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Resolve Minamata before global mercury treaty named for victims
NGOs around the world support Minamata victims’ demands for a resolution of
the ongoing tragedy after 55 years

(Chiba, Japan) Seventy-two NGOs from 42 countries today signed a statement of solidarity with
Minamata victims’ groups who insist that the ongoing tragedy must be properly addressed by the
Government of Japan and the Chisso Corporation before the global mercury treaty can take the
name the Minamata Convention in 2013.

The Honoring Minamata Statement was signed in a ceremony at the Makuhari Messe
Conference Centre in Chiba, site of the current second negotiating meeting for the mercury treaty.
In 2010, then Prime Minister Hatoyama proposed naming the mercury treaty, the Minamata
Convention, though the proposal was not discussed with Minamata groups prior to its
announcement.

“We call on the Government of Japan to make a public commitment to resolving the tragedy and to
take concrete steps toward a genuine resolution of the tragedy before the treaty is finalized in 2013,”
said Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN co-chair. “After 55 years of struggling, we stand in solidarity
with the Minamata victims’ groups in calling for a genuine resolution of the problem.”

“Naming the global mercury control treaty the Minamata Convention directly connects the treaty
to the tragedy,” said Olga Speranskaya, IPEN co-chair. “If the treaty has this name, then the
victims and their legitimate demands must be honored and the lessons of the Minamata tragedy
must be applied to the treaty.”

The resolution followed a statement yesterday by the Minamata victims and supporter groups in
opposition to naming the international treaty for the Minamata disaster before victims’ issues
were resolved. Specifically, the groups called for:

-Clarity on the full extent of the disaster
-Compensation for all victims
-Fidelity to the “Polluter Pays” Principle
-Full clean up mercury contamination in Minamata Bay and Shiranui Sea

Minamata disease is a serious and often deadly illness caused by exposure to methylmercury. It
is named after Minamata Bay in Kumamoto Prefecture where the first outbreak of this disease
occurred due to fish contaminated with methylmercury. Over the years, more victims have come
to light and now tens of thousands of people have reported being stricken with the disease.
The methylmercury entered the Bay from the wastewater discharges of a plant owned by the Chisso Corporation. The plant produced the chemical acetaldehyde using a mercury catalyzed process. Although the disease was first diagnosed in 1959, the Chisso Corporation plant continued discharging methylmercury into the Bay through 1968.

Despite a public apology by Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama in 2010 and a 2004 ruling by the Supreme Court of Japan that the Government of Japan and the Kumamoto Prefecture were responsible for not preventing the spread of the disease after 1960, the vast majority of victims remain unrecognized and uncompensated.

In 2009, the Government of Japan enacted the Minamata Disease Victim Relief Law, which law allowed the Chisso Corporation to split into two companies to enable it to limit its Minamata disease liabilities.

In 2010, when he apologized to Minamata residents, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama expressed the hope that Japan would actively contribute to creating an international treaty for preventing future mercury poisoning and proposed naming the treaty the *Minamata Convention*.

A representative of the Government of Japan then formally proposed naming the global mercury control at the First Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee Meeting to prepare a global legally binding instrument on mercury was held in Stockholm, Sweden in 2010.

The proposal to name the treaty for the Minamata victims had never been discussed with Minamata victims’ groups prior to its announcement.

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*The International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) is a global public interest NGO network with more than 700 Participating Organizations in 100 countries in all regions. IPEN Participating Organizations in many countries and in all regions collaborated to advance the common goal of creating a strong and effective global POPs treaty. IPEN now works with NGOs at regional, national, district and community levels in support of POPs elimination efforts at a step toward a future world where toxic chemicals no longer cause harm to human health or to the environment. www.ipen.org*