



for a toxics-free future

## IPEN Intervention on Contaminated Sites

Given by Lee Bell

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Thank you, Mr. President-

Mercury contaminated sites represent a growing environmental and human health risk across the globe. Past estimates suggest that over 3000 identified sites were contributing to atmospheric, terrestrial and aquatic mercury pollution. This number grows daily. The majority of sites where ASGM is conducted with mercury will eventually be proven to be contaminated sites. These represent both a historical legacy and a contemporary issue. Each new site where ASGM activities using mercury are established is a contaminated site in the making. As we know there are hundreds of new sites opened to this activity every year and these will become legacy sites of the future.

Our ability to identify and manage contaminated sites has improved significantly over the last 50 years, however it is telling that countries such as the United States and Australia are still struggling to manage mercury contaminated areas created during the gold rushes of the 1800's. Despite our technological and practical advances, the sheer number of sites created on an ongoing basis is outstripping our ability to remediate them in terms of capacity and resources. This is especially true for less developed countries that are least well equipped financially and technologically to manage them.

The two clear strategies to address this problem are to firstly stop the creation of these sites and secondly to provide the necessary support to remediate existing sites. To address the first issue, we must stop the trade in mercury that is used for ASGM. The mercury trade also continues to supply industries such as mercury cell chlor-alkali plants and other highly polluting industries that generate contaminated sites. We should also stop artisanal mercury mining (cinnabar). IPEN is calling on all parties to go beyond the requirements of the convention and seriously consider announcing full bans on the export and import of mercury. Acceleration of a global ban of mercury exports is the quickest most efficient way to prevent the creation of new contaminated sites. Because long after the gold is gone the mercury remains to inflict harm on future generations.

Secondly, at this COP we must adopt the contaminated sites guidance developed by the expert group, to allow many parties to proceed with identification and management of contaminated sites that lead to remediation and reduced human and environmental exposure.

Finally, funding mechanisms of the convention must remain open to activities to identify, manage and remediate mercury contaminated sites to protect communities, the environment and the food chain. Without these resources we will ensure that human and environmental exposure will grow in many countries beyond their ability to recover.

Thank you-