

23 January 2011

Statement by Minamata Victims and Supporter Groups Addressing the Government of Japan's Proposal to Call the Mercury Treaty the "Minamata Convention"

Minamata disease is an ongoing tragedy. As the global community negotiates the mercury treaty, the Japanese government must first confront the Minamata disease issue at home. After fifty-five years of struggling with the disaster, we are opposed to naming the mercury treaty the "Minamata Convention" until the tragedy is faced head on and a road map created for its genuine resolution. The Government of Japan must make clear what was learned from Minamata, implement the lessons learned and, before the diplomatic conference in 2013, reexamine its policies and make concrete progress toward a genuine resolution of the elements described below.

The Government of Japan must implement the following with integrity:

1. Clarify the full extent of damage caused by Minamata disease

Although it has been 55 years since the official discovery of Minamata disease, the full extent of the actual damage is yet to be clarified. Not only is it absolutely necessary to undertake health studies of the entire contaminated region of the Shiranui Sea, follow up studies must continue for the residents living in this contaminated area. Recently, research has shown that children are affected by mercury contamination even at low levels of exposure. Therefore, it is also necessary to implement studies and measures based on these findings.

2. Compensate all victims

The Supreme Court verdict of October 2004 established the legal responsibility of the Government of Japan and Kumamoto prefecture for spreading Minamata disease. The Osaka District Court verdict found that the criteria established by the Government of Japan in 1977 to certify victims of Minamata disease "had no medical basis." The Government of Japan must respect these legal decisions and recognize all victims as Minamata disease victims, and, compensate them.

3. Instead of protecting the polluting company, ensure full implementation of the "Polluter Pays Principle"

Under the Minamata Disease Victim Relief Law enacted in July 2009, the polluting company Chisso Corporation has been allowed to split into two companies, and this process is moving forward. The polluting company must not be allowed to escape its legal responsibility. The offender must be made to fulfill its responsibilities as the polluting company.

4. Clean up the Minamata Bay and Shiranui Sea mercury contamination

Minamata Bay and the Shiranui Sea were contaminated as a result of several hundred tons of mercury emitted by the Chisso Corporation's Minamata factory. There are numerous contaminated areas existing within the city of Minamata. Thorough decontamination of

these contaminated areas is essential. Also, the existing landfill of part of Minamata Bay is only a temporary storage area for the toxic methylmercury and cannot be considered final decontamination of the area. It would be a travesty to hold the ceremony for a “Minamata Convention” at the very place where massive mercury contamination is being ignored.

5. Establish a health and welfare system so that victims can live secure lives within their society

There are so many victims, including congenital Minamata disease victims, who are living their daily lives in anxiety, worrying about the situation concerning the health and welfare system in the areas where they live. Monetary compensation alone does not solve the problems victims encounter. It is absolutely necessary to have a health and welfare system that victims battling with their own illness and victims continuing to nurse seriously ill victims can feel secure about.

Implementation of the above is not just an issue for Minamata alone. Beginning with Niigata, Japan, which fell victim to the second Minamata disease, there are innumerable locations around the world contaminated with mercury, and even more in the process of being contaminated. We believe that if the mercury treaty learns the lessons of Minamata, then it will indeed be a treaty of great significance. The tragedy of Minamata was the result of eating fish contaminated with mercury. We the undersigned fervently hope for a strong global treaty, which will significantly decrease mercury contamination worldwide so that fish are once again safe to eat.

Signatures

**Minamata Disease Mutual Aid Society
Association of Minamata Disease Victims
“SHIRANUI”**

**Minamata Disease Victims’ Mutual Aid
Society**

**The Collaboration Center for Minamata
Disease Victims (NPO)**

**Solidarity Network Asia and Minamata
Green Action**

**Organizing Committee “Symposium
Addressing Chisso and Government of
Japan’s Minamata Disease
Responsibility”**

**Tokyo Association to Indict [Those
Responsible for] Minamata Disease**

**Editorial Office of “Support for Minamata”
Magazine**

Minamata Disease Tokai Association

**Tokai Region Minamata Disease Victims
and Families’ Mutual Aid Society**

**Nagoya Association to Indict [Those
Responsible for] Minamata Disease**

Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)

Contact Information

**Association of Minamata Disease Victims
“SHIRANUI”**
2-2-20 Sakurai-cho, Minamata City, Kumamoto
867-0045 Japan, Tel/Fax +81-966-62-7502
Email: mdshiranui-v@friend.ocn.ne.jp

Minamata Disease Victims’ Mutual Aid Society
108 Nanpukuji, Minamata, Kumamoto
867-0023 Japan, Tel/Fax +81-966-63-8779
Email: ezg01444@nifty.ne.jp