



[28 January 2011, Chiba, Japan] Delegates from more than 120 countries met this week to continue constructing a legally-binding global mercury treaty, expected to be signed in Minamata, Japan in 2013. While many important issues were discussed, public interest NGOs urged delegates to be more ambitious when setting the mercury treaty's scope and goals. "Governments need to step up and take more leadership in this debate", stated Linda E. Greer, Ph.D., of the Natural Resources Defense Council and Zero Mercury Working Group. "Mercury is a problem within our grasp to solve, but it will take political will and focus to resolve it."

The Minamata tragedy provided a centerpiece and inspiration for discussion; Minamata victim Shinobu Sakamoto testified in the plenary session and presented a statement from 13 Minamata victims and supporter groups directly to the Vice Minister of the Japanese Ministry of Environment. They urged delegates to develop a strong treaty that would prevent future Minamata catastrophes, and to justly address the continuing effects of the Minamata disaster, still unresolved after over 50 years.

The Japanese government also received criticism from NGOs for its continued export of tons of toxic mercury, especially to developing countries. "Japan knows more than any country in the world the terrible cost to life and the environment that mercury causes because of Minamata," stated Richard Gutierrez, of Ban Toxics from the Philippines. "Only a ban of Japanese mercury export can begin to give honor to Minamata's legacy."

Measures to reduce the global supply of commodity mercury, to reduce mercury use in industry and to restrict trade were debated. Delegates also discussed requirements to control mercury emissions from major sources such as coal fired power plants and metal smelters and to address existing contaminated sites. Although delegates generally agreed that the proposed basic

framework for the reductions of mercury pollution was adequate, many substantive issues remain to be resolved to ensure that health and environmental resources are protected worldwide.

The Zero Mercury Working Group and other non-governmental organizations spoke out on many occasions during the session, with recommendations for strengthening provisions, including: expanding the list of mercury-based products and processes to be regulated under the treaty, providing explicit time lines for phase outs, and strengthening provisions that address artisanal and small-scale gold mining, the largest single use of mercury in the world, among many others.

Several manufacturing processes using mercury completely escaped notice in the working draft, such as polyurethanes and sodium methylate. "Since there are well-developed, high-volume non-mercury alternatives available to produce these materials, the mercury-based processes should be phased out," said Rachel Kamande of the European Environmental Bureau and the Zero Mercury Working Group.

Notes for the editor

Mercury, a potent neurotoxin, contaminates fish supplies around the world, and poses particular risks to women and young children. The anticipated mercury treaty will address mercury pollution globally.

ZMWG comments on the Elements paper ZMWG summary of changes to the elements paper January 2011

ZMWG comments on the UNEP INC 2 Draft elements paper, FR, ES(only cover and track changes) January 2011

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The Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) is an international coalition of more than 93 public interest environmental and health non-governmental organizations from 45 countries from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project. ZMWG 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. Our mission is to advocate and support the adoption and implementation of a legally binding instrument which contains mandatory obligations to eliminate where feasible, and otherwise minimize, the global supply and trade of mercury, the global demand for mercury, anthropogenic releases of mercury to the environment, and human and wildlife exposure to mercury. (www.zeromercury.org)

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB), www.eeb.org , is a federation of over 150 environmental citizens' organisations based in most EU Member States, most candidate and potential candidate countries as well as in a few neighbouring countries. EEB is the environmental voice of European citizens, standing for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. We want the EU to ensure all people a healthy environment and rich biodiversity.