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Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**International cooperation and coordination: World
Health Organization; International Labour Organization**

**Report on cooperative activities with the World Health
Organization and the International Labour Organization**

Note by the secretariat

1. In paragraph 2 of article 16, on health aspects, the Minamata Convention on Mercury specifies that the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention, in considering health-related issues or activities, should consult and collaborate with the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other relevant intergovernmental organizations, as appropriate, and should promote cooperation and exchange of information with those organizations, as appropriate.
2. At its first meeting, held in Geneva from 24 to 29 September 2017, the Conference of the Parties requested the secretariat to continue to actively engage in cooperation and collaboration with WHO, ILO and other relevant organizations in the implementation of the Minamata Convention. That message was reinforced at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in Geneva from 19 to 23 November 2018.
3. The key areas for such cooperation and collaboration with WHO include mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers in health care, antiseptics, skin-lightening products and dental amalgam (art. 4 and annex A); public health strategies for artisanal and small-scale gold mining (art. 7 and annex C); human health risk assessment for contaminated sites (art. 12); the “health aspects” article (art. 16); health information exchange (art. 17); public information, awareness and education on effects on human health (art. 18); and health-related research, development and monitoring (art. 19), where ministries of health are envisaged to play a leading role. In addition, the secretariats of WHO and the Minamata Convention collaborate to support capacity-building and technical assistance (art. 14) and effectiveness evaluation (art. 22).
4. The secretariat has undertaken cooperative activities with WHO in the period since the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties, including participating in regional workshops promoting the Convention to health ministries, as well as technical cooperation on guidance documents and enquiries on matters related to health issues. WHO continues to participate in the intersessional work on effectiveness evaluation, making major contributions to the draft report prepared by the technical expert group. An update on the activities of WHO relevant to the Minamata Convention is set out in annex I to the present note.

* UNEP/MC/COP.3/1.

5. Work by ILO to date has focused on mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (art. 7), but the organization is currently expanding the scope of its initiatives to include mercury exposures in the e-waste sector (art. 16). ILO generally promotes its international instruments towards the prevention of occupational diseases and injuries caused by mercury and implements projects in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining and automobile dismantling sectors. It continues to produce global codes of practice, research papers and working documents to aid the implementation of the Minamata Convention. Future efforts include continued work in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector and a possible joint project with WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme to protect medical workers in the dental sector from hazardous exposure to mercury. On 4 July 2019, ILO presented its activities related to the Minamata Convention at a briefing addressed to the Geneva international community, organized by the Geneva Environment Network. An update on the activities of ILO relevant to the Minamata Convention is set out in annex II to the present note.

6. The secretariat continues to engage with ILO and WHO through the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, which is the international coordinating mechanism on chemicals management.

Suggested action by the Conference of the Parties

7. The Conference of the Parties may wish to request the secretariat to continue active cooperation and collaboration on health-related issues with the relevant intergovernmental organizations, in particular WHO and ILO. The Conference of the Parties may also wish to consider ways in which to promote consultation, collaboration and information exchange with those organizations, as provided for in paragraph 2 of article 16.

Annex I

Work of the World Health Organization relevant to the Minamata Convention on Mercury

1. Collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury and secretariat of the Minamata Convention stems from the Convention text, in particular paragraph 2 of article 16; the Minamata Convention Conference of Plenipotentiaries resolution on matters pertaining to other international bodies; and World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.11 on public health impacts of exposure to mercury and mercury compounds: the role of WHO and ministries of public health in the implementation of the Minamata Convention.
2. In the period from July 2018 to June 2019, WHO activities relevant to the Minamata Convention focused on the matters set out below.

WHO guidance on prioritization and planning for implementation of the health-related articles of the Minamata Convention

3. Owing to the multiple roles required of ministries of health in implementing the Minamata Convention, WHO has developed guidance on strategic planning for implementation of the health-related articles of the Convention. The guidance recognizes that the approach taken in any country will need to be adapted to that country's particular needs and circumstances. Therefore, the document sets out key considerations to be taken into account while developing plans, as well as guidance on the mainstreaming of mercury actions into various health programmes in support of article 16 on health aspects. The guidance will be published and released in the six official languages of the United Nations in the second half of 2019.
4. In the second half of 2019, WHO will also support a number of countries in applying the guidance and developing their strategic plans.

Regional workshops convened by WHO

5. WHO has completed a series of regional workshops to raise awareness and promote networking among ministries of health to support the implementation of the Minamata Convention and resolution WHA67.11. A booklet summarizing the outcomes of the workshops was released during the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in November 2018, and is now available in the six official languages of the United Nations.¹

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining

6. In December 2019, WHO will publish the guidance document *Addressing health aspects in the context of developing national action plans under the Minamata Convention on Mercury*, for wide dissemination to health ministries. It addresses the health impacts of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM). The working version of the document, provided to the Conference of the Parties at its second meeting, was prepared in response to resolution WHA67.11, and drew on a member State consultative process.
7. WHO is piloting the use of the guidance in three African countries that are in the process of developing wider national action plans on ASGM as required under the Convention. The pilot work has been carried out in Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria and comprises a rapid health situation assessment and an institutional capacities and systems assessment. The pilot work, which will be completed by December 2019, informed the development of the guidance document.
8. Other materials on ASGM and health currently in preparation include guidance on how to conduct a rapid assessment of the health situation of ASGM miners and their family members, developed based on the pilot work carried out in the three African countries.

Dental amalgam

9. The phase-down of the use of dental amalgam through the Minamata Convention could catalyse a profound change in dentistry. Published in 2018, "The Minamata Convention and the phase down of dental amalgam"² provides the perspective of WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the implementation of the phase-down of the use of dental amalgam. It lays

¹ https://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/publication/en/.

² <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/96/6/17-203141.pdf>.

out a set of strategic interventions aligned with the nine measures set out in part II of annex A of the Convention. The interventions are directed at a multipronged approach that combines waste management, knowledge management and the strengthening of health systems in the context of universal health coverage.

Mercury-containing thermometers and sphygmomanometers

10. WHO is partnering in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project entitled “Reducing UPOPs³ and mercury releases from the health sector in Africa”, which is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (2016–2019). The project introduces mercury-free thermometers and sphygmomanometers in pilot health facilities in four sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana, Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia).

11. On 26 and 27 June 2019, WHO convened an expert consultation on technical specifications for non-invasive blood pressure measuring devices. The consultation discussed key recommendations and a draft technical publication that will serve as a key reference for countries phasing out mercury-containing devices and seeking to use validated automatic blood pressure measuring devices as an alternative technology. Implementation issues, including capacity-building and training, were also discussed. WHO is also producing a report on the decommissioning of medical devices that includes information on mercury-containing devices. Both reports should be published as WHO guidance by the end of 2019.

Mercury and methylmercury in fish

12. The Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods⁴ is continuing its work on establishing maximum limits for mercury in fish.

Biomonitoring

13. WHO, through its Regional Office for Europe, has collaborated with UNEP on the implementation of a GEF project entitled “Development of a plan for global monitoring of human exposure to and environmental concentrations of mercury”. A harmonized approach to the assessment of prenatal exposure to mercury has been developed, including a WHO human biomonitoring survey protocol and a set of standard operating procedures for sampling and analysis, both of which are available online.⁵ Data on exposure to mercury has been collected in pilot surveys in six countries and is being prepared for publication.

Intersessional work of the Conference of the Parties

14. WHO contributed to the work of the ad hoc technical expert group on effectiveness evaluation of the Minamata Convention. WHO representatives participated in the group’s meeting held in Geneva from 8 to 12 April 2019.

Global mercury assessment and state-of-the-science review of mercury biomarkers in humans

15. WHO led the development of the chapter on human biomonitoring of mercury for the *Global Mercury Assessment 2018*. The basis for the chapter was a WHO-commissioned state-of-the-science review of mercury biomarkers in humans worldwide between 2000 and 2018.⁶ The review, published in the scientific literature in October 2018, established a global benchmark for human exposure to mercury and identified vulnerable populations and geographical regions for which data was lacking.

World Health Assembly

16. In May 2019, the seventy-second World Health Assembly took note of a progress report by the WHO secretariat on the implementation of resolution WHA67.11. The next progress report is scheduled for the seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, in 2021.

³ UPOPs stands for unintentional persistent organic pollutants.

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/committee/en/?committee=CCCF>.

⁵ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/chemical-safety/publications>.

⁶ <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP3904>.

Annex II

Work of the International Labour Organization relevant to the Minamata Convention on Mercury

1. Collaboration between the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the secretariat of the Minamata Convention is based on the text of the Convention, in particular paragraph 2 of article 16. ILO and its constituents have focused their technical support in line with article 7 of and annex C to the Convention, covering artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), and are starting to expand the scope of its initiatives to include mercury exposure in the e-waste sector.
2. Since the adoption of the Minamata Convention, relevant ILO activities in support of the implementation of the Convention have included promotion of ILO international instruments, project work at the country level, and production of global codes of practice and working documents, as described below.

Promotion of ILO international instruments for the prevention of occupational diseases caused by mercury

3. In the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted in June 2019 at the 108th session of the International Labour Conference, the Conference declared that “safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work”.¹
4. ILO, through its offices worldwide, has been promoting the ratification and the implementation of the ILO international instruments relevant to mercury exposure in various member States. This includes promotion of the Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170); the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 (No. 174); the Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No.176) and the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184). The Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), aims to strengthen national occupational safety and health (OSH) systems and infrastructure within which to anchor the implementation of the other ILO OSH conventions. Moreover, under the Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121), workers have access to a remedy to the exposure to mercury (schedule I, List of Occupational Diseases para. 12). This is in addition to the List of Occupational Diseases (revised 2010) in the annex of ILO Recommendation No. 194 concerning the List of Occupational Diseases and the Recording and Notification of Occupational Accidents and Diseases [List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002], which includes diseases caused by mercury or its compounds (para. 1.1.7).
5. ILO is currently developing diagnostic criteria notes to provide for coherent diagnosis of the occupational diseases listed in ILO Recommendation No. 194, including diseases caused by mercury or its toxic compounds, which will also be instrumental in reporting on Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 8.8.1.
6. At the ninth China International Forum on Work Safety, held in October 2018, ILO organized a parallel session to discuss OSH risks in the mining sector in China, during which issues of exposure to mercury in the mining sector at the national and global levels were discussed. ILO also promoted the Minamata Convention at a workshop organized with the Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency, held in July 2019 for OSH government officials from 10 member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), on “Adapting to the future of work: tackling current and future challenges on occupational health in ASEAN”.
7. ILO has provided continued support to the Philippines in the implementation of the ratified ILO Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No. 176). The Philippines is currently revising its list of occupational diseases in line with ILO Recommendation No. 194, as are Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Namibia.

Projects in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector

8. In the Philippines, ILO is conducting the project “Convening actors to develop and implement strategies to reduce child labour and improve working conditions in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (Caring Gold Mining Project)”. This four-year project is funded by the United States Department of Labour and addresses child labour, decent work deficits and working conditions in

¹ https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/provisional-records/WCMS_711288/lang--en/index.htm.

ASGM. It is aimed at regulating ASGM and has included many promotional and awareness-raising activities. The project team works in collaboration with BAN Toxics, a non-governmental organization that has long partnered with ASGM communities in the area of eliminating mercury use. As part of the project activities, the fifth National ASGM Summit was held in the Philippines on 27 and 28 September 2018, emphasizing the need for improved OSH in the small-scale mining sector and the elimination of child labour and mercury use.²

9. Further, ILO is promoting the use of the gravity concentration method as a mercury-free gold processing technology in the project's pilot sites in the Philippines. ILO is also supporting the work of the ASGM Technical Working Group of the Philippines and expanding its scope to include child labour and the promotion of decent work.

10. In 2019, the Caring Gold Mining Project team participated in baseline data collection on mercury use in ASGM and the drafting of the Minamata Initial Assessment (MIA). The project team lobbied for the expansion of membership of the MIA technical working group to include the Philippines Department of Labour and Employment and the Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development as an important step in increasing the multi-stakeholder nature of Minamata Convention engagement and implementation at the national level. In November 2018, the Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued a resolution instituting the creation of the MIA technical working group, including representatives from the Department of Labour and Employment and Department of Social Welfare and Development. In addition, the project team continued to implement mercury-free technology training/coaching sessions in mining communities, particularly in Camarines Norte. Finally, development of a national action plan on ASGM, which includes initiatives to address mercury use in ASGM, is ongoing.

11. The International Training Centre of the ILO and the Caring Gold Mining Project team organized the first Inter-Regional Knowledge-Sharing Forum on Child Labour and Working Conditions in ASGM,³ which was held in Manila in May 2019, bringing together more than 50 experts on the topic. Sessions were organized for the promotion of the Minamata Convention and mercury-free technologies, including one on the Minamata Convention as it relates to the ASGM sector and another with a panel on good practices, where representatives from the University of Mines and Technology in Ghana shared information on a technology being developing with Caring Gold Mining Project support, involving direct smelting of gold using a flux as an alternative to mercury amalgamation. Following the forum, there was a South-South exchange activity in which Ghanaian delegates visited a model mine that uses a mercury-free gravity gold concentration method and a plant where experiments are being conducted on using salt to extract gold from ore.

12. In Ghana, ILO contributed to significant progress made in 2019. The organization participated in the drafting, validation and launch of the MIA, which was completed and deposited it with Minamata Convention secretariat. ILO is also a member of the technical working group developing a national action plan on the elimination of mercury. In addition, within the framework of the Caring Gold Mining Project, ILO is working on the development of the mercury-free direct smelting gold processing method being developed at the University of Mines and Technology. With Friends of the Nation, a local non-governmental organization involved in the work of the technical working group on mercury, ILO is also developing a Minamata Convention communications campaign anchored on the link between mercury use and child labour. Finally, the Caring Gold Mining Project is also a member of the National Steering Committee overseeing the implementation of the entire complaint regime for the Minamata Convention.

13. In Guyana, ILO supported the Guyana School of Mining in the finalization of the OSH inspection manual for small and artisanal open-cast mines. The manual, which makes reference to the Minamata Convention and its principles, was motivated by a recent incident in the Guyana Gold Board related to mercury contamination from the amalgamation process.⁴

14. In Suriname, ILO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, is in the process of finalizing a draft manual similar to the Guyanese manual. Within the process, ILO will reflect the provisions of the Minamata Convention and explore synergies with the GEF-sponsored ASGM project being carried out by the United Nations Development Programme.⁵ In addition, an ILO decent work country programme

² https://www.ilo.org/manila/eventsandmeetings/WCMS_645607/lang--en/index.htm.

³ https://www.ilo.org/manila/eventsandmeetings/WCMS_701934/lang--en/index.htm.

⁴ <https://dpi.gov.gy/cdc-niosh-visiting-team-submits-findings-to-paho-who/>.

⁵ <https://www.thegef.org/project/artisanal-and-small-scale-gold-mining-asgm-national-action-plan-nap-suriname>.

agreement will be signed in 2019, which will enhance the momentum of activities related to this process.

15. In Mauritania, ILO is developing initiatives to address the growing environmental and health concerns raised by the exponentially growing mining activity, particularly in the north of the country. L'Union Nationale du Patronat de Mauritanie (UNPM), the national employers' organization, has expressed an interest in taking common action with ILO to inform artisanal and industrial prospectors of the short-term and long-term risks associated with the industry. In early 2019, ILO held discussions with UNPM to conduct an assessment of OSH risks and a capacity-development programme for safety officers in gold mines (northern Mauritania). This includes mercury exposure risk assessment and safety and health risk prevention efforts. ILO looks forward to securing funding for this activity with a view to implementation in the next biennium.

Project in the automobile dismantling sector

16. In Fiji, a project entitled "Promoting decent work and a just transition in automobile dismantling sector in Fiji", which was funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and implemented by ILO during the period October 2017–September 2018, had the immediate objective of promoting better jobs through the improvement of occupational safety and health and green growth and an increase in the number of those jobs in the automobile dismantling sector in Fiji. It also aimed at contributing to the prevention of occupational exposure to mercury and its safe disposal. The first report of a field survey showed that none of the car dismantling garages surveyed in Fiji applied the recommended mercury disposal methods. As a follow-up to the project, there are plans to develop and promote the application of occupational safety and health and environmentally friendly waste disposal guidelines and widespread training targeting policymakers, sector stakeholders and society in general.

Global codes of practice, research papers and working documents

17. In March 2019, ILO participated in an international Chemical Safety Seminar convened by the Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Council to share ILO standards and tools on the safe management of hazardous chemicals, and successfully promoted the provisions of the Minamata Convention with respect to mercury exposure.

18. In 2019, ILO published an issues paper entitled "Decent work in the management of electrical and electronic waste (e-waste)".⁶ The paper notes the role played by the Minamata Convention in protecting human health and the environment from mercury emissions and releases, and thus in the management of e-waste, much of which contains mercury.

19. In addition, ILO organized the Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the Management of Electrical and Electronic Waste, held in Geneva in April 2019. The forum unanimously adopted points of consensus for future action on the management of e-waste.⁷ ILO is also a member of the United Nations e-waste coalition, formed to increase collaboration, build partnerships and provide support more efficiently to help States to address the e-waste challenge.

20. ILO has published a study entitled *Sectoral Studies on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains: Comparative Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges for Social and Economic Upgrading*, which it is currently promoting among constituents.⁸ The study includes a case study on "Promoting Decent Work in Global Supply Chains: The Gold Industry" (pages 49–88) that refers to OSH concerns related to mercury use in the gold mining sector.

21. In 2018, ILO and its tripartite constituents adopted a code of practice on safety and health in opencast mines,⁹ developed based on the code of practice adopted at the Meeting of Experts on Safety and Health in Opencast Mines, held in Geneva, from 16 to 20 October 2017. The code of practice requests Governments and employers to take preventive action on hazardous chemicals, including mercury.

⁶ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/publication/wcms_673662.pdf.

⁷ https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/recommendations-conclusions-of-sectoral-meetings/WCMS_685681/lang-en/index.htm.

⁸ https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_485367/lang-en/index.htm.

⁹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_617123.pdf.

22. ILO is currently finalizing a working paper on the risks of exposure to mercury for workers in ASGM. The paper explores ways to reduce ASGM workers' exposure to mercury, support ILO technical assistance, promote a sustainable culture for accident and disease prevention and improve OSH. The document is part of the endeavour to promote technologies for improving or eliminating mercury use by artisanal miners in line with article 7 of the Minamata Convention, and to promote good safety and health practices at ASGM sites.

ILO continued support and future initiatives

23. In the ASGM sector, formalizing artisanal mining is a crucial step towards resolving the problem of mercury use and ensuring that gold is produced responsibly and in keeping with voluntary social and environmental standards. ILO interventions will consist of conducting targeted studies and proposing sustainable mining approaches and projects to Governments through a tripartite arrangement involving the authorities responsible for mining resources, miners' organizations and employers' organizations, with the goal of finding alternatives to mercury-based ore processing methods and enhancing OSH practices. Governments will be encouraged to implement binding action plans for reducing mercury use in ASGM.

24. In the health-care sector, discussions are under way to expand the work of ILO by collaborating with UNEP and WHO on a multi-country project to protect medical workers in the dental sector from hazardous exposures to mercury.
