

For immediate Release

Mercury in Fish is a Global Health Concern

Citizens' groups^[i] say problem warrants immediate United Nations action

[11 February 2009, Pietermaritzburg] As the world's governments convene next week to discuss developing a legally binding treaty on mercury, citizens' groups from around the world have released a new report calling attention to the significant global human health hazards caused by mercury in fish and fish-eating marine mammals. The international *Zero Mercury Working Group* (1) released the study, which maintains that the problem demands an effective response from governments and the United Nations.

"Mercury contamination of fish and mammals is a global public health concern," said Michael Bender, report co-author and member of the *Zero Mercury Working Group*. "Our study of fish tested in different locations around the world shows that internationally accepted exposure levels for methylmercury are exceeded, often by wide margins, in each country and area covered."

According to the report, "*Mercury in Fish: An Urgent Global Health Concern*", the risk is greatest for populations whose per capita fish consumption is high, and in areas where pollution has elevated the average mercury content of fish. In cultures where fish-eating marine mammals are part of the traditional diet, mercury in these animals can add substantially to total dietary exposure. In addition, the study shows that methylmercury hazards still exist where these dietary and local pollutant levels are less prevalent.

"The proposals outlined in the report, including labelling certain fish products and stronger controls on mercury pollution, should be instituted without delay," said Rico Euripidou, groundWork (2). "All governments should consider these results and agree launching an International Negotiating Committee (INC) to start work immediately on a global mercury treaty, in Nairobi next week."

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Notes and More Information:

The press release is available at: <http://www.zeromercury.org/press/090210-MercuryFishRelease.pdf>

The full report is available at:

http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/FULL_FISH_REPORT_FINAL+.pdf

The executive summary is available,

In FR at: http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/EXECSUMM_FRENA4.pdf

In ES at: http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/EXECSUMM_SPANA4.pdf

In PT at: http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/EXECSUMM_PORTA4.pdf

In CHI at: http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/EXECSUMM_CHINA4.pdf

The report indicates that mercury is a persistent, bioaccumulative transboundary pollutant that contaminates our air, soil, water and fish. Because of this potential for global contamination, mercury pollution requires a coordinated international response.

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that can make its way up the food chain into humans, and poses an increased exposure risk to developing fetuses and young children and to adults exposed to mercury.

The report is simultaneously co-released by more than 20 NGOs around the world, namely - Zero Mercury Working Group, European Environmental Bureau, Ban Toxics!, Mercury Policy Project, Indonesia Toxics-Free Network, World Wildlife Federation - Guinea, Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, Pollution Probe, Pesticide Action Network – Mauritius, Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement, Health & Environment Alliance, CEPHED, ACPO, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Pro-biodiversity Conservations in Uganda (PROBICO), Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control (UNETMAC), East African Sustainability Watch Network, Ecologistas en Accion, Legambiente, Arnika, France Nature Environnement, German League for Nature and Environment, DISHA, Sierra Club, NRDC, groundWork, Friends of the Earth, SA.

(1) The **Zero Mercury Working group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 75 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the EEB and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The aim of the group is to reach “‘Zero’ emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally.”

(2) **groundWork** is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organization working primarily in South Africa but increasingly in Southern Africa. We seek to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance, placing particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices. One of our project areas is a health care waste campaign which seeks to assist health care providers in phasing out toxics like mercury in health care.