



PRESS RELEASE

24 SEPTEMBER 2014, UN HEADQUARTERS, ~~IN~~ NEW YORK
HIGH-LEVEL SPECIAL EVENT - "THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY:
TOWARDS ITS EARLY ENTRY INTO FORCE AND EFFECTIVE
IMPLEMENTATION"

New York, 24 September 2014 – Twenty-two countries have taken major steps to address the emissions and releases of the one of the most notorious heavy metals – mercury.

A year after the adoption of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, Ministers and senior government officials from around the world have renewed the international community's commitment to combat the global threat posed to human health and the environment from mercury pollution worldwide.

The high-level special event - "The Minamata Convention on Mercury: Towards its early entry into force and effective implementation" – witnessed three States agreeing to become Parties to the Minamata Convention and an additional 15 States signing the treaty. In addition, two more States joined the Convention and three additional States signed it since UN Treaty Event started yesterday.

The Governments of Djibouti, Gabon, Guyana, Monaco and Uruguay have joined the United States as the first six future Parties to the Convention. The United States had joined the Convention last November.

An additional 18 countries, bringing to the total number to 120, used this occasion to sign the Convention, namely: Belarus, Cameroon, Croatia, Cyprus, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Latvia, Liberia, Malaysia, Monaco, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

Held in the margins of the opening of the sixty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, and in conjunction with the Secretary-General's annual Treaty Event, the event was jointly convened by the Governments of Japan, Switzerland, the United States and Uruguay, with the assistance of UNEP.

Yoshio Mochizuki, Minister of the Environment of Japan, said: "As the country that has experienced the Minamata Disease, we recognize our critical role to lead the global challenge to eliminate mercury pollution. We promise to keep supporting the developing countries utilizing our advanced mercury reduction technologies. It is crucial to keep the political ambition and momentum formed through the Diplomatic Conference to achieve the rapid entry into force and effective implementation of the Convention."

Franz Perrez, Ambassador for Environment of Switzerland, said: "The Minamata Convention was built upon five key elements essential for multilateralism to succeed, namely, understanding facts, political will, competent support, guidance and leadership, and solution-oriented commitment."

Judith Garber, Acting Assistant Secretary, United States Department of State, said: "I'm particularly pleased that the focus of this event today is on not only the entry into force of the Convention but also its effective implementation. We look forward to continuing that spirit of extraordinary cooperation as we take the next step – the most important step – to achieve the objectives of the Convention through implementation of its provisions. It is through those



actions that we will all collectively be able to reduce the risks and, one day, eliminate the tragedies to human health and the environment from mercury.”

Raquel Lejtreguer, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Housing, Land Planning and Environment of Uruguay, said: “For Uruguay, it is an important day because we deposited the ratification of the Minamata Convention. We pioneered the negotiations, a process that took over five years and in which our country placed a big effort in order to achieve this Treaty. We would like to highlight that the Latin American and the Caribbean region played an important role in the team. The solidarity of our people was a motor that helped to carry out this process and, therefore, the solidarity became responsibility. This is an important issue because the effects that mercury causes impact communities disproportionately, particularly in the most vulnerable ones. This is the first environmental agreement, besides Rio+20, which incorporates sustainable development with a human rights perspective.

Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP, said: “I congratulate the countries signing and ratifying the Minamata Convention today as they now join the international community's commitment to address a pollutant -- mercury -- whose impact and notoriety is truly global. Their diversity speaks to the treaty's universal nature and relevance as they encompass both large and small nations, rich and poor, tropical and polar. While there is much to celebrate today, it is now imperative that we use this momentum and move towards the Convention's early entry into force. It is critical that we begin the implementation phase as soon as possible in order to protect human health and the environment for the current generation and those yet to come.”

Named after a city in Japan where serious health damage occurred as a result of mercury pollution in the mid-20th century, the Minamata Convention aims to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

The Convention requires that 50 States have to agree to become Parties to bring the Convention into force. Signature will be closed on 9 October 2014. Meeting this cut-off date for signature could be of particular importance for developing countries and countries with economies in transition, as signing the Convention is a condition to access funding for enabling activities and pre-ratification projects from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

UNEP provides secretariats for a number of key Conventions aiming, like the Minamata Convention, for the sustainable management of chemicals and hazardous wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, which are served by a joint Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland. The Basel Convention (on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal) is celebrating its 25th anniversary of its adoption, and has almost universal membership.

Useful links:

- Website of the Minamata Convention: <http://mercuryconvention.org/>;
e-mail: mercury.chemicals@unep.org
- Map of signatories and parties to the Convention:
<http://mercuryconvention.org/Countries/tabid/3428/Default.aspx>
- Read more about the Treaty Event 2014:
https://treaties.un.org/pages/TreatyEvents.aspx?path treaty=Treaty/Focus/Page1_en.xml
- Read more about High-level Special Event:
<http://mercuryconvention.org/News/SpecialHighlevelEventforthesignatureandrat/tabid/3867/Default.aspx>
- On the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, go to:
www.synergies.pops.int