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Zero Mercury Working Group welcomes new Mercury Convention, calls for its speedy ratification - 50 by 2015: Make it Happen!

Kumamoto, Japan; 7 October 2013 - As more than 140 countries are expected to convene near the small town of Minamata, Japan, in the next few days to adopt a new legally binding treaty on mercury, the Zero Mercury Working Group [i] welcomes the new treaty. It also urges governments pay homage to Minamata and the tragedy that befell this bucolic village by undertaking concrete activities that begin reducing global mercury pollution and ratifying the treaty quickly so that it legally enters into force.

“Governments and all the stakeholders involved need to build upon this momentum by continuing to undertake mercury reduction activities in parallel, and ratifying the treaty as fast as possible,” said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, ZMWG International Coordinator. “We urge 50 countries to step up and ratify by 2015 — *“50 by 2015 – Make it Happen!”*”

The treaty holds critical obligations that affect primary mining of mercury, mercury product phase-outs, mercury use, trade, emissions and disposal, among others, that taken together will eventually lead to global mercury reductions.

“Delays in ratification not only translates to more mercury pollution,” said Lymberidi-Settimo, but it invariably raises the human and environmental costs of unabated mercury pollution.

During the preparatory meeting at the beginning of next week, governments must also decide on how to move collectively forward during the interim period until the treaty is ratified.

“The Preparatory Meeting will need to agree interim activities of work to facilitate immediate mercury reduction and early ratification,” said Rico Euripidou of GroundWork South Africa, a member group of ZMWG. “Countries need to take action while the treaty is in legal limbo. This must include providing the information and guidance necessary for developing countries to begin addressing crucial areas such as reducing mercury use in artisanal small-scale gold mining.”

The NGO group also expressed their preference that the resolutions to be adopted during this meeting, include language whereby NGO participation throughout the interim period is both facilitated and ensured.

“This is particularly important where expert groups are created,” said Michael Bender, Coordinator of the ZMWG. “NGO are needed to ensure that the process is balanced, transparent, and our technical experts can contribute their knowledge and experience.”

The ZMWG expects a large number of countries to sign the treaty by the end of this week, opening the way to quick ratification.

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Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Coordinator 'Zero Mercury Campaign', European Environmental Bureau, T: +32 2 2891301, Mobile: +32 496 532818, elena.lymberidi@eeb.org "

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elena.lymberidi@eeb.org

Alison Abrahams, EEB Communications Officer at alison.abrahams@eeb.org "> alison.abrahams@eeb.org

+32 (0) 2289 13 09 or +32 (0) 489 304 962

Michael Bender, ZMWG International Coordinator, T: +802-917-4579, mercurypolicy@aol.com

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Background reading:

<http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/MinamataConvention/ConferenceofPlenipotentiaries/DipConMeetingDocuments/tabid/105833/Default.aspx>

[i] Zero Mercury Working Group is an international coalition of over 95 NGOs from more than 50 countries, see: www.zeromercury.org