



For Immediate Release: 11 June 2010

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Mercury Treaty Negotiators Tested for Mercury

Survey shows human contamination

(Stockholm, Sweden) During the first UN negotiating meeting to create a new mercury control treaty, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) tested for mercury in the hair of 45 government delegates. The survey found mercury in all of them.¹ The amount of mercury in hair provides an estimate of methylmercury in the body. Fish consumption is the main way people are exposed to methylmercury which is toxic to human health.

The survey tested negotiators from 40 countries and found mercury levels between 93 ug/kg and 2956 ug/kg. More than one-third of the samples exceeded the US National Research Council mercury reference dose of 1000 ug/kg.² Surprisingly, average mercury levels in people from developing and transition countries were twice the levels measured in delegates from developed countries. The difference was statistically significant.

"Mercury is now a personal issue for many treaty delegates," said Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN co-chair. "We hope this new information strengthens the collective resolve to deliver a strong and comprehensive treaty."

"We want the delegates to confront the mercury treaty negotiations from a fish-eaters point of view," said Imogen Ingram, Island Sustainability Alliance based in the Cook Islands. "That means acting to protect our children and billions of people who rely on fish for food."

Globally, fish is a major source of human exposure to mercury and a vital source of food. According to the UN, fish provides at least 40% of protein for two-thirds

¹ Those tested included: 45 government delegates and 8 representatives of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples. In addition, 4 Swedish members of Swedish parliamentary parties- Andreas Carlgren (Minister of Environment, the Center Party), Göran Hägglund (Social Minister Party Leader, Christian Democrats), Mona Sahlin (Party Leader, Social Democrats) and Maria Wetterstrand (Party Leader, The Greens), and 1 Swedish Olympic Game Gold Winner, Anja Pärson- were tested.

² The reference dose is a level set for pregnant women to avoid adverse fetal brain development effects



of the world's population, including most of the world's poor.³ Cooking or removing the skin does not remove mercury. Mercury is highly toxic, especially to the developing brain. The nervous system damage is irreversible.

Mercury is transformed into methyl mercury by micro-organisms in the environment. Methyl mercury then accumulates up the food chain as larger fish eat smaller ones. Due to long-range transport, high mercury levels are observed in the Arctic, far from the sources of any significant releases. This makes mercury contamination a global issue.

Mercury is released to the environment from many sources including: coal combustion, mining activities, mercury-containing products and devices, product manufacturing sites, metal refining and recycling, cement kilns, waste dumps and incinerators, contaminated sites, crematoria and many others.

IPEN – Is a global network of more than 700 public interest organizations from over 100 countries working for the elimination of toxic substances threatening current and future generations. For more information about IPEN's Mercury Free Campaign see: www.ipen.org/hgfree

³ Commodities Atlas: Fishery Products, UNCTAD – UN Conference on Trade and Development