

Opening intervention

Delivered by Mr. Tani Yoichi

Thank you Mr. Chair. I am speaking on behalf of the Collaboration Center for Minamata Disease Victims and IPEN.

I have spent the last 41 years in Minamata working with the victims of the world's most famous mercury poisoning. I am sad to say that the tragedy is still happening. In fact, several months ago more than 65,000 victims have applied to the government for compensation under the Relief Law of Minamata Disease. This makes your work this week very important.

As you know, there is a proposal to call the treaty, the Minamata Convention. I would like to urge you to carefully consider a different name for the treaty because there is a growing controversy surrounding this proposal.

First, many Minamata victims are opposed to the proposed name. There are several reasons for this. Many victims are still not relieved. A comprehensive health study was never performed. There is 1.5 million m³ of mercury-contaminated sludge still at the site. If the treaty is named the Minamata Convention, it would be dishonorable to these victims.

A mercury treaty should prevent future tragedies like Minamata. But the text does not require any action on contaminated sites. Polluters do not have to pay for clean up. No provisions compensate victims. It would be ironic to name the treaty after Minamata, if it allows future tragedies like Minamata to happen.

My understanding is that several governments have expressed disagreement with the proposed name. They say that the name Minamata is a local issue and not appropriate for a global treaty.

Finally, there are many treaties that are not named after cities. For example, we have the Biodiversity Convention.

To conclude Mr. Chair, Minamata is NOT just a name, a place or a disease. It is tragedy, pain, corporate irresponsibility, loss, and discrimination. Minamata is about people and community. It is about their struggle to survive, and their determination to live. This is the real Minamata.

To honor the tragedy, we respectfully request delegates to name the new treaty, the Mercury Convention.

Thank you for consideration of our views.