



Open Letter to World Governments & Mercury Treaty Negotiating Committee Delegates and experts;

7th January 2013

Subject: Last chance to develop strong treaty to reduce mercury exposure

Dear Government delegate, Dear Mercury expert,

The Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG)ⁱ, urges you to support the adoption of a strong international agreement on mercury when governments meet next week in Geneva for their fifth and final negotiation (INC5).ⁱⁱ

Earlier last month, the ZMWG presented the most extensive new findingsⁱⁱⁱ to date on global mercury seafood contamination, with health effects occurring below the level considered “safe” just a few years ago – suggesting current health benchmarks should be revised. We highlighted new scientific evidence that for the first time correlates rising mercury levels in the oceans with the growth in pollution and also projects a 50% increase in mercury levels by 2050 in the Pacific Ocean if current pollution trends continue unabated.^{iv}

Since then, new findings have come to light indicating that prenatal exposure to mercury can result in \$18,000 in lost lifetime earning potential for each IQ point lost. For the US, monetary benefits from preventing excess exposure are estimated at about 5 billion dollars and in the EU benefits are estimated at twice as high.^v

The above findings will be presented at a pre-INC 5 “side event” on Saturday 12th January, 2013, in Geneva at the same venue where INC 5 will be taking place.

This and other new evidence clearly demonstrates that the mercury threat has grown substantially since the UN Environment Program (UNEP) global mercury assessment report was completed just after the turn of the century. Since 2001, countries around the world have been discussing options to control mercury pollution and in 2003 the UNEP Governing Council agreed that enough was known to “...warrant immediate action to reduce global mercury pollution.”

Now over a decade has past and the time for bold and corrective action has come.

The solution is *not* for people to stop eating fish since the nutritional benefits are substantial and many small island countries, indigenous people and others depend on fish. While informing consumers about low mercury fish is essential to reduce exposure, it should not be a substitute for the ultimate goal: to reduce mercury contamination and all sources of exposure to the lowest possible levels in the shortest amount of time.

Fortunately, the world community can come to grips with the global mercury crisis. Since 2009 governments have been negotiating an internationally binding agreement to control mercury pollution. The treaty is expected to include actions to reduce among others, mercury supply, trade, its use in products and processes, and atmospheric mercury emissions, which will ultimately reduce human exposure to mercury globally. Yet so far the negotiations have been going slowly.

This is not because alternatives or solutions are absent; the technology is available to manage mercury pollution. We know how to control mercury emissions, and there are mercury-free alternatives for nearly all mercury-containing products and industrial processes. What is missing is the political will to make the necessary commitments to phase out mercury use, and put the needed controls and alternatives in place.

Therefore, as detailed in our comments^{vi} on the final draft treaty text,^{vii} we call on you to work toward a successful outcome next week in Geneva; an ambitious treaty leading to serious emissions reductions and mercury use phase outs for our children and for future generations. The final treaty negotiation session in Geneva is the world's last chance to create a strong program for international action and cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,



Elena Lymberidi-Settimo and Michael T. Bender,

International Co-coordinators
Zero Mercury Working Group

ⁱ The **Zero Mercury Working Group** is an international coalition of over 100 public interest NGOs from more than 50 countries founded in 2005 to achieve 'Zero' emissions, demand and supply of mercury, www.zeromercury.org

ⁱⁱ <http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/MercuryNot/MercuryNegotiations/tabid/3320/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Links to the new reports:

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/FINAL BRI Patterns of Global Seafood 120312.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/FINAL_BRI_Patterns_of_Global_Seafood_120312.pdf);

http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/groth_report_zmwg%20rev.pdf;

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/zmwg_summary_recommendations final.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/zmwg_summary_recommendations_final.pdf)

^{iv} http://toxics.usgs.gov/highlights/pacific_mercury.html

^v ZMWG global webinar, 4 Dec 2012, see: www.zeromercury.org with link to slides; also see:

<http://www.biomedcentral.com>

^{vi} Link to the ZMWG paper commenting on the final draft treaty text ("Chair's text):

http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/zmwg%20preliminary%20views%20on%20inc%205%20draft%20chairs%20treaty%20text-%20november%202012.pdf

^{vii} Link to the Chair's text:

<http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/Mercury/Negotiations/INC5/INC5MeetingDocuments/tabid/3495/language/en-US/Default.aspx>