

Minamata COP-6 Highlights: Monday, 3 November 2025

Delegates to the Sixth Conference of Parties (COP-6) started the day with music and inspiring opening addresses lauding the Minamata Convention as a model of global environmental governance to emulate before delving into discussion of the Convention's financial mechanism and tricky technical issues such as phaseout of dental amalgam, mercury in cosmetics, and mercury as a catalyst in the production of vinyl chloride monomer (VCM).

Opening

Katrin Schneeberger, Director, Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), Switzerland, said the Convention stands as a clear example of what nations can achieve when they work together, guided by science, with a shared vision, lifecycle approach, and a sense of responsibility. She suggested that it can serve as a blueprint for other processes.

Elizabeth Mrema, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said the Minamata Convention is a prime example of a "patient collective act of humanity choosing to do better together." She called for building on what we've learned, "carrying that knowledge into every mind, every factory, every community."

Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention, said it was important to expand Convention work under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in the next GEF replenishment, since most Parties will soon "feel the weight" of their Convention commitments. She declared herself "deeply optimistic" that the Convention will increase its positive impact on people everywhere.

COP-6 President Osvaldo Patricio Álvarez Pérez (Chile) urged the COP to "build on the collective commitments we have made," effectively address artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) and supply and trade issues, and "take specific and measurable actions" on financing.

Sierra Leone, for the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized the challenge posed by ASGM, mercury-added products, trade in mercury compounds, and the management of mercury waste. They underlined the criticality of adequate, predictable, and accessible financial resources.

For the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), Mexico reiterated, the commitment of the region to the full implementation of the convention. He highlighted the particularly negative effects of mercury pollution on vulnerable groups including Indigenous People, women, and children.

Saudi Arabia, for ASIA-PACIFIC, reiterated the importance of the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and equity principles. He emphasized the need for predictable financing and technical support.

Denmark, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION, expressed hope for progress on issues such as dental amalgams, highlighting that measure towards their prohibition have been adopted within the EU.

Georgia, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, emphasized the importance of regional collaboration and stressed the need for further synergies with other multilateral environment agreements (MEAs).

Organizational Matters

Delegates adopted the agenda (UNEP/MC/COP.6/1/Rev.1) and approved the organization of work presented by President Álvarez and detailed by the Secretariat (UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/4). Álvarez announced that a new Bureau, Implementation and Compliance Committee (ICC), and Governing Board for the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity Building and Technical Assistance (SIP) would be elected later in the week and called for all regions to submit their nominations for these positions by the end of plenary on Tuesday.

Rules of Procedure and Financial Rules for the COP

Rules of Procedure: The Secretariat introduced its note on the rules of procedure (UNEP/MC/COP.6/3), noting the rules still have bracketed text in rule 45 regarding the option for parties to take a decision by voting on matters of substance. She further explained that the text describes action that can be taken when deciding what is a matter of substance, or a matter of procedure. Delegates agreed to return to this item at COP-7.

Financial Rules: The Secretariat introduced its note on financial rules (UNEP/MC/COP.6/4), noting bracketed text in the COP-1 decision (MC-1/10) regarding contributions, and in annex text regarding procedures of allocation from the Specific Trust Fund. Delegates agreed to return to this item at COP-7.

Matters for Consideration or Action by the Conference of the Parties

Financial Resources and Mechanism: Global Environment Facility: The Secretariat introduced its note on matters related to the GEF (UNEP/MC/COP.6/10), the report of the GEF to the COP (UNEP/MC/COP.5/INF/13), and the executive summary of the GEF's report (UNEP/MC/COP.6/10/Add.1).

Chizuru Aoki, GEF Secretariat, highlighted, *inter alia*, that the GEF allocated USD 155.5 million for the implementation of the Minamata Convention within the 8th replenishment reporting period (1 July 2022 to 30 June 2025), and the projects approved are expected to reduce 911 metric tons of mercury.

Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-building and Technical Assistance: The Secretariat presented the relevant documents (UNEP/MC/COP.6/11, UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/15, INF/16, INF/40). SIP Governing Board Co-Chair Andrew Clark (US) highlighted the importance of SIP project impacts.

Review of the Financial Mechanism: The Secretariat introduced the draft terms of reference for the third review of the financial mechanism ([UNEP/MC/COP.6/12](#)).

In ensuing discussion, the EU, on behalf of Brazil, Norway, and Switzerland, presented their proposal (CRP1) on the draft decision in document UNEP/MC/COP.6/10, suggesting amendments such as leaving the choice of extending the SIP to COP-7. BRAZIL stressed the importance of a culturally grounded implementation of the Convention. The AFRICAN GROUP called for more guidance for the GEF to support developing countries and countries in transition. PAKISTAN recommended a mechanism for information sharing and best practices for developing countries. SOUTH AFRICA suggested a contact group to develop a proposal for a dedicated global programme to eliminate dental amalgam.

Regarding the draft terms of reference for the third review of the financial mechanism, SURINAME, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, SRI LANKA, COLOMBIA, MALDIVES, INDONESIA, and ECUADOR supported the draft decision, welcoming assistance from the GEF and other financial mechanisms. IRAN emphasized that support from the SIP should be global and non-discriminatory, noting it has not yet received any. Delegates agreed to adopt the draft decision, pending confirmation from the budget group on related implications.

Regarding the draft decision on the final mechanism, many countries highlighted the importance of the GEF and the SIP, calling for their replenishment and extension. The US objected to references in the draft decision to the Convention on Biological Diversity and climate change, requesting their removal. CANADA stressed the importance of maintaining Indigenous People prominently among vulnerable populations, noting they disproportionately bear the burden of mercury pollution. President Álvarez formed a small group including the CRP1 sponsors and other interested parties to address outstanding issues.

Mercury-added Products and Manufacturing Processes in Which Mercury or Mercury Compounds are Used: President Álvarez introduced the documents ([UNEP/MC/COP.6/6](#), [6/Add.1](#), [Add.2](#), [Add.3](#); [UNEP/MC/COP.6/INF/8](#), [INF/9](#), [INF/10](#), [INF/42](#) and [INF/44](#)), noting that dental amalgam, cosmetics and VCM are holdover items from COP-5.

Amendments to Annex A: Via video, US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said the US is eliminating the use of thimerosal in vaccines. He called for other Parties to do likewise and the Minamata Convention to revisit its exclusion from Annex A.

The US, the EU, NORWAY, the PHILIPPINES, SWITZERLAND, AUSTRALIA, BANGLADESH, BRAZIL, URUGUAY, SURINAME, PANAMA, PERU, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO), ZERO MERCURY WORKING GROUP, and WORLD ALLIANCE FOR MERCURY-FREE DENTISTRY supported the AFRICAN GROUP's COP-5 proposal to phase out dental amalgam by 2030 and add more phasedown measures to part 2 of Annex A. The UK, IRAN, SINGAPORE, INDIA, and ARGENTINA expressed reservations about the proposal. The matter was referred for further discussion to a Technical Matters Contact Group co-chaired by David Kapindula (Zambia) and Claudia Dumitru (Romania).

Cosmetics Listed in Part I of Annex A: The AFRICAN GROUP presented its proposal (CRP4) on strengthening the implementation of mercury-added cosmetics. They stressed activities such as mobilizing technical and legal assistance, border and customs controls, raising public awareness, and adequate financial resources to ensure effective implementation.

In ensuing discussions, the PHILIPPINES, THAILAND, UGANDA, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, MEXICO, ZAMBIA, NORWAY, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, BANGLADESH, PAKISTAN, INDIA, and SRI LANKA

largely supported CRP4, stressing its importance in protecting human health and the environment. JAPAN, the EU, and the US welcomed CRP4 as a basis for further discussion, noting the need for reformulation and streamlining of several elements.

WHO highlighted a multi-country project with Jamaica, Gabon, and Sri Lanka that has, *inter alia*: built lab capacity, led research on skin-lightening behaviors, and supported national communication strategies. UNEP highlighted its work on “shifting minds” that reaffirms mercury and other harmful chemicals have no place in cosmetics. The INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN) noted that 25% of skin-lightening products on the African market contain mercury concentrations exceeding international limits and stressed the health impacts of the use of these products. ECOWASTE and the ZERO MERCURY WORKING GROUP called for stronger enforcement of the global ban on mercury in cosmetics.

President Álvarez closed the session by asking Gabon, with the support of other African Group delegates, to consult with those parties that want amendments to CRP4 and to propose a clean text to plenary.

Consideration of the feasibility of mercury-free alternatives for manufacturing vinyl chloride monomer: The EU presented its proposal cosponsored by NORWAY and the US (CRP 5) containing a draft decision establishing that alternatives to mercury in VCM production are technically and economically feasible, and that Parties should therefore phase out the use of mercury for that purpose within five years.

The PHILIPPINES, AFRICAN GROUP, the UK, THAILAND, SWITZERLAND, AUSTRALIA, UGANDA, and IRAN supported the proposal.

CHINA lamented the high uncertainty surrounding the economic and technical feasibility of mercury-free catalysts and, supported by INDIA, called for further discussion in a contact group.

The NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL reminded delegates that VCM is by far the largest remaining industrial use of mercury and that mercury-free alternatives for its manufacturing would yield “huge global benefits.” Echoed by the ZERO MERCURY WORKING GROUP, they reported that most of the world uses ethylene, demonstrating the feasibility of alternatives.

Delegates agreed to request the Technical Matters Contact Group to prepare a draft decision on this matter.

In The Corridors

As delegates gathered in Geneva for the first day of Minamata COP-6, some worried that the proposal from the EU, Brazil, Norway, and Switzerland on the financial mechanism could create substantive and organizational challenges. One seasoned observer noted: “We don’t want to repeat the mess from BRS COPs,” where a proposal from the African Group on mobilizing financial resources from non-state actors led to protracted negotiations and important tensions among developing countries. When the Minamata COP decided to address the financial mechanism in a small group rather than establishing a dedicated contact group, thereby avoiding the replacement of the scheduled one on trade, the relief in the room was palpable. One participant joked: “This is nothing like the plastics negotiations!”

In the afternoon session, when delegates turned to technical issues, the debate slowed down and the lightness of the morning gave way to more somber discussion. The possible phaseout of dental amalgam took center stage, occupying most of the session’s time. As a result, two items originally scheduled for the afternoon were postponed to day 2 of the COP.

Many delegates welcomed the appointment of two experienced Minamata hands, both former COP Presidents, to co-chair the contact group handling the evening’s deeper discussion of the tricky technical issues of dental amalgam and VCM.