



PRESS RELEASE

EU leading the way towards world mercury export ban

(Brussels, 26 October 2006) - Environmental and health NGOs^[i] welcomed the European Commission's proposal for a regulation to ban EU mercury exports and ensure the safe storage of surplus mercury, so that it will not re-enter the global market.

"The European Commission has taken a leadership role in the world through its hands-on approach to reducing mercury in the environment, by controlling mercury supply", said Elena Lymberidi, the EEB's Zero Mercury Campaign Project Coordinator.

The NGOs believe that this sends a clear message both to world governments attending the European Commission International conference today and tomorrow, and to participants at the forthcoming UNEP Governing Council meeting in February 2007.

"We are happy that the EU has decided to control mercury flows which go to developing countries," said Rickford Vieira, Gold-mining Pollution Abatement Coordinator, WWF Guianas "Other developed countries should now take similar measures which will help to better protect goldminers and their families, in developing countries as well as global food supplies."

"The Commission recognised that it is very important that mercury supply and demand are addressed simultaneously," said Michael Bender Director of the Mercury Policy Project and co-founder of the Zero Mercury Working Group "This should also happen globally; mercury is a deadly pollutant which should stop being traded internationally."

The NGOs also acknowledge the importance of tracking mercury to ensure accountability as mentioned in the proposed regulation.

However, despite encouraging progress towards a mercury export ban, NGOs would like to have seen mercury compounds and mercury-containing products, which are, or soon will be, subject to use and marketing restrictions in the EU, included in the scope of the ban. They also regret that the proposed implementation date may be as late as June 2011, when the necessary action could be taken much faster. NGOs have been seeking a 2008 export ban, whereas the European Parliament resolution of March 2006 sought implementation by 2010.

In addition, NGOs are concerned that the Commission is allowing the potential for permanent storage of mercury, before an environmentally sound method guaranteeing such an approach, is developed and understood.

"A transfer of polluting technologies and products to the developing countries will not prevent the entry of mercury into the ocean and the fish we eat in Europe", said Karolina Ruzickova of HCWH Europe.

Mercury is a global pollutant traveling long distances around the globe. Its most toxic form – methylmercury - accumulates in large predatory fish and is therefore transferred to our bodies through the fish diet, affecting the most vulnerable people – pregnant women and children.

The environment and health NGOs therefore call on the European Parliament and Council to strengthen the directive by widening the scope of the export ban and ensuring that implementation of the agreed measures takes place much more swiftly.

For further information:-

See letter sent to Commissioners:

http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/060907Letter_%20to_Commissioners_Mercury_Export_Ban.pdf

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^{i[i]} Environmental NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in all EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. The aim of the EEB is to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable the citizens of Europe to play their part in achieving that goal.

The **Zero Mercury Working group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 40 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau 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."

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), <http://www.env-health.org/> is an international non-governmental organisation advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being. Member groups and organisations represent health, environment, women, health professionals and others. The group has a diverse membership of 41 member groups (6 international organisations, 11 European networks and 24 national/local organizations) including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), www.noharm.org, is an international coalition of hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, environmental and religious organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment.

And with the support of NGOs from the USA (Natural Resources Defence Council), India (Toxics Link), China (Global Village of Beijing), Brazil (Association for Combats against the POPs).