

Intervention at GRULAC Regional Meeting on Jan. 13

Delivered by Mr. Yoichi Tani

Good morning. It is my pleasure to be with you today to talk about the plight of Minamata victims in Japan and my concern about the proposed name for the treaty.

My name is Yoichi Tani from the Collaboration Center for Minamata Disease Victims in Minamata, Japan. My work has been to provide support to Minamata victims and their families for more than 40 years. You may be surprised to know that the tragedy is still happening. In fact, two months ago more than 65,000 victims have applied to the government for compensation under the Relief Law of Minamata Disease.

Many Minamata victims are opposed to the proposed name of the Minamata Convention. I also want to inform you that the local authorities from the Minamata City Council have asked that the treaty be given another name.

Minamata victims oppose the name for several reasons. Many authentic victims have been denied recognition. A comprehensive health study of the disaster was never performed. Currently, there is 1.5 million m³ of mercury-contaminated sludge still at the site. How can we in good conscience accept the name Minamata Convention when mercury-related injustices continue to plague Minamata?

The treaty is very weak in addressing contaminated sites. It ignores critical provisions on victim compensation and environmental remediation. This makes it ironic to call it the Minamata Convention. We could simply follow the example of The Biodiversity Convention and the Desertification and Land degradation Convention, and just name it the Mercury Convention.

Finally I want to express my strong support for the GRULAC proposal to have an article 20 Bis on health aspects to ensure a stronger treaty

We appeal to you at the GRULAC to choose a different name for the treaty. We would like you to consider naming it, the Mercury Convention.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions.