

Date (Time): December 6th (11am-12pm)

Room: Press Conference Room

Mercury Pollution, A Threat to All:

New Study Reveals Dangerous Mercury Levels Among Delegates at Minamata Mercury Convention COP1 with the Highest Levels in Delegates from Small Island Developing States

Evidence that mercury, a neurotoxic metal, poses a global health threat to all was underscored today by a study analyzing the mercury body burdens among delegates to a global conference of the world's first mercury treaty. The study detected mercury levels above health alert thresholds in over half of the global policy decision makers tested at the first Conference of the Parties of the Minamata Convention. Researchers concluded that even global policy makers who are educated on mercury risks are not protected from mercury contamination.

Researchers from [IPEN](#) (a global public health and environment network) and [BRI](#) (the Biodiversity Research Institute) analyzed mercury levels in hair samples from 180 delegates (104 women and 76 men) from 75 countries who participated the COP1 of the Minamata Convention in Geneva from September 24-29th, 2017. **The findings revealed mercury in all participants and elevated mercury levels exceeding the US EPA health advisory level of 1 ppm, above which brain damage, IQ loss, kidney and cardiovascular damage may occur, in over half of the study participants. Levels many times higher were identified in delegates from a number of regions.** Mercury, while harmful to adults, causes the greatest damage to the developing nervous systems of fetuses in utero.

When assessed by UN region of origin, the mean mercury concentration levels of delegates exceeded the US EPA health advisory level of 1ppm in **Africa, Asia Pacific, GRULAC** (Latin American and Caribbean Countries), **JUSCANZ** (Japan, United States, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand), **Small Island Development States** (SIDS) and **Western Europe**. The mean level of mercury in hair of delegates from the Asia Pacific region exceeded 2 ppm overall. When researchers isolated the results from **Small Island Developing States** the average mercury levels increased to above **3 ppm**.

Speakers:

Dr. Joe DiGangi, IPEN Sr. Science & Technical Advisor

Opening speaker providing a brief presentation about the report and the results.

H.E. Minister Mr. Alexander Teabo, Kiribati Ministry of Environment Lands and Agricultural Development

To share impact of global pollution and impact in Kiribati and Small Island Developing States.

Deputy Minister Ado Lohmus, Estonia Ministry of Environment

To share the commitment by Estonia and EU Member States to the Minamata Convention on Mercury

Dr. Maria Neira, WHO Director Public Health and the Environment

To share the perspective of WHO on mercury pollution

Jacob Duer, UNEP Chief Chemicals and Health Branch Economy Division

To share the importance of the Minamata Convention & actions by UNEP to reduce mercury pollution

Facilitator: Björn Beeler IPEN International Coordinator & General Manager

Previous Research: Global Study on Women of Childbearing Age

IPEN, with UNEP and BRI, previously conducted a pilot study in 2015-2016 on [Mercury in Women of Child-bearing Age in the Asia and Pacific Region](#) of 236 participants in 6 countries. Of the women included in the study 69.2% had mercury levels exceeding 1ppm, however when separated by regions, 96% those sampled in the SIDS region had levels exceeding 1 ppm and only 21.4% those not in the SIDS region had levels that exceeded this level. This study motivated the larger global study Mercury in Women of Child-bearing Age in 25 Countries.

In the largest study of its kind, [Mercury in Women of Child-bearing Age in 25 Countries](#), researchers from IPEN coordinated hair sampling from 1044 women of reproductive age in 37 locations across 25 countries on 6 continents. Analysis, conducted by BRI, found that 42% of the sampled women had average mercury levels over the US EPA health advisory level of 1ppm, above which brain damage, IQ loss, and kidney and cardiovascular damage may occur. The study additionally found that 55% of the global sample of women measured more than [0.58ppm](#) of mercury, a level associated with the onset of fetal neurological damage.