

To: Environment Ministers of EU Member States
Cc: Commissioner Potocnik
Director General Falkenberg

18 December 2012

Subject: Last chance to develop strong treaty to reduce mercury exposure

Dear Environment Minister,

We, the undersigned, urge you to support the adoption of a strong international agreement on mercury when governments meet in Geneva in January for their fifth and final negotiation.

Earlier this month, the Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) presented the most extensive new findingsⁱ to date on global mercury seafood contamination, with health effects occurring below the level considered “safe” just a few years ago – suggesting current health benchmarks should be revised. We highlighted new scientific evidence that for the first time correlates rising mercury levels in the oceans with the growth in pollution and also projects a 50% increase in mercury levels by 2050 in the Pacific Ocean if current pollution trends continue unabated.ⁱⁱ

This and other new evidence clearly demonstrates that the mercury threat has grown substantially since the UN Environment Program (UNEP) global mercury assessment report was completed just after the turn of the century. Since 2001, countries around the world have been discussing options to control mercury pollution and in 2003 the UNEP Governing Council agreed that enough was known to “...warrant immediate action to reduce global mercury pollution.”

Now over a decade has passed and the time for bold and corrective action has come.

The solution is *not* for people to stop eating fish since the nutritional benefits are substantial and many small island countries, indigenous people and others depend on fish. While informing consumers about low mercury fish is essential to reduce exposure, this should not be a substitute for the ultimate goal: to reduce mercury contamination and all sources of exposure to the lowest possible levels in the shortest amount of time.

Fortunately, the world community can come to grips with the global mercury crisis. Since 2009 governments have been negotiating an internationally binding agreement to control mercury pollution. The treaty is expected to include actions to reduce, amongst others, mercury supply, trade, its use in products and processes, and atmospheric mercury emissions, which will ultimately reduce human exposure to mercury globally. Yet so far the negotiations have been going slowly.

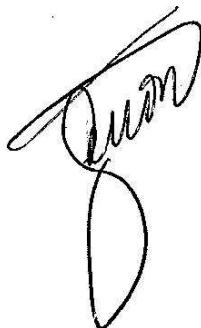
This is not because alternatives or solutions are absent; the technology is available to manage mercury pollution -- we know how to control mercury emissions, and there are mercury-free alternatives for nearly all mercury-containing products and industrial processes. What is missing is the political will to make the necessary commitments to phase out mercury use, and put the needed controls and alternatives in place.

Therefore, as detailed in our commentsⁱⁱⁱ on the final draft treaty text,^{iv} we call on you, as representative of your country to work toward a successful outcome next month in Geneva; an ambitious treaty leading to serious emissions reductions and mercury use phase outs for the sake of our children and for future generations. The final treaty negotiation session in Geneva is the world's last chance to create a strong program for international action and cooperation.

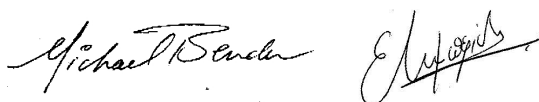
Yours Sincerely,



Jeremy Wates
Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau (EEB)



Genon Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)



Michael Bender and Elena Lymberidi-Settimo
International coordinators
Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG)

ⁱ Links to the new reports:

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments at UNEP level/INC5/FINAL BRI Patterns of Global Seafood 120312.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments%20at%20UNEP%20level/INC5/FINAL%20BRI%20Patterns%20of%20Global%20Seafood%20120312.pdf);

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments at UNEP level/INC5/groth report zmgw%20rev.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments%20at%20UNEP%20level/INC5/groth%20report%20zmgw%20rev.pdf);

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments at UNEP level/INC5/zmgw summary recommendations final.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments%20at%20UNEP%20level/INC5/zmgw%20summary%20recommendations%20final.pdf)

ⁱⁱ http://toxics.usgs.gov/highlights/pacific_mercury.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Link to the ZMWG paper commenting on the final draft treaty text ("Chair's text):

[http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments at UNEP level/INC5/zmgw%20preliminary%20views%20on%20inc%205%20draft%20chairs%20treaty%20text-%20november%202012.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments%20at%20UNEP%20level/INC5/zmgw%20preliminary%20views%20on%20inc%205%20draft%20chairs%20treaty%20text-%20november%202012.pdf)

^{iv} Link to the Chair's text:

<http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/Mercury/Negotiations/INC5/INC5MeetingDocuments/tabid/3495/language/en-US/Default.aspx>