



## **Countries Urged to Stop the Global Toxic Trade in Mercury at Upcoming UNEP Meeting Advocates<sup>i</sup> recommend binding agreements to stem global glut of mercury**

**(Brussels/Washington, Delhi, Beijing, Nairobi 30/1/2007)** Anti-mercury groups will urge world governments to ban mercury exports and reduce global mercury pollution at the forthcoming 24<sup>th</sup> UNEP Governing Council (GC) meeting on 5-9 February in Nairobi.

“Tough and binding rules must now be agreed to reduce mercury contamination” said Elena Lymberidi from the European Environmental Bureau, “There has been too much procrastination. Therefore this upcoming Governing Council Decision needs more teeth to ensure global action.”

In the five years since the UNEP Global Mercury Assessment report, there have been no significant reductions in the use of mercury on a global scale, according to UNEP’s new mercury trade report.<sup>ii</sup> The report shows that trade has stabilized at roughly 3500 tons per year for the past decade; as mercury use has gone down in industrialized nations, developing countries have increased their reliance on this toxic metal. Also, air pollution experts report that global atmospheric mercury releases have actually increased over the past 15 years. (See charts below<sup>1</sup>.)

“The UNEP GC first identified mercury as a serious global threat over six years ago,” said Michael Bender of the Mercury Policy Project. “It has since supported extensive research that all leads to one conclusion: serious, concerted global actions must be taken immediately to reduce the level of mercury in the environment and protect fish as a viable world protein source.”

Advocates contend that support of voluntary “partnership” programs alone, in place of a meaningful, legally-binding agreement, with necessary resources and achievable global mercury reduction goals, are the fundamental cause of failure over the past two years. Advocates insist that global binding agreements are the only way to curtail mercury’s worldwide reach.

“Governments must show their serious commitment to immediate and meaningful action, through the adoption of a legally binding, multi-lateral agreement,” said Rico Euripidou, from groundWork S.Africa. “Present measures are too limited in scope and direction and insufficient on their own to reduce risks from mercury exposure.”

NGOs recommendations for curtailing mercury’s global reach include the following:

1. Immediately start work towards a **globally binding instrument on mercury**.
2. Make **use of the findings of the UNEP trade reports** and
3. Address the **global mercury demand reduction** by establishing a **global mercury use reduction goal** of 70% by 2017, and achieve the goal by ending the use of mercury in electronics, button cell batteries, thermometers, and other non-electronic measuring equipment; phasing out the mercury-cell chlor-alkali process; and establishing a sector-specific demand reduction goal for artisanal and small scale gold mining of 50% by 2017, achievable by eliminating the use of mercury in the processing of whole ore, and other practicable measures.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 is derived from the recently published UNEP mercury trade report prepared for the 5-9 February 2007 Governing Council meeting, and indicates global mercury use has changed little since 1994 as the developed world exports its excess mercury and outdated technologies to the developing world. Figure 2 is based on the work of Jozef Pacyna and his colleagues, and illustrates that atmospheric mercury releases have actually increased, from sources such as coal combustion, smelting of metal ores (particularly zinc and copper), chlor-alkali plants, and waste handling/disposal of products containing mercury.

4. At the same time, **reduce the supply of mercury** by ceasing primary mining, except where mercury is produced as by-product from other ore processing; restricting mercury exports from developed nations; and managing mercury from closing mercury cell chlor-alkali facilities.
5. Developed nations should provide **new and additional financial resources** to support these activities in developing nations.
6. Instruct UNEP to develop a global air emissions report for next GC, which will form the basis for setting goals to reduce major air sources of mercury emissions.

Mercury, a potent neurotoxin, affects the central nervous system, including the brain. Workers exposed to mercury, e.g. artisanal and small scale gold miners, often suffer from tremors, memory loss and other symptoms of neurological damage. Studies show those most at risk from methylmercury contaminated food are women and children. With the developing brain the most sensitive endpoint, eating contaminated fish prior to or during pregnancy as well as during early developmental years poses the greatest risk.

Advocates point out that in 2002, UNEP’s own Global Mercury Assessment concluded that: “Despite data gaps, sufficient understanding has been developed of mercury (including knowledge of its fate and transport, health and environmental impacts, and the role of human activity), based on extensive research over half a century, that international actions to address the global mercury problem should not be delayed.” (GMA, key findings, #35, see: <http://www.chem.unep.ch/Mercury/Report/Key-findings.htm>).

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Figure 1

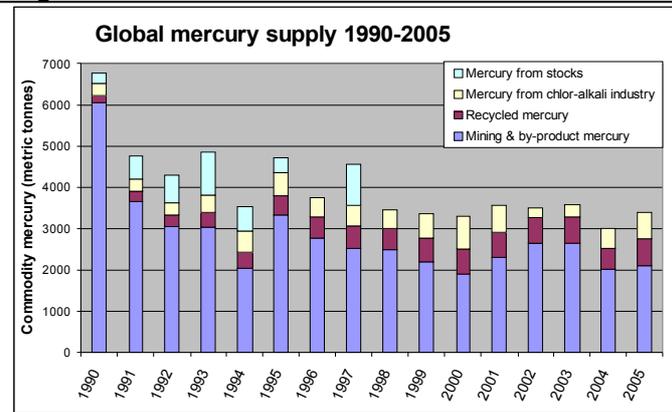
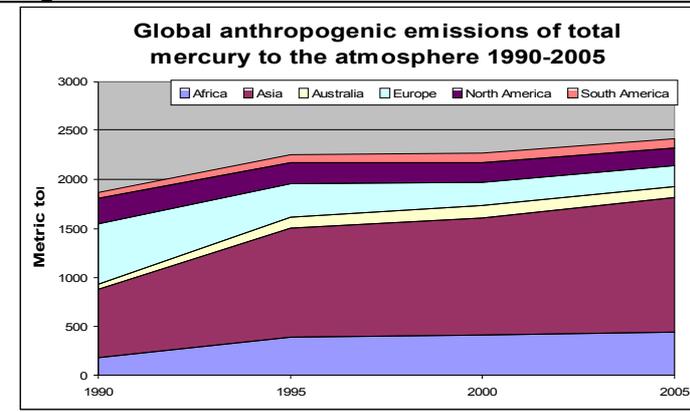


Figure 2



<sup>i</sup> The **Zero Mercury Working Group**, [www.zeromercury.org](http://www.zeromercury.org), is an international coalition of more than 48 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The aim of the group is to reach “Zero emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally.”

<sup>ii</sup> Both available in a single document at <http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/Trade-information.htm>