



IPEN Statement

Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Minamata Convention on Mercury
11 October 2013

Minister of the Environment for Japan, Nobuteru Ishihara, Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner, Honorable Ministers and Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and last, but certainly not least, colleagues from public interest civil society organizations and victims of mercury poisoning around the world:

The mercury treaty is a victory because it represents a global consensus that mercury pollution presents a serious threat to human health and the environment. Now we need to get to work.

During the negotiations we strongly criticized the parts of the treaty that are not obligatory. Now our message to all governments is that when the treaty requires governments to “endeavor” or “encourage” action –governments still have to do something. In our view, each government has a moral, if not a legal, commitment to fully implement ALL treaty provisions.

Since the treaty bears the name of Minamata, IPEN believes that three lessons from the Minamata tragedy should be applied to the treaty.

No. 1: Apply the precautionary principle: Already we are beginning to see signs of mercury poisoning in gold mining communities; in women, children and men. We do not need to wait 20 years to confirm what we are seeing like what happened in Minamata. The cost of inaction is too high.

No. 2: Understand and act on mercury use in cities, towns, communities and nations. A single industrial source caused the Minamata tragedy, but mercury sources throughout the world can be widely dispersed. Inventories will reveal priority sites for action and banning mercury trade will stop the export of harm.

No. 3. Do not wait 20 years to manage contaminated sites. The cleanup of contaminated sites in Minamata began 20 years after the problem was discovered. That was too late. If we do not act quickly, the legacy of the current worldwide gold rush will be thousands of highly contaminated sites and devastated communities around the world.

The preamble of the Mercury Treaty states that governments should learn and apply the lessons from the Minamata tragedy to prevent mercury poisoning in the future. But governments around the world cannot be asked to implement the lessons from Minamata if those same lessons remain unresolved in Minamata.

In Minamata, this means recognition and compensation for all victims as well as clean-up of all contaminated areas before an earthquake happens, including the 1.5 million cubic meters of toxic mercury waste “temporarily” stored at the Eco-Park.



a toxics-free future

The mercury treaty now bears Minamata's name. This creates a special obligation to fully meet the victims' demands now and transform a human tragedy into an opportunity for change.

Let's honor the Minamata disease victims, wear this blue and orange solidarity ribbon as a reminder of their pains, sufferings and struggles, and as a reminder of our commitment and responsibility to prevent new Minamata tragedies from ever happening again.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.