

**Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to Prepare a Global Legally Binding Instrument
on Mercury**
Fifth Session Geneva, 13-18 January 2013
Opening Statement
Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Thank you Mr. Chair. The Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus consists of Indigenous representatives from Inuit Circumpolar Council, Island Sustainability Alliance Cook Islands Inc., International Indian Treaty Council, and the California Indian Environmental Alliance.

Indigenous Peoples disproportionately suffer the adverse effects of mercury contamination, yet we are not specifically mentioned in the current draft of the mercury treaty text. There should be a preambular paragraph on Indigenous Peoples, much like the Stockholm Convention and as supported by the Rio +20 outcome document, “The Future We Want”. It is our right to be free from this toxin. We did not create the problem, but we suffer the impacts from it. Indigenous Peoples must be included in the text to ensure that the treaty provides appropriate protections so we can practice our cultures and life-ways without the threat of mercury in our lands, waters, foods or in the bodies of our children.

Methylmercury is a neurotoxin found in traditional foods, for example fish and other marine animals. Fish are one of the main sources of protein, and also serve social, cultural and spiritual purposes in many Indigenous communities. For Indigenous Peoples in remote places, alternative food sources are scarce, and food insecurity is common. This neurotoxin causes permanent, irreversible brain damage to babies and children. In addition, new studies show that even low-level exposure to mercury contamination over long periods of time may considerably impair health.

The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, identifies us as “Peoples” and not “populations”, a distinction that has been recognized by UN mechanisms, treaty monitoring bodies and other international mechanisms. The standards established in the *Declaration*, which has been globally endorsed, must be incorporated under this treaty.

Thank you Mr. Chair.