FEDERAL MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

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DEPARTMENT OF POLLUTION CONTROL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

To: Mr. Timothy J. Kasten
Minamata Convention Interim Secretariat, Chemicals Branch
Division of Technology, Industry and Economics
The Head, DTIE, United Nations Environment Programme
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LETTER OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TO ACCESS THE FUNDS OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FUND (GEF) FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN (ASGM), IN SUPPORT OF THE RATIFICATION AND INPLEMENTATION OF THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of 170 million and has a long history of informal gold mining in the absence of any systematic exploration and development of large scale industry. There are over 500,000 artisanal miners in Nigeria and this number is expected to continue to increase as the price of gold remains high.

2. The current ASGM practices in Nigeria include mercury amalgamation where workers combine mercury with ores to form an amalgam with the gold, which is then heated often in or near homes. The heated mercury is released into the air, where it is directly inhaled by workers and their families. Mercury is particularly dangerous to children and pregnant women. Mercury Exposure in adults can cause permanent damage to the brain, kidneys, immune system and cardiovascular system. Artisanal gold miners with mercury intoxication may have difficulties with balance, motor coordination, tremors and vision.

3. The ASGM sector in Nigeria is unorganized and associated with social problems such as alcoholism and child labour.

The sector is known to be one of the most significant sources of mercury release into the environment in the developing world, and, according to the Artisanal Gold Council, ASGM accounts for about 15% of the world's annual gold production. The current estimate for mercury use by ASGM globally is at least 1,400 tonnes of mercury per year, and accounts for at least 30% of total annual anthropogenic mercury releases to the air, water and soil.

4. Over the years, the Federal Government of Nigeria has made efforts to reposition the mining sector for accelerated development especially within the context of safe and environment friendly mining operations. The Federal Ministry of Environment on behalf of Nigeria collaborated with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to convene the Anglophone West Africa regional Awareness raising workshop on Mercury in Artisanal Small Scale Gold Mining held on 8-10 June 2011 in Lagos, Nigeria. The workshop recommended the following amongst others:

i. The need for the development of appropriate and adequate policies and regulatory reforms, accurate data base on mercury use, risk management plan, adoption of environment friendly technologies and sustained awareness raising in all countries in the West African region as strategies for reduction in the use of mercury in ASGM.

ii. The need for the development of national strategies and action plans by countries in the West African subregion including a regional action plan for the phase out of mercury in artisanal and small scale gold mining sector.

5. It is important to note that the Government of Nigeria is aware of the challenges that lie ahead, taking into account the financial, technical and scientific constrains to immediate solutions nationwide. The signing and the ongoing process to ratify the Minamata Convention on Mercury will further boost necessary actions for implementation of this statutory instrument in Nigeria, and also assist the nation to address the reduction of environmental and health impacts of mercury exposure and contamination in ASGM activities. This is especially so, in Nigerian States of Zamfara, Niger and Kaduna already identified with high levels of Lead/Mercury contamination due to mining activities.

6. In this context, we would like to indicate our intention to access the Global Environment Fund (GEF) for the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) through the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), considering the current "more than insignificant" ASGM practices, and, the need to take steps to reduce and where feasible, eliminate the use of mercury in Nigeria. This process will further assist Nigeria in the early implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in line with Article 8 of the Text of the Convention.

7. Below is the detailed information of the Contact Point for the Minamata Convention in Nigeria:

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8. Please accept the assurances of the Honourable Minister's highest considerations.

Mr. Abdulkazeem Kasimu Bayero
Director, Pollution Control and Environmental Health
and National Focal Point, Minamata Convention on Mercury
For: Honourable Minister of Environment, Nigeria