STATEMENT

Opening remarks by Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, at the 15th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant (ICMGP 2022)

25 July 2022

Chair Dr. Lynwill Martin, co-chair Dr. Joy Leaner, Scientific chair Professor Vernon Somerset, distinguished scientists, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honor for me to deliver an opening remark for this historical meeting of the International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant, hosted in Africa for the first time, on behalf of the secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all the scientists who have been passing the torch to convene this biennial scientific conference. This conference is very exceptional and unique in that scientists from a broad range of disciplines work together to address the global challenges posed by one single substance – mercury. You are making this world a better place to live for everyone.

You know that science has been driving the development and implementation of the Minamata Convention. The intergovernmental negotiation of this treaty started based on the scientific understanding of the global nature of mercury pollution. Knowledge about the sources, pathway and impact of mercury led to the convention articles addressing the whole life cycle of mercury. Many of you participated in that process and directly contributed to the creation of the Convention.

Since then, scientists and technical experts have been contributing to the Convention`s guidance documents such as on reducing mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, controlling emissions of mercury from stationary sources, managing mercury waste and contaminates sites.

I thank you for this work.

This year commemorates the 50th anniversary of the UN Conference on Human Environment, and the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme. At the Stockholm +50 Conference in June this year, UN Secretary General António Guterres called for action against a "triple planetary crisis" – climate emergency, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. These three challenges are closely linked with one another, and I am very glad to find that this is reflected in the conference programme by including sessions on climate change and ecosystem impacts. In fact, scientists like no one else are aware of the linkages between various environmental problems, and it is us civil servants and policy makers who need to catch up and meaningfully reflect these linkages to improve policy coherence.

In this context, I am glad to inform you that the Minamata Convention secretariat published exploratory studies in cooperation with the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

secretariat on the interlinkage between chemicals and biodiversity, and the interlinkage between chemicals and climate change. These reports represent a modest but at the same time significant attempt to summarize the findings on these linkages, including the impact of chemicals on ecosystem services and potential increase in mercury emission due to permafrost melting. I say modest because we were limited in time, resources and expertise, and significant because it was for the first time such work going beyond chemicals and waste was undertaken by the four chemicals conventions together.

These reports were presented to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in March this year – COP-4, which adopted a decision on international cooperation and coordination, requesting the secretariat to gather and disseminate knowledge on the contribution of the Minamata Convention to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. Furthermore, the COP specifically requested the secretariat to work on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework expected to be adopted later this year. I look forward to working with the scientific community to follow up on these COP decisions.

The COP-4 also took several decisions with the support of mercury science. It agreed on the amendment of Annex A listing the mercury-added products to be phased out, on the basis of information on availability and feasibility of mercury-free alternatives. COP also requested technical expert groups to develop guidance on technology to control mercury releases to land and water, and thresholds to define mercury waste. Furthermore, COP-4 agreed to start the first evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention, on the basis of monitoring data and other available scientific, environmental, technical, financial and economic information, and agreed on an appropriate framework to do this. An Open-Ended Scientific Group was established consisting of experts nominated by parties and invited stakeholders, and the group is expected to work on mercury monitoring report and emissions and releases data summary, supported by input from a broader roster of experts. I believe that the discussion at the sessions on technologies, monitoring and effectiveness evaluation at this Conference will greatly contribute to the work of the expert groups under the Convention and by the secretariat that I have just outlined.

The 5th meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly held in February and March this year adopted a resolution on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. An Open-Ended Working Group will start meeting this year to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel. This is extremely positive global development and an opportunity not to be lost to increase awareness of challenges posed by chemicals use and emissions and for policy-makers to receive timely and consolidated scientific advice that responds to policy needs. My expectation is that the panel will also contribute and create an additional impetus to the scientific processes under the Minamata Convention, in particular by placing mercury in a larger context of variety of pressures and impacts on ecosystems and human health, including socio-economic considerations. The International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant can be a great asset to and collaborator of the future panel and I encourage you to follow this initiative closely.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the organizers of the Conference for the on-going cooperation between ICMGP and the Minamata Convention. The Convention secretariat started a series of online events entitled “Minamata Online” in 2020. This series consists of three streams – mercury science, implementation review and support, and preparation for COP. From its “season 2” in 2021 and 2022, ICMGP has been a co-organizer of the “mercury science” stream. Based on the outcome from this Conference, we plan to launch a Minamata Online Season 3. We look forward to working with the ICMGP organizers and scientists again on this.

I would like to close my speech by expressing my high expectation on the Conference in supporting the implementation of the Convention, and also wishing for the organizers' continued leadership towards the face-to-face conference to be held in Cape Town in 2024.

Thank you.

Monika Stankiewicz
Executive Secretary
Minamata Convention on Mercury