

MoE Minamata Meeting on June 26, 2011

This is a brief description of the meeting held on June 26 at Minamata by the Ministry of Environment, Japan to explain the Mercury Treaty to Minamata people.

This is the first time for MoE to hold this kind of meeting with Minamata people on the treaty.

It is supposed that MoE felt the necessity to have a meeting with Minamata people on the treaty, especially in the context of "the name of Minamata", which was proposed in May 2010 without any prior notice to Minamata people.

As I attended the meeting as an observer, I am preparing this report.

On behalf of Minamata victims and their supporters, I thank all friends and groups who showed solidarity to them.

MoE Minamata Meeting

Date: June 26, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Organizers: Ministry of Environment with the cooperation of Kumamoto Prefecture and Minamata City

Number of people present: Approx. 100

There seemed no noticeable mobilization for participation by organizers.

1. Meeting agenda

(1) Opening

(2-1) Introduction of INC for Mercury Treaty (Mr. Tatsushi Terada, a high-ranking officer from MoE)

(2-2) Summary of Mercury Treaty and Japan's Effort (Mr. Teruyoshi Hayamizu from MoE)

(3) Kumamoto Prefecture's Effort on Mercury Treaty (An officer from Kumamoto Prefecture)

(4) Lesson's Learned from Minamata Disease and Creation of New Town Minamata (An officer from Minamata City)

(5) Question and Answer

(6) Closing

2. Explanation by MoE, Kumamoto Prefecture and Minamata City

(1) MoE explained the status of mercury in Japan and world, schedule of INCs for the Mercury Treaty, purpose of the treaty, expected provisions of the treaty, Japan's position and effort, and then Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's proposal in May 2010 to name the treaty Minamata Convention.

(2) MoE stated that if mercury export is banned or restricted by the treaty, the major problem for Japan to resolve is storage of surplus mercury which is mainly derived from nonferrous metal smelters and recycling of mercury containing products,

(3) Japan's basic position for the treaty

(i) To strengthen regulation of mercury at each country.

(ii) To build an international framework which allows countries including developing ones as many as possible to join the treaty.

(iii) To restrict and, where possible, to eliminate use of mercury in products and industrial process, and trade of mercury.

(iv) To reduce mercury emission to environment by introducing BAT.

(v) To actively contribute to the Mercury Treaty so that damage of health and destroy of environment may not occur as Minamata disease at any country in the world.

(4) Kumamoto Prefecture and Minamata City welcomed the Diplomatic Conference to be held at Kumamoto, but did not talk much about naming the treaty Minamata Convention.

3. Question and Answer

(1) No specific discussion was made on "Minamata Convention", although one participant stated that he objected to the naming.

- (2) Concerns about the safety of the mercury contaminated landfill site and other contaminated sites around Minamata bay were raised from floor by several attendees.
- (3) The Minamata landfill site was reclaimed by highly mercury contaminated (more than 25ppm) massive sludge (1.51 million m³) dredged from Minamata bay and it was completed in 1990 after total 14 year construction period at approx. USD 6 billion.
- (4) Mr. Komatsu, the then site manager of the construction at the initial stage about 34 years ago noted that the design and construction were carried out based on the tentative guidance shown by the then government. He raised his concern that the lifetime of steel piles for seawall is less than 50 years and no seismic design was taken into account in safety consideration of the landfill.
- (5) He asked whether the tentative guidance is still valid, and also how authorities consider the safety of the landfill against corrosion of the steel piles and supposed earthquake.
- (6) As for the tentative guidance, MoE replied clearly that it remains unchanged, but as for safety of the landfill, nobody gave clear reply to the question.
- (7) Some other attendees also asked the safety of other contaminated sites called Hachiman residue pools which are contaminated mainly by highly alkaline massive residue of carbide including some other toxicants like mercury. There was also no clear reply to the safety of the Hachiman residue pools.
- (8) A new petition to the Minister of MoE signed by five Minamata victims and supporters groups was introduced and handed to the high-ranking officer of MoE. The petition states that if Minamata issues have not been resolved by the time when the diplomatic conference will be held in 2013, the treaty will lose its influence.
- (9) The petition asked the following five points which were basically same as the ones in the Minamata victims and supporters statement released at INC2 in January 2011 at Chiba, Japan. If the signature ceremony for the treaty is to be held at Minamata without a genuine resolution of the elements of the petition, the ceremony must be ironical and even funny,
 - (i) Clarify the full extent of damage caused by Minamata disease
 - (ii) Compensate all victims
 - (iii) Instead of protecting the polluting company, ensure full implementation of the "Polluter Pays Principle"
 - (iv) Clean-up the Minamata Bay and Shiranui Sea mercury contamination
 - (v) Establish a health and welfare system so that victims can live secure lives within their society



A new petition to the Minister of MoE was handed to the high-ranking officer of MoE.

End

Note:

The International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) released its statement on June 23 that "Resolve Minamata before global mercury treaty named for victims" together with photos showing global support for Minamata victims on its Minamata webpage at: <http://ipen.org/minamata/>

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