QUICK VIEWS ON THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY
SIXTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

for a toxics-free future

October 2025

The Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (Mercury Treaty) will take place in Geneva from November 3-7, 2025. A number of important decisions will be discussed and are covered in these IPEN quick views.

In addition, IPEN will be seeking to raise two important issues that are not specifically on the agenda at COP-6. These two items are to amend the text of the Treaty to:

- **End the legal global mercury trade, and**
- **Phase out artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) as an allowable use of mercury by 2032.**

IPEN members will discuss these amendments with delegates, with a view to developing party proposals for text amendments to be included on the agenda at COP-7 in 2027.

These amendments are needed because:

1). It is time to end the global trade in mercury.
Now that most products and manufacturing processes relying on mercury have been phased out, there is little justification to continue the global mercury trade. Most mercury being traded finds its way into ASGM, the leading source of global mercury emissions. Mercury in ASGM contaminates the food web and undermines the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and those who rely on fish for dietary protein, such as populations in Small Island Developing States. The US and the EU have already prohibited mercury exports. An amendment should center on ending the mercury trade once and for all.

2). It is time to establish a phase-out date for ASGM as an allowable use of mercury.
While the convention appears to have been effective in phasing out most products and manufacturing processes using mercury, there has not been the same level of effectiveness in reducing mercury use in ASGM. There is still heavy use of mercury in ASGM areas in Latin America and parts of Africa and Southeast Asia and known volumes of mercury used in ASGM annually over the last five years have remained roughly unchanged.

The mercury sources for ASGM are a combination of legally traded mercury, smuggled mercury, and cinnabar conversion from primary mines (particularly in Indonesia and Mexico). The ASGM sector's mercury use is undermining the human rights of Indigenous People and other populations who are disproportionally impacted by mercury from ASGM. As long as the convention permits ASGM to be an allowed use for mercury, it sends a signal that (i) gold extraction is more important than human rights, and (ii) gold extraction is not feasible without mercury amalgamation – with the result that the practice will continue to be tolerated at national level in many countries. ***The Convention needs to send a clear message that mercury use will no longer be tolerated in ASGM by the international community by establishing a phase-out date for mercury use in ASGM of 2032.***

In addition, a much greater emphasis is required by the Treaty on **Health Aspects** (Article 16), with specific actions urgently required on training medical personnel, including local health services and midwives, on detecting mercury-exposure symptoms and providing treatment and advice on mercury-exposure reduction.

Key issues and decisions for COP-6

Trade and Supply (elemental mercury)

Meeting document MC/COP.6/5 on the trade in mercury compiles statements from Parties detailing issues their countries have with controlling the trade in mercury and highlights that two parties (Indonesia and Mexico) have identified significant problems with ongoing, illegal primary mercury mining, despite requirements under the Convention to control it. The matter will be taken up by the Implementation and Compliance Committee and the document has suggested that the COP may invite parties to report on experiences and challenges in implementing this aspect of Article 3. Large quantities of mercury are being smuggled out of Mexico into active ASGM regions in Latin America with the involvement of organized crime.[1] The destinations include Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, among others.

It was also conceded in MC/COP.6/5 that 16 Parties reported neither receiving consent nor relying on a general notification of consent for all exports of mercury from their territories and provided no explanation as to why they allowed exports without this documentation. Nine Parties conceded that they have significant issues with illegal trade in mercury, including the Philippines who noted illegal trade in mercury for use in ASGM, which is sold to miners by dental clinics. The Implementation and Compliance Committee expressed concern regarding the issue of illicit trafficking, illegal trade, and smuggling of mercury and will re-examine the matter at its next meeting following COP-6.

The draft decision calls for:

- adoption of updated guidance on national mercury stocks and trade forms;
- further information from Parties on illegal mercury trafficking;
- case studies in how to combat that trade and encouraging various international organizations (e.g., the World Customs Organisation) to assist Parties in controlling illegal mercury trade.

In addition, it requests the Implementation and Compliance Committee to:

- assess the reasons for which Parties have challenges in implementing trade-related provisions under article 3; and
- initiate dialogue with relevant international organizations with the aim of supporting Parties in preventing and combating illegal trade.

[1] https://eia.org/report/traffickers-leave-no-stone-unturned/

In IPEN's view, most of these actions will not produce any short-term reduction in the amount of mercury being used in ASGM. Record-high gold prices are creating strong demand for mercury in ASGM and an amendment to the Convention is required to prohibit the international trade in mercury. This will lead to a sharp price increase for mercury, moving miners to adopt mercury-free methods and allowing customs officers to confiscate any transboundary movement of mercury that is not being sent for ESM disposal. While IPEN does not oppose the draft decision recommendations, they are insufficient to control both legal and illegal mercury flow into ASGM.

Trade in mercury compounds

At COP-5, the Secretariat was requested to initiate a study of the global supply, production, trade, and use of mercury compounds, to investigate if they compromise the objective of the Convention by circumventing mercury trade restrictions. The final study is at UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/5. The findings of the report note that cinnabar was being traded to circumvent mercury trade restrictions. The other major finding was that mercury compounds continue to be used in skin-lightening creams, with four types of compounds identified in these cosmetics. Mercury in skin creams is a well-documented health hazard, with restrictions on such cosmetics in the US, EU, and other countries.

IPEN's position is that the cinnabar trade should be restricted as soon as possible by listing it in an additional annex adopted in accordance with Article 27 and be made subject to paragraphs 6 and 8 of Article 3. This would have the effect of requiring more stringent documentation on trade in these mercury compounds, including prior informed consent and restricting the use of the compounds to uses allowed under the Treaty. Other compounds noted in the study should be evaluated and restricted from use in cosmetics with a view to prohibiting their trade altogether if required. Further, the related draft decision in UNEP/MC/COP.6/5 calls for adoption of Annex III (updates to the guidance on the use of forms on import and export of mercury, to assist parties in identifying, managing and reducing mercury trade from primary mercury). Recognizing that the study into mercury compounds concluded that cinnabar was being traded to circumvent trade restrictions, Parties should add a new element to the draft decision to require parties to include information on mercury compounds, including cinnabar, in their national reporting, including production, stockpiles, and exports of these compounds. The contact group on this issue should suggest that this request for information is added to the updated guidance on national reporting on sources and supply of mercury. The objective would be to generate data leading to a decision to subject mercury compounds to the same trade restrictions as elemental mercury. Ultimately, trade in cinnabar should be prohibited.

Effectiveness Evaluation (EE)

Two committees have been working intersessionally on the effectiveness evaluation of the COP. These are the Open-Ended Scientific Group (OESG) and the Effectiveness Evaluation Group (EEG). The evaluation is to determine if the Convention has been effective in reducing mercury pollution and, if so, in which sectors. At COP-5 the Parties agreed to consider the full report of the EEG at COP-7. An annotated outline of the EEG report will be presented at COP-6 with an update provided on the work of the OESG, who are compiling data. The OESG is considering data including air monitoring, other abiotic media monitoring, biota monitoring, human biomonitoring, emissions and releases, and an integrated analysis. Preliminary data that will be included on trade and supply and

use of mercury in ASGM appears to show that the amount of mercury used in ASGM has not declined since the Convention came into effect and may even have increased. This indicates that the Convention has not been effective in reducing mercury use and releases in ASGM. *IPEN proposes that amendments are required to the Convention to prohibit the legal trade in mercury and establish a phase-out date of 2032 for mercury use in ASGM for the Convention to be effective in this sector*.

The work of the OESG and EEG will continue intersessionally to develop a final report for COP-7. The draft decision calls on Parties to acknowledge the work of the OESG and EEG to date and urges Parties to submit their full national reports (Article 21) in December 2025. These reports are important for the future EE process. It should be noted that the majority of the data being collected for the EE process is currently from developed countries and will need to be balanced with significantly more data from the Global South – particularly in relation to areas where ASGM occurs. IPEN supports the draft decision.

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM)

Issues raised in meeting document MC/COP.6/7 on ASGM include progress on reporting under Article 7, National Action Plans (NAP) completion rates, various projects implemented since COP-5, and new measures for Indigenous Peoples' engagement in the development of NAPs. The document acknowledges that ASGM remains the main source of mercury pollution globally and notes that 51 Parties (and four non-parties) have notified the Secretariat that they have significant ASGM activity. To date, 35 Parties and 2 Non-parties have submitted NAPs to the Secretariat. Few of these have conducted reviews of progress in implementing NAPs, as required under paragraph 3 (c) of Article 7. New sections have been added to the guidance on developing and reviewing NAPs (see UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/11), including more detail on review procedures and engagement with Indigenous Peoples. It is also noted that the planetGOLD programme had prevented the emission of 33.8 tons of mercury to the environment as of June 2024. Current estimated use of mercury in ASGM is around 2,000 tons per annum, but that is likely an underestimate.

In the second reporting cycle, 27% of reporting Parties noted problems with illicit trafficking of mercury, smuggling of mercury for use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and trade of prohibited mercury-added products. One Party reported two specific concerns: one related to the facilitation of mercury trade through e-commerce or online trading platforms and the other to the ongoing issue of mercury sold through dental clinics being illegally diverted for ASGM. This should not be permitted, as the Convention now prohibits the use of bulk form of mercury in dental amalgam.

The recommended draft decision on ASGM includes:

- adoption of the updated NAP guidance.
- A call for those who have not submitted a NAP do so as soon as possible.
- A call for those who have submitted a NAP to conduct a review and report on that review.
- A request for the Secretariat to report on measures taken by Parties to implement NAPs and successful strategies and activities to reduce mercury use in ASGM.

While these measures are reasonable and supported by IPEN, they are not in themselves sufficient to make a significant impact on mercury use in ASGM. As noted in the meeting document, all planetGOLD activities combined since the Treaty was adopted have only resulted in the reduction of the equivalent of 2% of one year's annual mercury consumption in ASGM.

Far stronger measures are required and IPEN proposes that one of those measures is to amend the Convention text at COP-7 to establish a 2032 phase-out date for the allowable use of mercury in ASGM. Currently there is no phase-out date in the Convention for this use.

Indigenous Peoples' engagement

Following the decision at COP-5 to increase support for Indigenous Peoples' involvement at the COP, the Secretariat have produced a meeting document (MC/COP.6/17) discussing the barriers to Indigenous Peoples' participation in the Convention processes and ways to address them. The findings were based on various forms of consultation with Indigenous Peoples' representatives. The Secretariat has also established an Indigenous Peoples Platform hosted within the Convention website. A draft decision has been prepared calling for:

- The establishment of a voluntary Indigenous Peoples funding mechanism to provide financial support for Indigenous participation in Minamata Convention processes. The Secretariat is to devise a transparent and inclusive procedure for identifying and selecting recipients of such funding. The funding is to operate via a dedicated trust fund with voluntary contributions from Parties and others.
- The establishment of an interim ad hoc advisory group, initially composed of seven self-nominated representatives from Indigenous Peoples' organizations accredited as observers to the Convention.
- The advisory group will be tasked with identifying Indigenous Peoples' organizations to participate in Convention processes with balanced representation between organizations, identifying support for travel and interpretation, and proposing next steps to strengthen indigenous participation in the Minamata Convention.

IPEN supports these initiatives and encourages open processes that welcome and support meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in the ongoing processes of the Mercury Treaty.

Gender

The current COP-6 agenda and meeting documents do not have any specific item on *gender and mainstreaming* but instead there is a related meeting document on *Activities to address health concerns of women and children in the biennium 2026–2027*. Details of this item are found under the '**Health**' heading, below. At COP-5, the Gender Action Plan[2] was welcomed and the associated decision tasked the Secretariat to carry out activities during the biennium 2024–2025 to implement the gender action plan. Parties were also requested to carry out activities to implement the gender action plan during the biennium 2024–2025 and to share with the Secretariat their related experiences and good practices.

[2] https://minamataconvention.org/en/documents/gender-action-plan

A review of these activities is presented in UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/25. IPEN supports the implementation of the Gender Action Plan which sets out to address the specific concerns of women in relation to mercury pollution impacts and increased engagement of women leaders in the Mercury Treaty deliberations. Specific actions that Parties could take include the inclusion of gender- and sex-disaggregated data indicators in National Implementation Plans (NIPs)/National Action Plans (NAPs).

The importance of the enhanced role of women in engagement with the Treaty and its implementation cannot be understated. Participation of women is essential to ensure cross-cutting issues are addressed and marginalized populations are heard. IPEN strongly supports more activities and funding to ensure that women have a much stronger role in the Mercury Treaty and other related chemicals and waste agreements.

Mercury Waste

In meeting document MC/COP.6/8, the results of a call for information from Parties on their mercury waste management regulations and programmes are presented. In addition, information was received on the use of the mercury waste threshold of 15 mg/kg established at COP-5. IPEN was disappointed with the waste threshold outcome at COP-5, calling for a lower, more health-protective threshold and warning that a clause was inserted in the final decision which undermined what should have been a globally harmonised threshold. The clause, in effect, said that Parties may use the 15 mg/kg threshold or any other value they choose. This obviously has the potential to create many different values worldwide to define mercury waste, leading to exports of materials that avoid the 'mercury waste' classification and associated import/export declarations. This means that Parties may be importing materials without knowing that they are mercury waste based on the 15 mg/kg threshold. A global agreement should have a single, harmonized value for any threshold definition of contaminated waste. Some Parties have submitted information on their mercury waste management systems and the Implementation and Compliance Committee have noted that there is a lack of mercury waste treatment and disposal facilities among parties.

An important contribution from the EU confirmed that mercury and mercury compounds from large sources (chlor-alkali industry, cleaning of natural gas, non-ferrous mining and smelting operations, and extraction from cinnabar ore) are to be handled as waste and disposed of. Further, the EU requires that mercury waste should undergo conversion and, where intended to be disposed of in above-ground facilities, conversion and solidification. IPEN fully supports these measures and encourages all Parties to adopt the EU approach – especially for mercury arising from the oil and gas industry, which is currently sold on the open market outside of the EU.

The draft decision contains an important element which is to establish a process to prepare for the review of mercury waste thresholds. This is an important opportunity to review the problematic clause that allows any party to choose any value to define mercury waste. IPEN supports the review process on mercury waste thresholds in the draft decision.

Cosmetics

At COP-5, Parties requested the Secretariat to call on Parties for more information relating to challenges in prohibiting mercury-containing cosmetics such as skin-lightening creams. In total, 23 Parties and 8 other organizations submitted information, including recommendations from a high-level regional meeting of African ministers in Libreville in January 2025. The main challenges identified in these submissions were:

- Lack of national implementing legislation and/or measures.
- Inadequate enforcement.
- Lack of capacity.
- Lack of awareness among key groups.
- Need for global cooperation.

It was also highlighted that online sales of mercury-added cosmetics were difficult to control. The Secretariat's final report includes current or proposed measures taken by Parties and others to address the challenges in regulating mercury-added cosmetics. IPEN supports further action on this issue and would recommend the adoption of models for mercury-added cosmetic control such as the inter-department task force created by the Philippines Quezon city government with civil society participation. While a draft decision is not presented, the COP may still choose to take further action.

Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM)

VCM production in China is one of the world's highest industrial consumers of mercury globally, now that chlor-alkali plants have nearly all moved to non-mercury methods. Most acetylene-based VCM plants that use coal with mercury catalysts as a production method instead of ethylene occur in China, where they have been reported to use up to 800 tonnes of mercury per year (nearly all sourced from primary mines in China). One acetylene-based VCM plant is located in India. The COP required Parties to find new methods to reduce mercury consumption in acetylene-based VCM production.

Parties are not to allow mercury use in VCM production five years after the COP has established that mercury-free catalysts based on existing processes have become technically and economically feasible (Part II of Annex B). Both Switzerland and the US submitted information demonstrating that alternatives to mercury catalysts are now available. Switzerland concluded full-scale VCM operations using gold and copper catalysts were already technically feasible and economically competitive. No draft decision has been suggested but Parties have been encouraged to consider the findings on the VCM report (UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/9). IPEN urges Parties to go further and draft a decision that confirms alternative methods of VCM production without mercury have been demonstrated and therefore acetylene-based VCM plants should now have a phase-out date of 2030 (i.e., five years after alternatives have been confirmed).

Biodiversity

At COP-5, it was decided to task the Secretariat with preparing a draft road map, including possible actions and indicators, to support the co-benefits arising from the implementation of the Minamata Convention and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In particular, the Secretariat have suggested that Minamata Convention effectiveness evaluation indicator 1 (levels and trends of mercury and mercury compounds in the environment and in humans due to anthropogenic emissions and releases) and indicator 29 (mercury levels in at risk human populations) could also serve as additional indicators under target 7 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
In addition, three pillars of the roadmap have been developed:

1. Contribution to the monitoring framework of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
2. Inclusion of mercury-reduction actions and targets in national biodiversity strategies and action plans and national biodiversity targets.
3. Creation of an enabling environment for enhanced co-benefits.

The draft decision calls on Parties to welcome the road map for enhancing co-benefits from implementation of the Minamata Convention and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by 2030. It also encourages Parties with ASGM NAPs to take integrating action to reduce mercury pollution from ASGM into national biodiversity strategies and action plans aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Finally, the draft decision encourages Parties and others to undertake the actions suggested in the road map. IPEN supports the draft decision integrating aspects of the Mercury Treaty and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Health (women, children and other sensitive populations)

In document MC/COP.6/18, the Secretariat lists a range of activities proposed for the biennium 2026–2027 intended to address the mercury-related health concerns of women, children, and other sensitive populations. The proposed activities include:

- Monitoring strategies in National Action Plans to prevent the exposure of at-risk populations, particularly children and women of childbearing age, especially pregnant women, to mercury used in ASGM, in collaboration with the Chemicals and Health Branch of UNEP.
- Supporting the coordination of the women's caucus of the Treaty to advance the equality and empowerment of women in the implementation of the Treaty.
- Collecting information from Parties and other stakeholders on capacity-building needs with respect to mercury exposure of women and children.
- Providing financial resources to support the participation of representatives of the women's caucus (Parties).

A draft decision calls on Parties to carry out activities to address health concerns of these at- risk groups and to provide comments on other activities that could be conducted in the 2028-2029 biennium. It also requests the Secretariat carry out activities to address health concerns of women and children, as listed in Annex I to document UNEP/MC/COP.6/18, during the biennium 2026–2027.

Dental amalgam (Amendment to Annex A)

At COP-5, proposals by the Africa region to amend part I and part II, Annex A to further restrict dental amalgam were presented. One of the two amendment proposals for part II was adopted mandating Parties that have not yet phased out dental amalgam to submit to the Secretariat a national action plan or a report based on available information with respect to progress they have made or are making to phase down or phase out dental amalgam. A decision on another proposal seeking to remove dental amalgam from government policies and insurance schemes was deferred to COP-6.

The decision on the amendment proposal to part I by adding “dental amalgam” as a new entry under mercury-added products with a phase-out date of 2030 was also deferred to COP-6. IPEN supports the Africa region proposal for removal of government support for dental amalgam and for a phaseout date of 2030 and encourages the COP to adopt these amendments.

Exemptions

Paragraph 6 of Article 6 provides that the Conference of the Parties may, at the request of a Party, decide to extend an exemption for five years unless the Party requests a shorter period. The same paragraph provides that an exemption may only be extended once per product and phase-out date.

Argentina, Bangladesh, Botswana, Canada, China, Eswatini, Ghana, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lesotho, Madagascar, Peru, and Thailand previously registered exemptions for some mercury-added products listed in Annex A. All the registered exemptions for Annex A expire in 2025.

Argentina, Ghana, India, Iran, Peru, and the US registered exemptions for some manufacturing processes in which mercury or mercury compounds are used, as listed in Annex B. For Annex B, the exemption for acetaldehyde production expired in 2023 and the exemption for chlor-alkali production expires in 2030.

In July 2025, Thailand requested the COP to extend the exemptions for switches and relays, compact fluorescent lamps, linear fluorescent lamps, cold cathode fluorescent lamps and external electrode fluorescent lamps, high-pressure mercury vapour lamps, and non-electronic measuring devices (see UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/42). IPEN’s position is that the exemption extension should not be granted, as alternatives to all these products are commercially available.

.