

IPEN INTERVENTION ABOUT TRADE - SIDS

Mr President, my name is Imogen Ingram and I am from Island Sustainability Alliance CIS Inc., one of more than 700 participating organizations of IPEN. As this is my first intervention, I congratulate the Government of Japan for the excellent meeting arrangements, and yourself for the smooth management of this meeting.

I wish to speak about trade with relation to Small Island Developing States, or SIDS. SIDS do not mine mercury or use mercury in manufacturing processes, instead we import products containing mercury from companies based in developed countries. In our humid and salty marine environment, they generally become hazardous, mercury-containing waste within 3-5 years. The current disposal method for these products is by landfilling, which produces leachates that migrate into our waterways and coastal waters. Our ecosystems are very quickly affected by these harmful releases to water. Our dependence on seafoods is the main exposure pathway to mercury for the vulnerable populations in SIDS.

In order to protect their citizens from such exposure, governments in SIDS need to adopt a life-cycle approach to the importation of products containing mercury. One first step is to establish a procurement policy, which only permits importation of products labelled to indicate that they contain no mercury, or which have met the most stringent standards to minimize mercury content. This is consistent with the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent in trade. The most effective way that the proposed legally binding instrument could assist SIDS in this regard is the negative list approach i.e. to ban all mercury-containing products except those listed in an annexe for exemptions. The current draft articles may be subject to abuse, because there is no accounting required for the ultimate use of the imported mercury. For example, our concern is that a small country could import a large quantity of mercury for a permitted use which becomes diverted to illegal uses. References to the ASGM issue this morning have highlighted that an accounting process would be useful in helping to control illegal commerce in mercury.

Secondly, in common with other developing countries, we do not yet have the resources to track flows of products from the time of their importation until they become wastes. Introduction of globally harmonized Customs systems would require technical and financial assistance to achieve this proper waste flows. We have insufficient expertise and resources to analyse imported products, so it would be more practical for the negative list to be. Our limited resources would then be focused on how to deal with mercury-containing articles that have been considered by an expert committee under the Convention before an exemption has been granted. Another way to protect SIDS populations is to rely on Extended Producer Responsibility to ensure that producers take back their products for proper disposal. This would give producers an important incentive to reduce their liability by re-designing products to eliminate mercury and/or use safer alternatives to mercury.

International legislation is required to deal with the global problem of releases to air, soil and in particular water, because it is in international waters that the migratory fish on our daily menu ingest mercury. SIDS parties can then incorporate the mercury convention into their national legislation to minimize any local contamination from mercury-containing products or wastes. Because of our vulnerability to natural disasters such as hurricanes or tsunamis, SIDS need to be able to re-export mercury-containing waste for proper disposal.

in appropriate facilities. Regional arrangements to facilitate the collection and shipping of such mercury-containing waste would be desirable.

In summary, we want to protect ourselves against the terrible human health impacts that the Minamata victims have spoken about this week. Our concerns stem from contamination of our main food by releases to air, soil and water and because we import products in mercury. Our main focus is therefore on eliminating mercury in imported products and in the food supply.

Thank you sir