



## SPEECH

### Remarks by Rossana Silva Repetto, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, at the opening ceremony of the Third Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury

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Geneva, 25 November 2019

*Mr. Marc Chardonens, State Secretary, Federal Office for the Environment of Switzerland*

*Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme*

*Mr. David Kapindula, President of COP3*

We have heard from Mr. Chardonens the need to effectively implement the Convention; we have also heard from the Executive Director of UNEP alarming figures that remind us that mercury is still being released and emitted, and the harms that such emissions and releases can provoke.

I wish to dedicate my opening remarks to you, the actors of the Minamata Convention, and thank UNEP for having provided me with the honour during these almost two years to serve the convention, to serve you, to be part of this fascinating international legal instrument with the objective to fight against the negative effects of mercury on human health and the environment.

In these incredible almost two years I have had the opportunity to serve you, a group of wonderful committed governments, institutions and individuals, who, not only in an excellent way represent their countries and entities but a group of people who really care, who believe in what we do, who are individually committed to make the Minamata Convention's aspirations a reality, to make mercury history!!!

I am grateful for the privilege of having been given the responsibility to initiate the Minamata Secretariat, of having been entrusted the task to operationalise its establishment, to put into practice what the authors of the convention and those who adopted it, decided to create, regulate and reflect in the Convention's text, including your decision to entrust to the UNEP Executive Director the performance of the functions of the Minamata Secretariat.

A friend of the Minamata Convention thanked me the other day for the work done under my tenure during the infancy of the Minamata Convention. She said we have turned the Minamata Secretariat into a well-oiled machine (mercury-free, of course)! I want to thank all of you for having supported the Secretariat in its initial steep ascent!

It has not been easy, it has been a roller coaster, tough, sometimes very tough but at the same time fantastic, exciting, rewarding as the results are tangible.

The three trust funds that you decided to have were established and are operative; the administrative basis of the Secretariat is well in place; the two components of the Convention's financial mechanism, the GEF and the Specific International Programme, are very successfully supporting countries with the implementation of their obligations under the convention; a number of technical guidance documents were produced and are in place; the various technical intersessional processes and groups established have delivered excellent products, the Group of Experts on Effectiveness Evaluation has in an outstanding way completed its assignments; the Implementation and Compliance Committee, subsidiary body of the Convention that promotes the implementation of, and review compliance with, all the provisions of the Convention, worked very hard and established the basis for its work, elaborated its Rules of Procedure, which were adopted by COP2, and submitted to this COP a proposal for its further TOR.



Your Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention is now established on very solid foundations, and this will allow us to dedicate our efforts to the most important mission of our work, which is implementation: Implementation through our support to those parties who need assistance in order to be able to strengthen their national frameworks to fully comply with their obligations under the convention, and attain the objective of the Convention.

For this task, time is of the essence, as the first evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention is due to begin no later than six years after its entry into force, in 2023. You are going to define at this meeting a mechanism to evaluate how effective the convention is. It is our common wish that the results of such evaluation reflect that our convention is proving to be effective. For this to happen, we need to work on the implementation of the convention at all levels in order to yield the fruits that indicate, in the data that will be collected, that we are on the right path towards attaining the objective that you, yourselves established for the Minamata Convention.

I am very proud of what my team and I have done, have managed to accomplish in very difficult circumstances. I want to thank my team, a small group of very committed staff members, who not only work hard but look for excellence and hold the highest standards. You may remember when last year a 5-staff member Secretariat organised COP2 with support from the BRS Secretariat, the UNEP Chemicals and Health Branch, Corporate Services and Law Divisions, and the UNEP Europe Office. We are a fully-staffed Secretariat today, with staff members to occupy the last two vacant positions having been selected and joining soon.

I had the privilege to visit Minamata a couple of months ago. I used the work “privilege” because I think it was. Many of you visited Minamata on the occasion of the Convention’s adoption at Kumamoto, and will share my feelings: Work for the Minamata Convention and having had such a privilege in life, what else could we ask for? The feelings and emotions that the beautiful bay and people of Minamata inspired in me are deep. I think I can summarise them as “having understood even better our role, our objective, the raison d’être of our work, our mission!”

The museum of the Minamata disease, which I visited, starts by showing in its first exhibition rooms what was happening in the late 1940s, with people and their animals started to behave strangely. In those times the world did not know about the effects of mercury in human health.

The museum continues showing in the following exhibitions rooms, through a time line, a series of happenings, including the official confirmation of the Minamata disease and the calls for a Minamata Disease Centre that were made at the First United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in 1972 in Stockholm, which, as we know, also gave birth to UNEP. Curiously enough, the time line ends in 2013 with the adoption of the Minamata Convention.

We have just heard what the situation and the problems with mercury that the world faces, still are, we know that the adoption of the convention is not the end but the beginning, the point of departure of a new time line, the time line that started in 2013 when the international community united and with one voice showed its determination to address the negative effects of mercury through a convention on mercury.

That time line will only end once we have a world free of anthropogenic mercury emissions and releases, a world where human beings and the environment will no longer live under the threats posed by mercury. This is not a dream, it is a reality, a reality that started when you decided to get together and negotiated and adopted this global legally-binding instrument.

Another incredible moment in Minamata was when I met Mr. Masami Ogata. Mr. Ogata is a victim of the Minamata disease, he is an expert carpenter, he sculpts furniture and he sculpts dolls, the Japanese Kokeshi dolls. Masami’s dolls are not ordinary wooden dolls, they are the soul of Minamata! Masami makes them with his hands, from wood of the Mishou Woods in the reclaimed lands of the Minamata Bay.

Masami so generously gave me a doll, his dolls have no eyes, no nose and no mouth. He said he does not complete his creation because his hope is that we complete the dolls with our heart. Masami’s message is that the international community cannot afford a repetition of the Minamata tragedy in other parts of the world, that it is necessary to learn from the past and look ahead, look to the future.

We are Masami’s messengers! This is what we are all doing here, putting eyes, nose and mouth to Masami’s Kokeshi dolls, committing to deploy all our efforts and energy to attain the objective of the Minamata



Convention, to help Masami's dream become true, a world without the Minamata disease! A world that has left mercury and its negative effects behind, a world where mercury is history!

Thank you very much!

**Rossana Silva Repetto**

Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention