



## MEDIA ADVISORY

### EXPECTED HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THIRD MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

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19 November 2019

**WHAT?** *Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury, convened under the theme “Make Mercury History”, featuring:*

- **COP Plenary:** During the plenary sessions, the official meeting documents will be discussed in order for the COP to make decisions on matters such as the framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the Convention, the adoption of technical guidance documents, and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2020-2021. The complete list of documents can be found on the COP3 webpage.
- **COP Special event on Mercury Science:** The Secretariat of the Minamata Convention is convening a special event on mercury science, with financial contribution from the Government of Japan. Advice from Prof. Jozef Pacyna, Chair of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant, (Krakow, Poland, September 2019) was sought in the planning of the session. Prof. Pacyna will participate in the session, which will start with presentations on the state of mercury science, followed by a panel discussion on the contribution of science to the implementation of the Minamata Convention.
- **Side Events and knowledge labs:** 26 side events and knowledge labs that will discuss broader issues such as the linkages between chemicals management and biodiversity, artisanal and small-scale gold mining, trade, contaminated sites, chemicals and waste management beyond 2020, and global community's efforts to protect human health and the environment from the negative effects of mercury, among others.
- **Exhibitions** throughout the week on mercury waste management, Minamata disease, mercury-added products, ASGM, among others.

**WHEN?** Monday, 25 November to Friday, 29 November 2019.

**WHERE?** Geneva International Conference Centre - Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG), Rue de Varembé 17, 1211, Geneva, Switzerland

#### WHO?

More than one thousand participants – including parties' representatives, non-parties governments, intergovernmental organizations, UN bodies and NGOs – are already confirmed to attend the meeting.

**Opening Plenary session** (Monday, 25 November, 10 a.m.):

- Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme.
- David Kapindula (Zambia), President of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.
- Rossana Silva Repetto, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

**Opening Side event “Promoting synergy between biodiversity and chemicals and waste clusters”** (Monday, 25 November, 13.15 – 14.45, Room 3):

- Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme.

**COP Special event on Mercury Science** (Wednesday, 27 November, 13.15 – 14.45, Room 3):

- Mr. Nil Basu, McGill University, Canada



- Ms. Milena Horvat, Jožef Stefan Institute, Slovenia
- Ms. Joy Leaner, Western Cape Government, South Africa
- Mr. Olaf Malm, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Mr. Jozef Pacyna, AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland
- Mr. Mineshi Sakamoto, National Institute for Minamata Disease, Japan

## Background information:

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The **third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury** will be held from 25 to 29 November 2019 at the International Conference Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

More than one thousand participants – including parties' representatives, non-parties governments, intergovernmental organizations, UN bodies and NGOs – are already confirmed to attend the gathering. Participants will meet to review progress and challenges regarding the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in the world.

At the **official opening ceremony**, which will take place on Monday, 25 November at 10 a.m., the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, Inger Andersen, will be joined by David Kapindula (Zambia), current President of the Conference of the Parties (COP), and Rossana Silva Repetto, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention.

During the **plenary sessions**, the official meeting documents will be discussed in order for the COP to make decisions on matters such as the framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the Convention, the adoption of technical guidance documents, and the work programme and budget of the secretariat for the biennium 2020-2021. The complete list of documents can be found on the COP3 webpage. The meeting's official activities also include **26 side events and knowledge labs** that will discuss broader issues such as the linkages between chemicals management and biodiversity, chemicals and waste management beyond 2020, and global community's efforts to protect human health and the environment from the negative effects of mercury, among others.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is **the most recent global Convention on environment and health**, adopted in 2013. It is named after the bay in Japan where, in the mid-20th century, mercury-tainted industrial wastewater poisoned thousands of people, leading to severe health damage that became known as the "Minamata disease". Since it entered into force on 16 August 2017, **114 parties** have been working together to control the mercury supply and trade, reduce the use, emission and release of mercury, raise public awareness, and build the necessary institutional capacity.

While **mercury** is naturally occurring, it is also a by-product of a number of industrial processes and can be found in many everyday objects, including batteries, dental amalgam, thermometers and fluorescent lamps. Once released to the atmosphere, soil and water - often through coal burning, and artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) - mercury bioaccumulates in fish, animals and humans, posing a serious threat to human health and the environment. Through the Minamata Convention the international community can tackle the entire life cycle of mercury.

The meeting will play a critical role in the future of the Convention, which aims at protecting human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury, a highly toxic heavy metal considered by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 chemicals of major public health concern.

## Key facts:

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- Minamata negotiators built in a mechanism to periodically evaluate the **effectiveness of the Convention** and achieve continuous improvement. The first evaluation is set for 2023, and this COP has a critical role to establish the framework for the evaluation.
- **Minamata Initial Assessments (MIA)** has been conducted through the support of the Global Environment Facility, and 45 reports of completed national MIAs have been submitted. According to the



priority actions identified in the reports, the issue on phasing-out mercury-added products and management of mercury waste are the highest priorities in many developing countries.

- Today, the largest source of mercury emissions and largest global consumer of mercury is the **artisanal and small-scale gold mining**. In the process, mercury is used to extract gold from the ore by forming a mercury-gold amalgam. In 2015, according to the UNEP's latest Global Mercury Assessment (GMA), ASGM sector emitted some 800 tons of mercury to the air, roughly 38 percent of the global mercury emissions, and 1,200 tons of mercury to land and water.
- **Mercury poisoning** also represents a serious and direct health threat to the 12-15 million people who work in the ASGM sector around the world. Reducing mercury emissions and releases from mining is a key goal of the Convention.
- **Coal combustion** is the second largest source of global mercury emissions. UNEP's latest GMA found that coal burning, and other forms of fossil fuel and biomass combustion was responsible for about 24 percent of global mercury emissions. UNEP and its Global Mercury Partnership have been addressing the mercury emission from coal combustion through the development of technical guidance documents and pilot projects in China, India, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, Thailand and Viet Nam involving the analysis of mercury content of coal, emission monitoring and training on mercury control technologies.
- The 2017 UNEP report on Global Mercury Supply, **Trade and Demand** identified fundamental changes in the recent years in supply patterns as well as new trade hubs and routes for mercury trade around the world. We see disruption of mercury trade due to the provisions of the Convention and the efforts by the Parties, but we are also facing challenges on illegal trade of mercury.
- African countries have submitted a first proposal to amend an annex to the Convention to strengthen the control on the use of **mercury in dentistry**. This COP will discuss this proposal, and other issues related to the use of mercury in products and industrial processes.
- The good news is that a wide range of safe and high-functioning **alternatives to mercury-containing products** have been developed. And thanks to the Minamata Convention – specifically Article 4, which requires that countries take measures to phase out the production and trade of mercury-containing products, and Annex A, which sets out deadlines for that process – it's just a matter of time before mercury-free alternatives fully replace their more toxic counterparts.
- This COP is also an opportunity to define the role of the Minamata Convention as part of the processes of developing post-2020 frameworks for both SAICM and **biodiversity**. Linking the two processes is an opportunity to strengthen joint actions to deliver on the environmental dimension on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### Online resources:

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- See full meeting programme and schedule here: <http://bit.ly/overview-schedule>
- See Side Events and Knowledge Labs info: <http://bit.ly/COP3-sideevents>
- See Minamata Convention website here: [www.mercuryconvention.org](http://www.mercuryconvention.org)
- See the COP3 Media corner: [www.mercuryconvention.org/Meetings/COP3/Media](http://www.mercuryconvention.org/Meetings/COP3/Media)
- Follow us on social media through our Trello board: <http://bit.ly/COP3-Trello>
- Follow us on Twitter: [@MinamataMEA](https://twitter.com/MinamataMEA) [#MakeMercuryHistory](https://twitter.com/MakeMercuryHistory) [#MinamataCOP3](https://twitter.com/MinamataCOP3)
- Watch our videos on gold mining, health, alternatives... here: <http://bit.ly/minamata-youtube>

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