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**United Nations
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**Conference of the Parties to the
Minamata Convention on Mercury
Second meeting**

Geneva, 19–23 November 2018

Item 5 (l) of the provisional agenda*

**Matters for consideration or action by the Conference
of the Parties: emissions of mercury resulting from the
open burning of waste**

**Information in relation to emissions of mercury resulting from
the open burning of waste**

Note by the secretariat

1. At its first meeting, held in Geneva from 24 to 29 September 2017, the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury considered the issue of mercury emissions related to the open burning of waste and adopted decision MC-1/14 on the matter. In the decision, it noted the report prepared by the secretariat on the basis of submissions received from Governments and a number of non-governmental stakeholders, as well as information gathered from a range of other sources, including publications by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank, and from a number of civil society organizations (document UNEP/MC/COP.1/19). The report concluded that the challenges of open burning of waste extended far beyond the problem of mercury emissions and that its elimination, as part of the overall development agenda, had been identified as a priority for sustainable development, helping to reduce a range of air pollutants and providing social and economic benefits.

2. Recognizing that open burning may be a significant source of mercury emissions that has not been quantified and also that the guidance on best available techniques and best environmental practices¹ states that open burning of waste is considered bad environmental practice and should be discouraged, the Conference of the Parties at its first meeting invited parties and other interested entities and organizations to submit to the secretariat information on mercury emissions from open burning of waste. It further requested the secretariat to continue to compile information submitted by parties on the issue, particularly from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, including information from inventories and Minamata initial assessments, emission factors and real measurements of emissions, and any relevant information developed by the conferences of the parties to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and to submit that information to the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention at its second meeting for its consideration of the need for further action.

* UNEP/MC/COP.2/1.

¹ Guidance on best available techniques and best environmental practices adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention at its first meeting to assist parties in meeting their obligations under Article 8 (UNEP/MC/COP.1/7, annex II).

3. Further to the call for information on mercury emissions from the open burning of waste, submissions were received from two parties, Nigeria and the Republic of Moldova, as well as one intergovernmental organization, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and one non-governmental organization, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN). Those submissions have been compiled in the note by the secretariat on the matter (UNEP/MC/COP.2/INF/6, annex) and are available on the website of the Minamata Convention at www.mercuryconvention.org/Meetings/Intersessional%20work/tabid/6325/language/en-US/Default.aspx.
4. Parties provided information on mercury emissions from open burning, estimated using the Toolkit for Identification and Quantification of Mercury Releases, Level 2, of the United Nations Environment Programme. UNITAR provided observations regarding emissions from open burning of waste in their work, including in supporting the development of Minamata Initial Assessments, and highlighted some of the uncertainties, including the potential for overestimation of emissions from open burning, associated with the use of the Toolkit. IPEN provided a combined submission on capacity-building, technical assistance and technology transfer, as well as mercury emissions resulting from the open burning of waste, stressing the importance of basic waste collection and separation systems that have an emphasis on separating organic and hazardous waste (highlighting mercury waste streams) from the recyclable waste stream.
5. Information relevant to the issue of mercury emissions from the open burning of waste has also been developed in the context of the Basel and Stockholm conventions.
6. The Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention established the Household Waste Partnership in 2017 with the aim of promoting the environmentally sound management of household waste, including its prevention and minimization, and of enabling the decoupling of economic growth and environmental impacts associated with the generation of household waste and its initial handling by the public in their households. The Partnership has been mandated to develop a guidance document on the environmentally sound management of household waste.
7. The expert working group on environmentally sound management of wastes under the Basel Convention has prepared draft guidance on how to address environmentally sound management of wastes in the informal sector (UNEP/CHW/OEWG.11/INF/6). The draft guidance recognizes the adverse environmental impacts of open burning and its associated health risks, and it recommends prohibiting open burning, especially of hazardous waste. After the consideration of the guidance at the eleventh meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention, revised draft guidance will be presented to the Conference of the Parties at its fourteenth meeting for consideration. The expert working group has also prepared revised fact sheets providing an overview of the most important aspects related to environmentally sound management for specific waste streams (UNEP/CHW.13/INF/7/Rev.1), including e-waste, waste vehicles and health-care or medical waste, all of which may contain or be contaminated with mercury.
8. Findings from the Basel Convention E-waste Africa programme² indicate the high prevalence in the concerned countries of open burning to recover metals in e-waste, including mercury-containing or mercury-contaminated waste. The publication states that recycling activities with adverse impacts on human health and the environment, such as the open burning of cables, require the immediate attention of Governments.
9. The *Guidelines on Best Available Techniques and Provisional Guidance on Best Environmental Practices Relevant to Article 5 and Annex C of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* also address the issue of the open burning of waste, including burning of landfill sites (sect. VI on source categories in Part III of Annex C). The guidelines recognize that open burning covers a wide range of different uncontrolled waste combustion practices, including dump fires, pit burning, fires on plain soil and barrel burning, and that for people in many parts of the world, especially for those with no access to organized waste handling and who have been left to their own devices for materials disposal, open burning is the cheapest, easiest, most sanitary means of volume reduction and disposal of combustible materials. The guidelines, while highlighting materials to be avoided and providing techniques to improve the burning process and avoid emissions, state clearly that open burning is an environmentally unacceptable process and that the best guidance is to reduce the amount of material disposed of via this method with the goal of elimination altogether.

² “Where are WEee in Africa?”, Secretariat of the Basel Convention, December 2011. This publication was developed in the framework of the project entitled “Building local capacity to address the flow of e-wastes and electrical and electronic products destined for re-use in selected African countries and to augment the sustainable management of resources through the recovery of materials in e-wastes”.

Suggested action by the Conference of the Parties

10. The Conference of the Parties may wish to consider the information presented in its discussions on the need for further action on the issue of mercury emissions related to the open burning of waste, and, noting the limited number of submissions received, to request the secretariat to continue to compile information on the issue from parties and other stakeholders, as well as information from its overall consideration of the inventories available. It may also wish to request the secretariat to continue to engage on this issue with the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, and to update the Conference of the Parties at its third meeting
