

IPEN Opening Statement for Mercury INC 1:

Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN Co-chair
7 June 2010

Thank you Chair; and our thanks to all who have made this meeting possible.

I speak on behalf of the over 700 participating organizations of the International POPs Elimination Network, a public interest NGO network with representation in over 100 countries.

IPEN is committed to a broad, comprehensive and effective mercury treaty that will ultimately eliminate all sources of anthropogenic mercury and ensure the protection of human health, the environment and the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable populations.

The mercury treaty is more than just a series of technical challenges. There are complex social, cultural and labour dynamics that must be addressed. Mercury is not a substance that exists in isolation. It is deeply intertwined with issues of poverty and development and negotiators will need to be creative to address mercury and its related problems. In some cases, there may even be need for transitional assistance or aid to workers or communities who currently depend on activities that release mercury to the environment.

We cannot be satisfied with a minimal or 'bare bones' treaty. This is a substance that contaminates the main protein source of 2/3 of the world's population. Hence, we need a treaty that addresses all aspects of mercury's lifecycle including wastes, end of life products and the remediation of contaminated sites. Most importantly, we need to ensure access to information about mercury is open, transparent and free of costs.

We also believe that the treaty should include provisions that will enable it to be expanded at a future date to also control other pollutants of similar global concern, without compromising the robustness of the mercury treaty.

We must succeed at this task, as we cannot ignore the needs of vulnerable children working in the poisonous atmosphere of small scale gold mines, or the mother who must eat contaminated fish knowing that it is causing irreparable damage to her unborn child or even the rural worker forced to spray outmoded toxic mercuric fungicides. We cannot dismiss the serious global impacts of mercury emissions from the thousands of coal fired power stations pouring out their toxic mercury byproducts.

Unless we act now the growing legacy of mercury contamination will rob our children and future generations of their intellectual potential; their health and their right to a clean mercury free environment.

The NGOs that make up IPEN stand willing and able to participate fully, be it through technical expertise, information provision or outreach and public awareness-raising. Together we can develop and implement a mercury treaty that will protect all of us, our descendants and the environment and life support systems on which we all depend.