CALL FOR INFORMATION ON SUPPLY SOURCES AND TRADE

On June 22th 2026, Minamata Convention Secretariat addressed a call for information on supply sources and trade of mercury with regards to a report presenting strategies for addressing the supply and trade of mercury for Parties not in compliance with Article 3. Two questions were addressed on:

- experiences in preventing and combating illegal trade in mercury related to Article 3 on mercury trade

- information on successes and lessons learnt on addressing the supply and trade of mercury not in compliance with Article 3

1. Experience in preventing and combating illicit mercury trade

Since 2010, INTERPOL's Illicit Markets Environmental Security Programme (ENS) has supported law enforcement agencies in identifying, investigating and disrupting criminal networks involved in environmental crimes and associated offences, including fraud, human trafficking, money laundering and corruption. Within this framework, INTERPOL has progressively strengthened its efforts to combat illegal mining and the associated illicit trade in mercury, particularly in regions where mercury is widely used in artisanal and small-scale gold mining.

In 2020, INTERPOL launched Project MNYA, its first project specifically dedicated to combating illegal mining and associated crimes. The project focused on six Latin American countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru. Through the collection and analysis of law enforcement information provided by participating countries, INTERPOL sought to improve understanding of the criminal networks, trafficking routes and modus operandi associated with illegal gold mining and mercury trafficking.

The resulting criminal intelligence analysis identified illegal mining hotspots and trafficking routes involving both gold and mercury, revealing the transnational nature of these activities. Approximately half of the identified hotspots were located in cross-border areas, highlighting the importance of international cooperation in addressing the movement of illicit commodities and the criminal networks facilitating their circulation.

The analysis also highlighted the role of front companies and commercial intermediaries in supporting illegal mining operations, including through the purchase and supply of mercury, the transportation of illegally extracted minerals and the provision of logistical support. These findings demonstrated that illicit mercury trade forms part of broader criminal supply chains, involving actors operating beyond the mining sites themselves.

Project MNYA further contributed to strengthening international police cooperation by facilitating the exchange of criminal intelligence between participating countries and identifying national law enforcement points of contact to support information sharing and ongoing investigations.

Building on this experience, INTERPOL has continued to address illicit mercury trade through intelligence-led investigations, capacity-building activities and coordinated law enforcement operations targeting illegal mining and associated environmental crimes in Africa and Latin America.

Several operations have produced tangible enforcement results:

- In 2023, Operation Aurum, conducted in Nigeria, targeted organized criminal networks involved in illegal mining, mercury trafficking and associated crimes. The operation resulted in 52 arrests, including 11 high-level targets.
- In 2024, Operation Sanu, conducted in Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal, resulted in the seizure of 14 mercury cylinders valued at more than USD 100,000, alongside other hazardous chemicals and equipment used in illegal mining activities.
- In 2025, Operation Guyana Shield, involving Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana and Suriname, led to the seizure of mercury valued at over USD 60,000. The operation also uncovered concealment methods used by traffickers, including mercury hidden inside solar panels transported by bus, and highlighted the involvement of commercial supply points in facilitating the illicit movement of mercury.
- In 2026, Operation Madre Tierra VIII, conducted across Latin America and the Caribbean, resulted in the seizure of mercury in Costa Rica. The same year, Operation SANU II, conducted in Central Africa, also aims to fight illegal mercury trade and supply chains in the region.

In parallel, through Project GAIA (2024–2027), INTERPOL has further strengthened criminal intelligence collection and international cooperation on illegal mining and illicit mercury trafficking. The project has supported forensic and investigative activities, including cooperation with the Brazilian Federal Police on the analysis of gold and environmental samples potentially contaminated with mercury.

All these initiatives illustrate INTERPOL's experience in addressing illicit mercury trade through a combination of criminal intelligence analysis, international information sharing, operational coordination, capacity building and the identification and disruption of criminal supply networks. They also demonstrate the importance of integrating mercury trafficking investigations into broader efforts to combat illegal mining and associated organized criminal activities.

2. Successes and lessons learned in addressing the illicit supply and trade of mercury

INTERPOL's experience has contributed to a better understanding of the criminal networks and supply chains facilitating illicit mercury trade, while supporting concrete law enforcement actions resulting in mercury seizures, arrests and the identification of trafficking routes and criminal facilitators.

One of the principal achievements has been improving the criminal intelligence picture of illicit mercury trafficking, particularly its links with illegal gold mining. The findings of Project MNYA highlighted the transnational character of these activities, the concentration of illegal mining hotspots in border areas and the involvement of front companies and commercial intermediaries in supplying mercury and facilitating illegal mining operations. Subsequent investigations and operations have reinforced these findings, demonstrating that illicit mercury supply chains may involve multiple jurisdictions, transport routes and commercial actors.

Another significant achievement has been the strengthening of international law enforcement cooperation. Operations such as Sanu and Guyana Shield have demonstrated the value of coordinated enforcement actions in detecting and intercepting mercury destined for illegal mining activities. Operational results have also demonstrated the effectiveness of targeting criminal networks and their facilitators, rather than focusing exclusively on individuals directly involved in illegal gold extraction.

Several key lessons can be drawn from this experience.

- First, addressing illicit mercury trade requires a comprehensive supply-chain approach. Investigations should extend beyond illegal mining sites to identify the actors responsible for sourcing, purchasing, transporting, distributing and financing mercury. Targeting these actors can help disrupt the structures sustaining illicit mercury trade rather than merely intercepting individual shipments or end users.
- Second, international cooperation and criminal intelligence exchange are essential. The transnational nature of mercury trafficking, particularly in border regions, requires close coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination.
- Third, a coordinated multi-agency approach is necessary to address the complexity of illicit mercury trade. Effective investigations require cooperation between police, customs authorities, environmental agencies, mining regulators and judicial institutions. Sharing information across these institutions can facilitate the identification of suspicious imports, commercial activities, transport movements and possible diversion of mercury into illegal markets. Differences in national legislation, investigative powers and enforcement responsibilities may nevertheless create obstacles to effective cooperation, highlighting the need for greater coordination and improved understanding of applicable legal frameworks.
- Fourth, strengthening specialized investigative and forensic capabilities is crucial. Illicit mercury trafficking and illegal mining often occur in remote and difficult-to-access areas and require specific material to analyze the chemical for instance. Dedicated training, access to forensic laboratories, appropriate operational equipment and analytical capabilities are therefore important for identifying criminal networks, collecting admissible evidence and supporting successful investigations.
- Fifth, intelligence-led operations are essential to achieve good results. Mercury seizures provide important opportunities to collect evidence, identify trafficking methods and generate intelligence on the individuals and companies involved in supply chains. However, isolated seizures may have a limited impact if they are not followed by investigations into upstream suppliers, financiers and organizers.

In terms of success, notices have also been published regarding mercury illicit trade.

2 purple notices have been published specifically on mercury.

- In November 2022, INTERPOL published a purple notice upon France's request on how mercury was transported from Suriname to France concealed in rice bags in a canoe.

- In June 2025, INTERPOL published a purple notice upon Brazil's request on modus operandi of large-scale trafficking of mercury. In this case, an organized criminal group imported large quantities of mercury into Brazil and hid the illicit origin by pretending it came from a legitimate recycling operation (a company licensed to decontaminate fluorescent lamps). However, this company reported recovering far more mercury than it could reasonably process, which raised suspicions that it was laundering the imported mercury and creating false "mercury credits" in the national registry.

However, INTERPOL underlines the difficulty to publish blue or red notices on individuals possibly linked to mercury trafficking due to the complexity of the supply chain and to retrieve the right intermediaries.

Overall, INTERPOL's experience demonstrates that combating illicit mercury trade requires a sustained, intelligence-led and internationally coordinated approach, combining operational enforcement with investigations targeting criminal supply chains and their facilitators. While mercury seizures and arrests constitute important operational achievements, long-term effectiveness depends on the ability to identify and dismantle the networks responsible for organizing and financing illicit mercury flows, strengthen national investigative capacities and promote effective cooperation between law enforcement and regulatory authorities.