



For Release

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Concerns Growing that Mercury Treaty Will Not Reduce Global Emissions

(Geneva) – IPEN and other non-governmental organizations expressed growing concerns today that an international mercury treaty, currently being negotiated in Geneva, is unlikely to reduce mercury emissions, and may even result in increased mercury pollution. [IPEN](http://www.ipen.org) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations representing 700 public-interest organizations in 116 countries.

“We hope that many of the provisions in this treaty can still be improved, but as it stands now the treaty offers only vague or no options for controlling emissions from the world’s worst sources of mercury pollution. Without a more deliberate effort to curb these sources, we can anticipate that global mercury pollution will likely continue to increase,” said Dr. Joe DiGangi, IPEN Senior Science and Technical Advisor.

Key areas of concern noted by IPEN include:

Artisanal Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM) – the largest deliberate and uncontrolled use of mercury

The current treaty text requires action only if Parties determine that ASGM is “more than insignificant,” but the treaty offers no guidelines to determine “significance.” UNEP identified ASGM as the largest source of mercury emission to air. However, during the negotiation process, countries decided to make ASGM an “allowed use” under the treaty without any clear phase-out date. In addition, two big countries proposed allowing thousands of tons of mercury from decommissioned chlor-alkali plants to enter the market. The likely destination for this extra mercury would be poor, polluted ASGM communities, further jeopardizing their health and future generations. Finally, there are no obligations to identify or clean up contaminated ASGM sites.

Coal-Fired Power Plants

The current treaty provisions offer only vague options for controlling existing coal-fired power plants. Currently, there is no agreement that measures should actually reduce emissions to air. Provisions are not likely to reduce mercury emissions from individual plants on a scale sufficient to offset the new mercury emissions that are likely to result from the rapid growth of this sector.

Chlor-Alkali Facilities

The current treaty text proposes the elimination of mercury in chlor-alkali production in either 2020 or 2025. However, no agreement exists on whether countries must identify and characterize mercury use at chlor-alkali facilities or whether to allow new mercury-cell chlor-alkali facilities under certain circumstances in the future. Currently, there is a proposal to flood the market with mercury from decommissioned plants. This surplus could be dumped into impoverished mining communities.

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Contaminated Sites

The current treaty text does not require the identification and cleanup of contaminated sites. In addition, the current treaty text provides no guidance on a health-protective value that defines waste as hazardous nor does it require minimizing or preventing the generation of mercury-containing waste. Finally, as the treaty links compliance with funding, and because action on contaminated sites is not obligatory, it is likely that no funding will be available through the treaty's financial mechanism to identify or clean up contaminated sites.

Additionally, there is a push by some countries to eliminate obligations to deal with mercury releases to land and water.

Finally, the proposal to name the global mercury treaty the "*Minamata Convention*" suggests that this treaty would be sufficient to prevent future outbreaks of Minamata disease. A treaty with this name should mandate adequate responses to any future Minamata-like tragedy and significantly reduce global levels of methyl mercury pollution in fish and sea food. However, the treaty now being negotiated will likely not be sufficient to prevent future outbreaks of Minamata disease, will not mandate adequate responses to any future Minamata-like tragedy, and will not reduce global levels of methyl mercury pollution in fish and sea food. For these reasons many representatives are suggesting that the treaty be called the "*Mercury Convention*."

New reports from both the United Nations Environmental Programme (*Mercury, Time to Act*), and BRI-IPEN (*Global Mercury Hotspots*) last week raised concerns about growing mercury levels around the world.

"Fish and human hair from around the world regularly exceeded health advisory levels," said Dr. David Evers, Executive Director at the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI). "The results demonstrate the need for a mercury treaty that mandates true reductions of mercury emissions – not just to air but to land and water as well.

"Mercury is a large and serious global threat to human health that requires a robust and ambitious global response," said Dr. Olga Speranskaya, IPEN Co-Chair.

The dangers of mercury poisoning have been known for centuries. Exposure to high levels of mercury can permanently damage the brain and kidneys. Mercury can also be passed from a mother to her developing foetus and this can result in brain damage, reduced intelligence and mental retardation.

IPEN's mission is a toxics-free future for all. The IPEN network is comprised of more than 700 public-interest organizations in 116 countries. IPEN leaders include grassroots activists and nationally and internationally recognized experts in the fields of science, health, environment and public policy.

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The mission of **Biodiversity Research Institute** is to assess emerging threats to wildlife and ecosystems through collaborative research and to use scientific findings to advance environmental awareness and inform decision-makers.

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