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For More Information

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High Contamination Levels Make Vlora Mercury"Hotspot"

Final Negotiation on International Mercury Treaty Begins Jan. 13

(Tirana)A new report finds that high mercury levels in fish regularly exceed health advisory guidelines and have created a mercury "hotspot" in Vlora Bay. The report highlights the urgent need for an overall reduction in mercury emissions as government delegates convene next week in Geneva for a final negotiating session to establish an international mercury treaty – the first global treaty on the environment in more than a decade by theUnited Nations Environment Programme.

Vlora Bay is an important fishing area and fish from the area are distributed to all cities in Albania. For this study, two fish species were sampled: mullet (Mullus surmuletus) and cod (Merluccius merluccius).

The results from this study shows that average mercury levels in mullet are 2.8 times higher than the US EPA reference dose of 0.22 ppm. The maximum mercury values observed in mullet are more than four times higher than the reference dose. Two of the mullet samples also exceeded the EU limit (data not shown). Four of the cod samples also exceeded the reference dose as indicated by for example the maximum mercury value.

"This report clearly demonstrates the urgent need to reduce overall mercury emissions to air, land, and water. This study and other studies have found mercury contamination associated with the abandoned chlor-alkalki facility in Vlora and that means that our government must take immediate action to clear this area" said Jonida Mamaj, project coordinator and EDEN Cernter.

The report released today in Tirana, Albania is part of a larger project conducted by the scientific team of the Biodiversity Research Institute and IPEN, a global network of non-governmental organizations. A report, ***Global Mercury Hotspots,*** [ISSUED JANUARY 9] by IPEN and BRI brings together new data on mercury concentrations in fish and human hair samples and identified, for the first time, a set of global biological hotspots where elevated levels of mercury are sufficient to pose serious threats to both ecosystems and human health.

“Fish and human hair from around the world regularly exceeded health advisory levels,” Jonida Mamaj, project coordinator, EDEN Center. “The results demonstrate the need for a mercury treaty that mandates true reductions of mercury emissions – not just to air but to land and water as well. Mercury is a large and serious global threat to human health that requires a robust and ambitious global response.”

Concluding negotiations on the mercury treaty will take place 13-18 January, 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.

There are also growing objections to naming the treaty the Minamata Convention, as proposed by a former Japanese prime minister, and holding the treaty signing ceremony in Minamata, Japan, a site where mercury contamination has devastated the community’s human and animal population for decades. As currently proposed, the treaty doesnot contain anyobligations to identify or cleanup contaminated sites, doesnot require polluters to pay for health damages or environmental cleanup or provide for protection from similar disasters occurring anywhere in the world. Objections to the name have been raised by some government delegates, the Minamata City Council, and some survivors of the tragedy.

Human activities such as burning coal, mining and refining metal ores, and the manufacture of cementrelease mercury into the environment. Large intentional usesof mercury today include small-scale gold mining and vinyl chloride monomer production. Coal combustion is also a significant contributor to atmospheric mercury emissions and subsequent global deposition. Much of the mercury produced and used eventually volatizes into the atmosphere and travels around the globe, eventually falling back to the earth or ocean.

When mercury falls into the ocean, microorganisms transform it into an especially toxic form of mercury, methylmercury, which then becomes part of the food chain.Methylmercury is readily absorbed by the body and people are exposed primarily through the consumption of fish. Many national and international health organizations recognize mercury in fish as a threat to human health, livelihoods and the environment.

The dangers of mercury poisoning have been known for centuries. Exposure to high levels of mercury can permanently damage the brain and kidneys. Harmful effects are also passed from a mother to her developing fetus and can result in brain damage, mental retardation, blindness, seizures and an inability to speak.

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EDEN center aim to contribute in a sustainable development and healthy environment through informing, educating and offering services in partnership with the interested actors**. EDEN** believes that a sustainable development and a healthy environment are possible.

IPEN’s mission is a toxics-free future for all. The IPEN network is comprised of more than 700 public-interest organizations in 116 countries. IPEN leaders include grassroots activists and nationally and internationally recognized experts in the fields of science, health, environment and public policy.

The mission of **Biodiversity Research Institute** is to assess emerging threats to wildlife and ecosystems through collaborative research and to use scientific findings to advance environmental awareness and inform decision-makers.