



a toxics-free future

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Mercury Treaty Not Likely to Reduce Global Releases
Proposed name dishonours victims of the Minamata tragedy

(Geneva) – IPEN and other non-governmental organizations said that a new global mercury treaty is unlikely to reduce mercury releases, and may even result in increased mercury pollution at the close of treaty negotiations today. They also said that the proposed treaty name, “Minamata Convention”, dishonours those who continue to suffer from one of the worst cases of industrial mercury poisoning in the world. [IPEN](#) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations representing 700 public-interest organizations in 116 countries.

“We anticipate that global mercury pollution will increase, not decrease as a result of this treaty. Some will say that some treaty is better than no treaty, but we say that if the treaty does not result in less mercury pollution, then the job is not done. ,” said Manny Calonzo, IPEN Co-chair.

“This treaty should be called the “Mercury Convention”, not the “Minamata Convention” said Takeshi Yasuma, of Citizens Against Chemical Pollution (CACCP), Japan. “Water pollution resulting in contaminated sediment and fish caused the Minamata tragedy but the treaty contains no obligations to reduce mercury releases to water and no obligations to clean up contaminated sites. Calling that kind of agreement the ‘Minamata Convention’ dishonours the victims.”

Key areas in which the treaty falls short, according to IPEN include:

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

The treaty 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. This will permit mercury import, export, and use without any clear phase-out date. The treaty also creates no obligation to identify or clean up contaminated ASGM sites.

“No phase-out date, no limit to mercury imports, no clean up of the mess it leaves behind , said Yuyun Ismawati, Balifokus, Indonesia. “These weak measures guarantee a new generation of suffering among those who work in this industry.”

Coal-Fired Power Plants and other air emission sources

Though the treaty creates an “obligation” to reduce emissions at existing coal-fired power plants, those reductions are only required “where feasible.” Overall, these 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 and other water emissions sources

There is no obligation for industry to reduce releases of mercury to land and water. Instead, the treaty notes that countries should try to act, “where feasible.” There is no specific mention of reducing releases to water from mercury cell chlor-alkali plants or to land from large-scale mining.

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. 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.

“Mercury” not “Minamata” Convention

It is reasonable to believe that a global mercury treaty would be sufficient to 1) prevent future outbreaks of Minamata disease, 2) mandate adequate responses to any future Minamata-like tragedy, and 3) reduce global levels of methyl mercury pollution in fish and sea food. This treaty will not achieve any of these goals. For these reasons a growing number of representatives are suggesting that the treaty be called the “*Mercury Convention*.”

“If implemented, the new mercury treaty might slow the rate of increasing mercury levels but greater political commitment will be needed to actually reduce mercury pollution,” said Joe DiGangi, IPEN Sr. Science and Technical Advisor. “Mercury is a large and serious global threat to human health that requires a robust and ambitious global response. This treaty does not do that.”

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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