



Press Release

As new global mercury treaty enters into force, worldwide mercury production skyrockets, note Global NGO Coalition on World Environmental Health Day

Geneva, 26 September 2017- As 156 countries convened for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention, a new UN report shows mercury mining skyrocketing in the last 5 years. Moreover, much of that mercury is used in artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM), the largest source of global mercury pollution.

Currently, countries do not have reliable information about trade in neighboring countries and within their own region. This problem is compounded where borders between countries are “porous,” and a significant portion of trade is informal or illegal. For example, mercury may enter a region through legal trade to one country, but then be traded illegally across borders to neighboring countries.

“Informal trade is difficult to track, and therefore does not appear in the official trade statistics,” said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Manager, Zero Mercury Campaign at the European Environmental Bureau. “With timely reporting, Parties can better understand mercury flows in order to better enforce trade restrictions in the Convention.”

“In recent years there have been a number of shocks to the global market, resulting in a doubling of the price of mercury in the last 12 months alone,” said Michael Bender, Co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group. “In addition, EU and US export bans now in place have resulted in a major shift in the main trading hub to Asia.”

“The emergence over the past five years of new small-scale producers of mercury in Mexico and Indonesia has made a difficult situation worse,” said Satish Sinha, Associate Director at Toxics Link in India. “Between these two countries alone, around 1000 tonnes are produced annually.”

“The main objective of the Minamata Convention is to protect human health and the environment by, in part, simultaneously reducing mercury supply and demand,” said Rico Eurpidou, Environmental Health Campaign Manager at groundWork in South Africa. Without adequate reporting on the global movement of mercury it will be difficult to monitor the overall effectiveness of the Convention, say NGOs.

“Annual reporting is consistent with the requirements of other environmental conventions such as Basel and the Montreal Protocol,” said Leslie Adogame, Executive Director at Sustainable Research and Action for Environmental Development in Nigeria. “Legal trade flows must be understood before informal or illegal trade can be adequately addressed.”

An analysis of publicly available UN COMTRADE data over the period 2013-2016 (see below) reveals that the majority of global mercury flows from commodity trading centres (such as Hong Kong, Singapore and the UAE) to developing country regions (such as Africa and Latin America) where mercury use in ASGM is prolific in response to the largest global gold rush the world has ever seen.

Mercury exports to countries with significant ASGM activities, 2013-16

ASGM importing countries	COMTRADE Reported Mercury Exports (kg)							
	Hong Kong	India	Japan*	Mexico	Singapore	Switzerland	United Arab Emirates	TOTAL
Bolivia	0	35	0	359,743	0			359,778
Brazil	32,679	4	20,525	690	20,011	2,719		76,628
Colombia	98	690	56,924	350,521	35,191	37,779	11,500	492,703
Ghana	0	2,505	0	0	8,246			10,751
Guyana	35,186	11,845	0	12,553	6,900			66,484
Kenya	15,359	13,908	0	4,363	30,362		2,648	66,640
Myanmar	0	30,290	31,049	31,050	10,355			102,744
Peru	0	0	5,002	250,109	10,350			265,461
South Africa	20,220	287	0	5,174	65,627			91,308
Sudan	21,812	2	0	0	0		42,641	64,455
Togo	39,181	2,418	0	0	43,988			85,587
Total exports to these ASGM countries	164,535	61,984	113,500	1,014,203	231,030	40,498	56,789	1,682,539

Source: Comtrade <<https://comtrade.un.org/data>>, accessed 6-7 Sept. 2017

* Japan recently adopted a partial export ban, prohibiting exports for ASGM

Notes to the editor

<http://www.mercuryconvention.org/>

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/21725/global_mercury.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

<http://www.ifeh.org/wehd/>

www.zeromercury.org

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*The **Zero Mercury Working Group** (ZMWG) is an international coalition of over 95 public interest environmental and health non-governmental organizations from more than 50 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.*