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**United Nations
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Ad hoc Open-ended Working Group on Mercury

First meeting

Bangkok, 12–16 November 2007

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Report on activities under the UNEP mercury programme

Status report on UNEP mercury programme partnerships

1. The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in paragraphs 26 and 27 of its decision 24/3 on chemicals management, urged Governments and other stakeholders to continue and enhance their support for the UNEP mercury programme partnerships, through the provision of technical and financial resources, as a means of achieving reductions in demand for and releases of mercury and thereby reducing the risks to human health and the environment from mercury. It also requested the Executive Director, working in consultation with Governments and other stakeholders, to strengthen the UNEP mercury programme partnerships.
2. The annex to the present note contains a report entitled “Status report on partnerships as one approach to reducing the risks to human health and the environment from the release of mercury and its compounds into the environment”, which has been prepared by the secretariat to inform the work of the Open-ended Working Group.
3. Information document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/8, Consultation document: proposed approach to strengthening mercury partnerships, outlines the proposed UNEP strategy for strengthening the mercury partnership programme in accordance with decision 24/3.
4. The Open-ended Working Group may wish:
 - (a) To note the process established by the Secretariat in response to decision 24/3 to strengthen the mercury partnership programme;
 - (b) To identify any further actions that should be taken by the secretariat with respect to mercury partnerships;
 - (c) To urge Governments and other stakeholders to participate in the mercury partnerships programme and its strengthening;
 - (d) To encourage countries and other stakeholders to provide funding to support partnership efforts.

* UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/1.

Annex

Status report on UNEP mercury programme partnerships

Background

1. The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in its decision 23/9 IV on the UNEP mercury programme, urged Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to develop and implement partnerships, in a clear, transparent and accountable manner, as one approach to reducing the risks to human health and the environment from the release of mercury and its compounds into the environment. The initial partnerships created in response to that decision focused on priorities identified by countries and stakeholders during the period 2005–2006, namely, mercury management in artisanal and small-scale gold mining; control of mercury from coal combustion; mercury reduction in the chlor-alkali sector; mercury reduction in products; mercury air transport and fate research.

2. In its decision GC 24/3 on chemicals management, the Governing Council urged Governments and other stakeholders to continue and enhance their support of UNEP mercury partnerships, through the provision of technical and financial resources, as a means of achieving reductions in demand for and releases of mercury and thereby reducing the risks to human health and the environment from mercury.

I. Enhancing support for UNEP mercury programme partnerships

3. UNEP has been actively seeking input from countries and other stakeholders, including current partners, on ways to strengthen and enhance support for the UNEP mercury programme partnerships. Some of the ways in which it has done so are as follows:

(a) UNEP solicited input from Governments and stakeholders on the current partnership areas and objectives as well as on how to expand the current mercury programme. Governments and other stakeholders were also invited to consider carefully and identify partnership areas in which they had a particular expertise or interest and in which they would be able either to participate or lead. Responses to this invitation from Governments are collated in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/1 and from non-governmental organizations in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/2;

(b) In addition, UNEP hosted an informal consultation on partnerships in Geneva in June 2007. The purpose of the consultation was to explore how best to plan for the overarching partnership meeting called for in paragraph 27 of decision 24/3 and to facilitate early strengthening of the mercury partnership programme. The outcome of the consultation is described in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/8.

II. Strengthening mercury programme partnerships

4. The Governing Council in decision 24/3 requested the Executive Director of UNEP, working in consultation with Governments and other stakeholders, to strengthen the United Nations Environment Programme mercury programme partnerships by taking a number of steps, including developing an overarching framework, expanding the number and scope of partnerships, enhancing the artisanal and small scale gold mining partnership and endeavouring to secure adequate funds.

A. Developing an overarching framework

5. UNEP will organize a meeting of partners and other stakeholders in Geneva in early 2008. The purpose of the meeting is to develop an overarching framework for the partnership programme, including business plans, partnership goals and operational guidelines. Work on developing business plans, options for governance arrangements and draft operational guidelines for the partnerships has commenced in consultation with Governments and other stakeholders active in the partnerships areas. Drafts will be presented at the meeting for consideration as key elements of the overarching framework.

B. Expanding the number and scope of partnerships

6. Decision 24/3 strengthens the partnership programme to include new growing or related sectors such as vinyl chloride monomer production, non-ferrous metals mining and cement production and waste combustion. UNEP, through document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/8, is seeking feedback from Governments and stakeholders in considering these new and emerging areas. In addition, UNEP is seeking feedback on the path forward for the emerging areas of mercury supply and mercury storage, based on the priority areas outlined in paragraph 19 of decision 24/3.

C. Enhancing the artisanal and small scale gold mining partnership

7. UNEP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization continue to work collaboratively to enhance the artisanal and small-scale gold mining partnership. Strategies to explore innovative market-based approaches and disseminate alternative capture and recycling technologies are discussed in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/INF/8.

D. Endeavouring to secure adequate funds

8. The Executive Director sent a fundraising letter dated 26 March 2007 to UNEP official focal points drawing attention to decision 24/3 and the need for funding to support the implementation of the decision, including work on partnerships. The United States of America subsequently pledged \$ 1,000,380 to support the work of partnerships. As of 30 August 2007, no further funds or pledges have been received.

9. With respect to the small grants programme, UNEP continues to encourage submission of project proposals aimed at assisting developing countries and countries with economies in transition in understanding the nature and magnitude of their mercury problems and in developing tools and strategies to mitigate mercury pollution. The maximum amount per project is \$100,000; projects under \$50,000 are given preference, however, as are projects with an element of co-funding from other sources or substantial in-kind contributions. Geographic and sectoral balance are also taken into account.

10. The proposals received to date generally underline the need, among other things, for technical assistance and capacity-building relating to inventories (identification and quantification of releases); training, awareness-raising and information exchange; measures to reduce or eliminate releases from wastes; and research, policy development and regulatory controls.
