



MINAMATA DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 2013

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

On Thursday morning, Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, opened the Minamata Diplomatic Conference and said today celebrates multilateralism, underscoring it is time to act on mercury, and time to send an unmistakable signal that this is the beginning of the end of mercury as a threat to human health and the environment. He paid tribute to negotiators who were able to keep their focus on the core objective over four years of negotiation. He stressed that if we take the journey of the Minamata people seriously, we cannot allow economic expediency or the technological age in which we live to justify things that are unjustifiable.

Bakary Kante, Director of the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (DELCO), delivered remarks on behalf of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. He noted the Minamata Convention would address the devastating effects of mercury by reducing global levels while promoting sustainable development. He noted it demonstrated the power of a broad coalition of governments, industry and civil society to overcome global problems. He urged governments to sign and then become parties as soon as possible.

Nobuteru Ishihara, Minister of the Environment, Japan, then addressed the meeting, noting that the previous day's visit to Minamata had reminded all of the tragic history that had led to the launch of the Minamata Convention. He reiterated the Japanese Government's commitment to assisting developing countries in combating mercury pollution.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Following the opening ceremony, the Conference elected Nobuteru Ishihara as President. President Ishihara then presided over election of the remainder of the Bureau, and invited regional groups to submit their nominations. The Conference elected the following to the Bureau: as Rapporteur, Terezya Pius Luoga Huvisa (United Republic of Tanzania); Sargon Lazar Slewa Binzezzo (Iraq); Abdou Nassur Madi (Comoros); Gheorghe Salaru (Republic of Moldova); Anne-Rose-Marie Juganaru (Romania); Izabella Teixeira (Brazil); Robert Pickersgill (Jamaica); Sean Sherlock (Ireland); and Franz Perrez (Switzerland).

President Ishihara then presided over adoption of the Rules of Procedure, without amendment, as set out in UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/INF.1. He then outlined the provisional agenda for the meeting as set out in UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/1/Add.1. The agenda was adopted without amendment.

On the appointment of the Credentials Committee, President Ishihara proposed, and the Conference agreed, that the Bureau

act as the Credentials Committee with the support of the Secretariat. President Ishihara asked Robert Pickersgill (Jamaica) to prepare the report of the Credentials Committee. He reminded delegates that only countries that have submitted credentials in good order will be eligible to sign the Final Act, and only countries that submitted full powers will be able to sign the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The Conference then agreed to follow the proposed organization of work set out in UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/1/Add.1.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

After a brief recess allowing the Bureau as the Credentials Committee to meet to review the credentials, Pickersgill reported that 139 credentialed States are present, and that 121 States' credentials of full power were found to be in order. He noted that 18 States have not submitted credentials for their representatives and will be recorded as observers in the report.

ADOPTION OF THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

INC Chair Fernando Lugris (Uruguay) introduced the Convention text (UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/3), noting it was the result of many long hours of debate and compromise. He said it is a Convention that sets out ambitious targets to reduce levels of mercury being released into the environment, and is a legally-binding framework to tackle a substance of global concern of which we can all truly be proud. He highlighted that its provisions for capacity building and technical assistance will foster cooperation in reducing, and where possible, eliminating exposures to mercury.

President Ishihara recognized that without the efforts of Chair Lugris and the INC Bureau members, delegates would never have been in a position to adopt the Convention text today.

Tim Kasten, Head of the UNEP Chemicals Branch, explained the procedure for finalizing the text and ensuring its translations are consistent and equally authentic.

The Diplomatic Conference adopted the Convention text.

ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS

Preparatory Meeting Chair Fernando Lugris introduced the final resolutions (UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/PM/4), thanking all negotiators for their constructive approach and their willingness to agree in a short period of time on the resolutions that will guide the work to be undertaken before the Minamata Convention enters into force. He explained the resolutions address: arrangements in the interim period, financial arrangements, matters pertaining to other international bodies, and a tribute to the Government of Japan.

The Diplomatic Conference adopted the resolutions.



ADOPTION OF THE FINAL ACT OF THE CONFERENCE

On Thursday afternoon, President Ishihara presented the Final Act of the Conference (UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/CONF/L.1), stating that the Final Act reflects the outcome of the Conference and the resolutions and Convention already adopted. The Conference adopted the Final Act.

SIGNATURE OF THE FINAL ACT AND THE CONVENTION

At 3:25 pm, both the Final Act and the Convention were opened for signature. The following 86 countries and the European Union signed the Convention: Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Samoa, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Zambia.

The following 23 countries signed only the Final Act: Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Botswana, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Kiribati, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mauritania, Morocco, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Suriname, Uzbekistan, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

President Ishihara welcomed all new signatories of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and encouraged rapid ratification and implementation, and invited closing statements. Many delegates thanked INC Chair Fernando Lugris for his dedication and commitment throughout the process, the Secretariat for their work, and the Government of Japan for hosting the Conference.

Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan, lauded the momentous occasions towards which Japan has been striving for ten years, and expressed the commitment of Japan to invest USD 2 billion over the next three years in assisting developing countries to combat environmental pollution in three areas: measures to tackle air pollution, means to fight water pollution, and waste management projects. He also announced the launch of a capacity-building program for the prevention of mercury pollution.

Jean Omer Beriziky, Prime Minister, Madagascar, recalled that his country had participated since 2001 with UNEP in activities to fight mercury pollution through awareness-raising campaigns and as a member of the Global Mercury Partnership. He regretted that not all countries have sufficient financial resources, and appealed to the international community to "stand shoulder to shoulder" to protect the environment.

URUGUAY said mercury pollution does not respect international borders, and it requires integrated efforts to agree and make progress. He urged strengthening the pillars of sustainable development, and said the GEF Council has been provided with a historical opportunity to demonstrate its effectiveness.

ZAMBIA stated it was keen to join hands with the world to address environmental hazards such as mercury. He recognized UNEP support through its mercury 'toolkit' which had

contributed to Zambia being able to identify key areas in its economy where mercury needs to be addressed.

SWITZERLAND noted today was an important day for the environment and for multilateralism. She announced Switzerland would increase financial support for activities on mercury to a total of 7.5 million Swiss francs: 1.5 million francs to support early ratification and implementation and 6 million francs to support improving management of mercury in ASGM. She welcomed the agreement in Kumamoto on close cooperation with the BRS Secretariat.

The European Commission (EC) and Lithuania gave separate statements both on behalf of the EU. The EC welcomed the treaty's financial assistance provisions for developing countries and stated the EU is committed to continuing its support in the interim period. Lithuania said the name of Minamata, having been associated with tragedy, would now represent hope for the future coordinated action on mercury.

The Comoros, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, reiterated their request for financial and technical assistance during the interim period to facilitate rapid ratification.

ARGENTINA stressed that developing countries need to have appropriate financial resources and said human health and the environment should be protected without compromising people's well being.

BENIN called on all who still use mercury and who know its consequences to become part of the global movement to find ways and means leading towards its complete elimination.

BOLIVIA underlined his willingness and political will to work in a constructive manner towards the Convention's implementation, noted that without serious collaboration from the international community it will not be possible to achieve the set objectives, and noted disappointment that the Convention does not include references to indigenous peoples.

BRAZIL highlighted progress made in phasing out mercury from Brazil's chlor-alkali industry, the challenge of addressing ASGM, and the importance of measures to prevent illegal trade in mercury.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The experience of Wednesday's Minamata Day was still the focus of conversations as the Conference of Plenipotentiaries was opened on Thursday morning. Typhoon Danas stayed at bay after all and the excursion to Minamata was bathed in glorious sunshine to the great relief of organizers and delegates alike. Minamata citizens welcomed delegates for a day of remembrance of the city's suffering, opportunities to hear victims' stories, and celebration of its rehabilitation as a model eco-city. The serene beauty of the traditional *utase* fishing boats gliding across the bay and the joy of the children playing *taiko* drums were an extraordinary counterpoint to the city's hardship and suffering over several decades as a result of mercury pollution.

As countries prepared to adopt and sign the first new global environmental agreement in over a decade, the corridors were filled with palpable excitement, and at 11:11 am the Minamata Convention on Mercury was adopted to great applause. By the evening, as participants made their way to the reception at Kumamoto Castle, the Minamata Convention was well on its way: not only had 86 countries and the EU already joined as signatories, UNEP Chemicals has already launched the website of the Convention (www.mercuryconvention.org) to track progress towards entry into force.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries for the Minamata Convention on Mercury will be available on Monday, 14 October 2013 online at:

<http://www.iisd.ca/mercury/dipcon/>