



Mr. Masami Ogata
President of Minamata Disease
Municipal Museum
Storytellers Group

It has been four years since the Plenipotentiary Conference on Minamata Convention was held in Minamata and the convention came into effect this August.

The sufferers' constant appeals have changed the world. People who were damaged by mercury suffered for a long time in their lives. However, I want them to see the Minamata Convention and realize that their sufferings were not wasted. We promise that we will continue to tell about the facts and the truth of Minamata disease in order to have the Minamata Convention ratified all the countries of the world.



Mr. Kenji Nagamoto
Fetal Minamata disease patient

There are Minamata disease patients whose conditions have worsened. However, there are people who use mercury to make money. I want all the people in the world to think about the people who have suffered because of mercury.



Ms. Kiyoko Kagata
Fetal Minamata disease patient

There are many more bed-ridden Minamata disease patients in Minamata. I cannot walk any more. I am so afraid of going outside with my wheelchair because of staircases. Minamata disease is not over yet. I don't want mercury or other dangerous chemicals to be put into the environment any more.



Mr. Yuji Kaneko
Fetal Minamata disease patient

I want to be able to take one more step again.



Mr. Isamu Nagai
Fetal Minamata disease patient

I want mercury in the environment to be eliminated. With more research, the entire world should be able to get rid of the threat of mercury.



Mr. Koichiro Matsunaga
Fetal Minamata disease patient

Minamata disease destroyed our environment and deprived us of our human rights. It is pleasing that the entire world won't use mercury anymore. I am praying that diseases caused by pollution like this will never happen again.



Ms. Fujie Sakamoto
Certified Minamata disease patient,
mother of Shinobu Sakamoto

If there is no need of using mercury, then we should try not to use it. Safe treatment is necessary.

It is too late to deal with pollution after it occurred. It is really too late when some people were damaged. There have been no Minamata disease patients who had recovered. The most important is not to cause any pollution.

Pollution causes the damage which threatens more than some ten thousands of people. The government should take quick actions before they hear the claim from the patients or people who were damaged. The governments are the ones to take measures seriously.

NO MORE MINAMAMATA



*Minamata disease
is not over yet.*

*Understand the damage
caused by mercury.*

坂本しのぶ

● Ms. SHINOBU SAKAMOTO

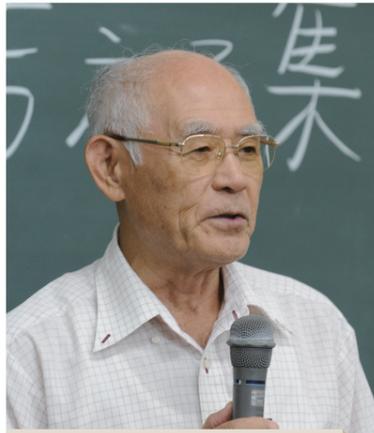
Fetal Minamata disease patient.
Born in Minamata city, Kumamoto prefecture, Japan, in 1956. Shinobu travelled to Stockholm with her mother, Fujie and other supporters where for the initial UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in 1972. She spoke on the damage caused by Minamata disease to the world. This was the first time for Shinobu to travel overseas.
Representative of 'Thinking over the Mercury convention from Minamata'

Minamata disease is not over yet.

More than 60 years have passed since Minamata disease occurred and many patients passed away from their sufferings. The older those people have become, the worse their conditions gets. Some are not able to walk anymore by themselves and some have become unable to speak clearly.

I don't know how long I will be able to meet people and talk with them. That is why I want to do what I can do now. By going to Geneva, I want everyone to understand the damage caused by mercury.

By agreeing to the Mercury convention and restricting the use of mercury all over the world, a tragedy like Minamata disease should never be repeated.



Dr. Hirokatsu Akagi

Director, International Mercury Laboratory

Dr. Hirokatsu Akagi is a researcher who is known as the developer of 'Akagi Method', mercury analysis method. Dr. Akagi has investigated and researched mercury all over the world and has focused on the diffusion of mercury analysis method. After his retirement from the National Institute for Minamata Disease of the Ministry of Environment, he established a private laboratory, 'International Mercury Laboratory' in Minamata City.

Technology transfer is a challenge.

We, Japanese, experienced Minamata disease twice and many people died of this and many people are still suffering. Thanks to new techniques of mercury analysis, it has become clear that fish all over the world contain Mercury. Now many people are paying attention to the mercury issue.

The significance of Mercury pollution is incalculable. I have researched mercury pollution in Amazon river basin with other scientists since 1993. It is said that about one million people are involved in gold mining. These workers have been exposed to Mercury through inhalation of mercury vapor into lungs and mercury is also being released into the atmosphere. About 40 to 45 % of the used mercury has been poured into the river and about half of dissolved mercury has been transformed to methylmercury. The fishermen were polluted with mercury and some had quite high hair concentrations of around 150 ppm. We also found that umbilical blood of fetus had higher mercury concentration than blood of the mother.

In Article 19 of the Minamata Convention, it is stated that 'monitoring is inevitable'. Measuring mercury is not so easy and technical know-how is necessary. However, technology transfer takes at least 10 years. So it could be an obstacle for enforcing these regulation. In addition, Article 12, which deals with identifying polluted sites and conducting assessment, depends on an evaluation process that requires effectiveness of measures and analysis techniques, in order to understand the degree of pollution. Starting this all at once is so difficult. I think it is a challenge for Japan to support this transfer of technology.

Minamata Disease: This is the pollution caused by the Chisso company, which released methylmercury contained in wastewater into Minamata Bay and was officially recognized as a disease in 1956. The current number of patients certified by the Japanese government is 2282. About 70,000 people are acknowledged to have been damaged by mercury. Health check of residents in the polluted areas has not been done. Because of this, the entire picture of the damage is not clear yet. Therefore, many people still apply for certification and many are claiming compensation through lawsuits.



MINAMATA CITY

Country: Japan
Prefecture: Kumamoto Prefecture
Area: 163.29 km²
Total Population: 25,178 (August 31, 2017)



Dr. Shigeru Takaoka

Director, Kyoritsu Clinic

Director of Kyoritsu Clinic for neurology, psychiatry and rehabilitation in Minamata where he treats Minamata disease patients. Secretary General of the Association of Doctors against Environmental Pollution of Kumamoto Prefecture, a group which has done the health check of over 10,000 patients and residents damaged by mercury in Shiranui Sea area.

Investigate the health effects.

Methylmercury damages occurs mainly in the parietal lobe or occipital lobe in the brain. Those who are damaged often shows the symptoms such as numbness of limbs, sensory disorder, cramp, staggering, dizziness, impairment in judgement and memory, and narrowing of the visual field. Chronic methylmercury intoxication does not appear immediately after exposure. Health damages diverse individually. There are cases in which damages occurs to the central nervous system even with a very low hair mercury concentration level.

As for the background of Minamata Convention, there are several facts such as the outbreak of Minamata disease, the globalization of mercury pollution, health damage caused by low concentration levels of methylmercury, and exposure to mercury at the small scale gold mining sites. When mercury pollution occurs, national governments and research institutes must check the mercury level of people in the area. Although there are sufferers who have been complaining various symptoms today in Japan, our government has never conducted the examination of mercury concentration levels in the hair at sites where pollution is suspected, nor in Minamata. This attitude of trying to hide the evidence made the damage much more serious. Also in Japan, the judgement criteria for Minamata disease was made arbitrarily by the government. Therefore, it made difficult for sufferers to receive relief measures and it inhibited the progress of medicine and public health as well.

I am expecting each government to not make political standards for certification when mercury pollution occurs and to investigate the health effects caused by low concentration level exposure.



Mr. Hideo Ikoma

Infant Minamata disease patient

Due to the fact that the Chisso company continued to release effluent containing mercury, despite knowing that mercury was very dangerous and because the national government did not regulate the effluent, I developed Minamata disease at the age of 15. Mercury is very dangerous. Many countries should pay attention to its danger. Then all the countries should conclude the treaty and make an effort not to cause any pollution.



Ms. Suemi Sato

Member of Minamata Disease Sufferers' Mutual Aid Society

People around the world now think that Minamata disease is over. However, the struggle of Minamata disease is continuing. Although there are more and more sufferers, the Japanese government has not acknowledged their condition and ignored sufferers to erase the memory of Minamata disease. Mercury destroys the daily living of people and their families. It is a real threat. I want people around the world to know this threat and make efforts to restrict mercury.



Ms. Yukimi Kuramoto

Plaintiff of Minamata disease lawsuit

I was exposed to mercury in mother's womb and after I was born I ate lots of fish not knowing those fish was polluted. At the age of around 50, I realized that I had been very weak because of mercury for the first time. I can never get rid of mercury, but I want to convey the threat of mercury until I die. I pray the earth is the place where people can consume fish without fear.



Mr. Yoshihiro Yamashita

Former chairman of Chisso labor union

When nature, the environment and health are destroyed, they can never be recovered all at once. This lesson has not yet been learnt in Japan. A factual investigation of the damage of Minamata disease on the people of Minamata has not yet been conducted and the reclaimed land which was the drainage site of the effluent from the Chisso plant containing mercury has not yet designated as the pollution site based on the Minamata Convention. Therefore, precautionary principle should be kept. I want the Minamata Convention to be strict and continue to protect us.



Mr. Hideki Sato

Chairman of Minamata Disease Sufferers' Mutual Aid Society and one of the plaintiffs of Minamata disease lawsuit

It is very important to convey the voices of Minamata disease sufferers in order to make people understand the lesson of Minamata disease. This time, making people hear the voice of Shinobu means people will understand the reality of Minamata disease, so that more countries go forward to conclude Minamata Convention and try hard to eliminate mercury pollution.



Mr. Yuji Nakayama

Secretary General of Minamata Disease Sufferers Society

I think that the Minamata Convention presents a framework and a direction for the restriction of mercury. It is just a starting point for the world to have concrete agreement on measures for the restriction of mercury use and a way to enforce them. The Japanese government has the responsibility to take the initiative and to implement this agreement at the same time as well as to contribute to the world mercury issue.