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Takeshi YASUMA  
Citizens Against Chemicals Pollution (CACP), Japan  
[ac7t-ysm@asahi-net.or.jp](mailto:ac7t-ysm@asahi-net.or.jp)  
skype id: yasuma.takeshi  
phone: +81-45-364-3123

## Make Minamata An International Model for Resolution of Environmental Crises

(Minamata, Japan) The world's first international mercury treaty offers Japan an opportunity to make Minamata an international model for how to resolve environmental crises, the International NGO IPEN said today. Speaking in Minamata on the eve of a diplomatic conference in Kumamoto that will adopt the "Minamata Convention," senior science and technical advisor for IPEN, Joe DiGangi, said:

"The Mercury Treaty is particularly connected to Minamata because it specifically calls on governments around the world to learn and apply the lessons from the Minamata tragedy to prevent mercury poisoning in the future. Unfortunately, the original tragedy is still not resolved."

"With the Minamata name comes a special responsibility – and an opportunity to take actions so that the name Minamata is not only associated with a tragedy, but becomes a positive model in the resolution of the world's worst case of mass mercury poisoning," DiGangi continued.

"But governments around the world cannot be asked to implement the lessons from Minamata if those same lessons remain unresolved in Minamata," DiGangi cautioned. DiGangi urged the following actions in Minamata:

- Recognition and compensation of all victims
- Clean-up of all contaminated areas, including 1.5 million cubic meters of toxic mercury waste "temporarily" stored at the EcoPark
- An acceptance of responsibility by the polluter for restoration of contaminated sites and making victims whole
- A comprehensive, independent, systematic health study undertaken in impacted areas
- A halt to Japanese mercury exports. Japan continues to export almost 100 metric tons of mercury, mainly to developing countries.

"All around the world there are beautiful places like Minamata where serious toxic pollution problems are being ignored because their effects happen quietly, over time, to one person at a time. In the future, when people learn about Minamata, my hope is that they will not only learn about the terrible tragedy here, but they will hear about how a government and a people turned a terrible tragedy into something that made them proud instead of ashamed and sad," DiGangi concluded.

IPEN is an international NGO comprised of 700 organizations in 116 countries that work to minimize, and whenever possible, eliminate, hazardous, toxic substances internationally and within their own countries. IPEN has been actively involved in the three-year mercury treaty negotiation process.

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