

IPEN's Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chair. First of all, we thank the government and people of Kenya, the UNEP Secretariat, the Chair and the Bureau for your earnest efforts to organize and support this meeting.

I am speaking on behalf of IPEN, a global network of 700 public interest groups in over 100 countries working for a toxics-free future.

In this meeting, the words will be very important as delegates negotiate text. Understanding the true meaning and consequences of these words will be essential if this treaty is going to be a success and protect the world from the impacts of mercury. We would like to request delegates to reflect on the following three words we will be frequently using the entire week: flexibility, allowable use exemptions, and voluntary measures.

1. Flexibility often appears to be used as a cover for half-hearted measures that fail to protect human health and the environment from the serious harms of mercury. Permanent brain damage is not flexible
2. Allowable-use exemptions often become a “business as usual” scenario that continues mercury pollution while forgetting about its true cost
3. Voluntary measures invite non-compliance and offer no financial assistance.

We conclude by leaving you with this African saying in Swahili for delegates to consider:

Mafahari wawili wakipigana ziumiazo ni nyasi. (It is the grass that suffers when bulls fight.)

For us this saying means that it is the health and human rights of children, women, workers, fishers, Minamata and other community victims, indigenous peoples, and Mother Earth that suffer from mercury pollution when those who are able to initiate change fail to act or merely engage in playing with words.

The recent Basel COP in Colombia showed that when delegates demonstrate political will, positive change can happen. We look forward to working with delegates this week towards a truly comprehensive treaty that address all human sources of mercury and ensure the protection of fundamental human rights, public health and the environment.

Thank you.

Manny C. Calonzo
Co-Chair, IPEN