

For immediate release

## **Illegal mercury from Indonesia ends up in domestic and international markets**

*A global ban on the mercury trade needs to be considered at the Sixth COP of the Minamata Convention on mercury*

Jakarta, 26 July 2025 - The historical data shows the price of gold increased significantly in early 2025, climbing from around \$2,624 at the beginning of the month to over \$2,796 by the end. This significant rise was observed over 31%. Consequently, a new “mercury fever” was hitting globally, triggered by the record-high prices (US\$330 per kilogram of mercury) offered by mercury traffickers due to skyrocketing gold prices.

A [new report](#) released yesterday by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) revealed that over 200 tons of toxic mercury were trafficked from Mexican mercury mines to illegal gold mines in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru from April 2019 to June 2025. This transnational trade, violating the Minamata Convention on Mercury, is fueling ecological violence, forest destruction, and the release of massive amounts of mercury in the Amazon, contaminating ecosystems and communities. The illegal shipment of mercury captured by Peruvian authorities is the largest seizure of mercury ever reported by an Amazonian country.

“The same situation also hits Indonesia. In 2017, Central Java Police seized [20.9 tons of mercury](#) confiscated from a warehouse before it was exported to Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. All mercury traded in Indonesia and exported to other countries is mined illegally, and processed illegally before entering the market,” stated Yuyun Ismawati from Nexus3 Foundation. “Every year, over 1500 tons of illegal mercury are used and traded in Indonesia to extract gold from illegal sites found in almost 200 cities/regencies. More concerning, the illegal gold flooded the market without any due diligence process and sold in many e-commerce platforms with fake stamps.”

Nexus3's [new report](#) highlighted that between 2014 and 2023, Indonesia exported 2,196 tons of mercury under HS code 280540 to various countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, UK, Sudan, Egypt, and Japan, worth almost USD 8,560,000. Most trade flow numbers between Indonesia and its trade partners are reported via the [UN Comtrade](#) platform, matched with the export-import data of [BPS-Statistics Indonesia](#).

A thorough search of verdicts showed that between 2017 and 2024, Indonesian law enforcement agencies from all over the country confiscated about 45,029.46 kg of mercury and 8,753.11 kg of cinnabar ores. In some cases, this evidence disappeared and recirculated to the market.

“We support the Indonesian Attorney General's Office's efforts to finalize guidelines for handling seized mercury in Indonesia. We hope these guidelines will assist law enforcement officials in handling seized mercury in Indonesia, from investigation to trial to the proper and safe execution of court decisions,” said Krishna Zaki of the Nexus3 Foundation.

According to BPS-Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik), the country exported 1,160 tons of mercury to Japan between 2016 and 2023. The number aligns with UN Comtrade

data within the given period. A source at the Ministry of Environment stated that some of the mercury exported to Japan is waste containing mercury from oil and gas but traded under the same HS code as elemental mercury because there is no specific HS code for waste containing mercury.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury prohibits the recirculation of mercury recovered from wastewater treatment into the market. Mercury cannot be destroyed, but it can be stabilized and stored in a final storage facility in the form of salt.

"There is an urgent need to improve regulations, increase law enforcement efforts, and strengthen border controls to distinguish shipments of elemental mercury from mercury-contaminated waste for final disposal. A review of the HS code is needed," stated Dyah Paramita, Senior Researcher of Centre for Regulation, Policy and Governance (CRPG).

"Furthermore, cinnabar mining and its supply chain, including refining, trade, and use, must be prohibited, particularly in small-scale gold mining. The government must explicitly issue the ban and enforce the law with a deterrent effect. There must be a global commitment to the timeline for this ban, funding, and treatment of confiscated mercury and cinnabar."

In March 2022, Indonesia hosted COP4.2 of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and launched [the Bali Declaration](#) on combating the illegal mercury trade. More efforts are being made to implement the Declaration by 2027. A large body of evidence has found that mercury used in small-scale gold mining is linked to serious health problems and physical symptoms among workers, children and communities in mercury hotspots. Severe cases of neurological disorder and delayed development in children have been found in many areas with illegal gold mining and cinnabar refinery areas.

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