

For immediate release:

Groups Submit to Japanese Government CSO Joint Statement on Mercury Export Ban

October 15 2009. Tokyo, Japan. Japanese civil society groups today presented to the Japanese government a petition entitled “Enact Mercury Export Ban Act”, calling on the government of newly-elected Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama to stop Japanese trade of the toxic element, mercury. The petition was endorsed by 114 civil society organizations (CSOs) from all over the world who are concerned about the worsening mercury pollution. The petition was also sent to Mr. Katsuya Okada, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Sakihito Ozawa, Minister of the Environment.

“Japan has experienced the Minamata disaster decades ago. Japan knows fully well the implications of uncontrolled mercury-use and pollution. Yet our current policies do not show that we have learned from this horrific incident,” said Mr. Takeshi Yasuma of Citizens Against Chemicals Pollution, one of the lead groups initiating the petition. “There must never be another Minamata.”

At the 25th session of the Governing Council of the UN Environment Programme at Nairobi in February 2009, governments unanimously decided to launch negotiations on a legally binding international mercury treaty to deal with world-wide emissions and discharges of mercury, that threatens the health of millions, from fetuses and babies to small -scale gold miners and their families.

In the autumn of 2008, the European Union and the United States enacted mercury export bans and took related actions to promote safe storage of excess mercury. The move was made in order to stop further use of mercury, since these are often used in environmentally unsustainable practices such as small-scale gold mining.

Japan, on the other hand, continues to export 100 metric tons of mercury per year mainly derived from nonferrous metal smelters and recycling of mercury containing wastes. Trade data shows that Japan has been exporting to Hong Kong and the Netherlands, two major trading ports. It is likely that Japanese exporters have no control what happens to the mercury after they sell it.

In this regard, the CSO joint statement strongly requests Japanese government to take the following action immediately.

1. To enact a Mercury Export Ban Act.
2. To safely place in long-term storage all Japanese surplus mercury in Japan.
3. To show good leadership to realize the International Mercury Treaty and increase effort to create mercury storage capacity for Asia and the Global Mercury Partnership.

The statement was endorsed by the 54 Japanese and 60 overseas CSOs including those working on the issues of chemicals pollution, biodiversity, public health, Minamata diseases, human rights, poverty, labor, consumer, etc.

“We are certain that a Japanese mercury export bans in concert with the EU and the US will have a big impact on mercury reduction worldwide, and will surely contribute to accelerate the promotion of an effective international mercury treaty to be set up by UNEP in the immediate future.” Mr. Richard Gutierrez, Executive Director of Ban Toxics, one of the overseas CSOs supporting the petition, explained.

End

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Attachment

Civil Society Organizations Joint Statement
Japanese Government Needs to Enact Mercury Export Ban Act