

Last Chance for Governments to Develop Strong Global Mercury Treaty

Groups Fear Failed Treaty Outcome

[embargoed until 12th January 2013, 14.30], Geneva – Non-governmental organizations from around the world renewed their call for “Zero Mercury Now!” to world governments as representatives converge in Geneva this coming week for the fifth and last UN intergovernmental meeting. [i] After 4 years of negotiations an agreement on a Mercury Treaty is just days away.

Concerned that special interests might affect the outcome of a strong international treaty, the Zero Mercury Working Group[ii] is hosting a pre-treaty event to highlight new key findings[iii] on mercury seafood contamination, with health effects occurring below the level considered “safe” just a few years ago. They are urging governments to take immediate and substantial measures to reduce global mercury pollution.

The keynote speaker, Professor Philippe Grandjean, from the University of Southern Denmark and Harvard School of Public Health, will present new evidence on prenatal exposure to mercury in the womb. Dr. Grandjean’s results indicate that mercury exposure before birth can result in \$18,000 in lost lifetime earning potential for each IQ point lost, which adds up to many billions of dollars per year on a global scale. [iv]

“How much is a developing child’s brain worth?” asks Dr. Grandjean. “We are taking developing brains hostage and we are allowing this pollutant to interfere with a very precious organ.”

The treaty is expected to include actions to reduce intentional mercury use and emissions, which will ultimately reduce exposure. Yet the negotiations have been slow going.

“We know how to control mercury emissions, and there are mercury-free alternatives for nearly

all mercury-containing products and industrial processes,” said Michael Bender, Co-coordinator of ZMWG. *“What is missing is the political will to do this.”*

□

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) represents the largest intentional use of mercury globally, and is the reason for much of the mercury trade from north to south. *“Achieving reductions and a time-limited phase out in the use and trade of mercury in ASGM is a must for the treaty,”* according to Rico Euripidou of groundWork in South Africa.

“In the last round of negotiations countries were dragging their feet on taking tough action on mercury,” stated Richard Gutierrez, Ban Toxics!, Philippines. *“If the global community won’t agree on mandatory emission cuts or have meaningful reductions in mercury use and trade by the end of the week, this treaty will be a failure.”*

ZMWG has highlighted the following critical points that the treaty needs to address:

- Restricting supply and trade, including a prohibition on primary mercury mining, and keeping mercury from closing chlorine plants off the market;
 - Phasing out the use of mercury in new and most existing products and processes;
 - Requiring substantial reductions of mercury releases to the environment, consistent with BAT capabilities;
 - Prohibiting the worst practices, and phasing out mercury use in artisanal small scale gold mining;
-
- Adopting basic binding requirements to ensure environmental sound management of commodity mercury storage and disposal of mercury waste, and
 - Providing adequate financial assistance to developing countries, including during the crucial interim period when governments are undertaking their necessary treaty implementation preparation activities.

□ *“The final treaty negotiation session in Geneva is the world’s last chance to create a strong program for international action and cooperation to finally reduce global mercury exposure,”* said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Coordinator of the ZMWG
“We urge world governments to make this a reality at the end of this meeting”.

- END -

Contacts:

Alison Abrahams; EEB/ZMWG ; alison.abrahams@eeb.org "> alison.abrahams@eeb.org +32 489 304 962

Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, EEB/ZM^{*} G; Elena.lymberidi@eeb.org "> Elena.lymberidi@eeb.org ; +32 496 532818

Michael Bender , MPP/ZMWG, mercurypolicy@aol.com "> mercurypolicy@aol.com ; +1 802 9174579

[i] <http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/Mercury/Negotiations/INC5/tabid/3471/Default.aspx>

[ii] 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

[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/groth_report_zmwg%20rev.pdf

;

http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/zmwg_summary_recommendations_final.pdf

[iv] ZMWG global webinar, 4 Dec 2012, see: www.zeromercury.org with link to slides; also see: <http://www.biomedcentral.com>, <http://www.ehjournal.net/content/12/1/3/abstract>