing exposure to mercury must be included in this treaty.”

“One last round of negotiation is left to get things right,” said Richard Gutierrez, director of Ban Toxics!, a member of the ZMWG. “Countries need to now get out of their positions and engage in meaningful compromises for our world and for future generations’.

Notes to the editors

Mercury, a potent neurotoxin, contaminates fish supplies around the world, and poses particular risks to women and young children. The anticipated Mercury Convention, projected to be finalized in January 2013 at the fifth negotiation in Geneva, is expected to address mercury pollution globally.

[ZERO MERCURY WORKING GROUP PRELIMINARY VIEWS ON INC 4 DRAFT TREATY](#)

[TEXT MAY 2012 - English version](#)

[PRELIMINARY DRAFT ZERO MERCURY WORKING GROUP RESPONSE TO CO-CHAIRS PROPOSED APPROACH TO EMISSIONS AND RELEASES May 2012](#)

[Zero Mercury Working Group Initial Comments on Products/Processes Discussion Paper June 2012](#)

[ZMWG Views on Mercury Use in Dental Amalgam, June 2012](#)

[ZMWG INC 4 BRIEFING PAPER SERIES Phasing out Mercury Use in Button Cell Batteries \(](#)

Other language versions available at www.zeromercury.org

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