

STATEMENT

Remarks by Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, at the 16th International Conference On Mercury as a Global Pollutant (**ICMGP 2024**) in Cape Town, South Africa

22 July 2022

Minister Singh, Minister Bredell, thank you for welcoming us to your beautiful country.

Executive Committee and its co-chairs, Dr. Lynwill Martin, Dr. Joy Leaner, and Professor Vernon Somerset, thank you for guiding the work to make this conference a reality.

Cape Town, we are here!

After a long pause, the International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant is meeting in person, and I cannot fully convey how happy and honored I am to be among you here in Cape Town.

Distinguished delegates, thank you for your journey – your professional journey and your actual journey to ICMGP.

From Minamata to Africa and beyond. This theme conveys not only the reach of the Minamata Convention, but its point of origin.

It is those of you gathered here, and those who mentored us, guided us, and showed us the enormity of the challenge in front of us, who paved that road.

It was science that lit the way for community members, photographers, communicators and policymakers so that Minamata Disease became understood globally, a warning to all.

It was science that laid the groundwork for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee process that culminated in the Minamata Convention.

And it is science that will, in this current phase, help assess to what extent the Minamata Convention is making progress towards its objective, contributing to global action on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and harnessing technological and non-technological solutions to end mercury pollution.

Since long before the Minamata Convention was negotiated, ICMGP brought information to the attention of policy-makers and stakeholders who could drive action at the local, national and global levels, while spurring innovative collaborations among experts.

The world has come a long way since those early meetings. Awareness of mercury risks across a wide range of sectors, and action to address those risks, has increased dramatically. The Minamata Convention now has 148 Parties actively working together.

But you all know better than anyone that the work is not over.

We now have clearly in our sights the elimination of mercury-added products. At both COP-4 and COP-5, the recent meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, Annex A of the Convention on mercury-added products was amended, leading to dramatically increased coverage. It was African countries that led the charge to enhance the Convention's requirements on mercury use in products including dental amalgam.

Globally, this means that the need for mercury to be supplied and traded on the global market will be reduced.

But some persistent issues remain, such as the widespread use of highly dangerous skin lightening cosmetic products containing mercury. The production and marketing of these products, relying on a false image of beauty, simply must stop.

Another difficult challenge is of course artisanal and small-scale gold mining, which continues to be the largest source of mercury emissions globally.

Here we are at the tip of the enormous continent of Africa, where artisanal and small-scale gold mining using mercury continues to impact communities across the continent as they pursue their livelihoods.

I recognize the tremendous efforts of so many of you here, and of our Parties and stakeholders in Africa and in other regions, to develop and implement National Action Plans on ASGM, to work through the planetGOLD programme and other programmes on trade and supply chain management.

I also applaud you for your efforts to increase the voices of workers, Indigenous Peoples, women, and local communities in decision making for this important sector.

The work on ASGM advanced by the Minamata Convention and the Global Mercury Partnership is an early example of "just transition".

And in this context, I would like to emphasize that Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth are "architects of change" whose engagement as full partners in the planning, decision taking, implementation and evaluation of any action will lead to better and faster change.

I am proud Parties to the Minamata Convention has recognized this in the adopted landmark decision on the effects of mercury pollution on Indigenous Peoples and on local communities.

Many of our parties will be undertaking their first reviews of implementation of Article 7 on ASGM, and I encourage you to lend your expertise to our parties in this effort. I look forward to the in-depth discussions on ASGM during the week, including to hear about what is not working as well as it should be.

As you are most certainly aware, there is now a serious global focus on the negative impacts to biodiversity, including marine biodiversity from pollution. Mercury is central to this dialogue. The Minamata Convention has affirmed its engagement in this challenge through recent decisions of the Conference of the Parties and collaboration with the Convention on Biological Diversity. Your expertise here can advance those efforts and the mutually reinforcing implementation.

The strong focus of the Minamata Convention on mercury emissions sources, including from industries listed in Annex D of the Convention must be central to any effort to address triple planetary crises, including to protect sensitive ecosystems and their biodiversity, to protect climate, and also to ant efforts to protect human health. The input of this conference will help guide the way forward.

This conference also occurs as the first effectiveness evaluation of the Minamata Convention is underway. Our Effectiveness Evaluation Group has held its first meeting, and our Open-Ended Scientific Group has been working diligently for over a year already to bring the best available science and data to the table for this evaluation.

This is so important, because the effectiveness evaluation offers an opportunity to make course corrections, clarify gaps in our knowledge base, and focus our efforts to fulfill the promise of the Minamata Convention.

And speaking of the promise of the Convention, I am so pleased that ICMGP is providing a platform for young researchers whose fresh perspectives and skills can take our work forward with enduring impact. I hope that solving problems of mercury pollution provides insights that can be applied to other issues facing the planet.

Dear Participants,

Let the words of Nelson Mandela, whose International Day we celebrated on 18 July, to inspire us for this week. He said: "I dream of our vast deserts, of our forests, of all our great wildernesses. We must never forget that it is our duty to protect this environment."

To all of you, I thank you for the part you play in sustaining our future and making mercury history.

I wish you a productive, interesting, challenging and very enjoyable week.