

Implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury on the use of dental amalgam : Africa Phases Down Amalgam Use with Multiple Measures, moving toward Phase Out.

FOREWORD

Africa is delighted to submit to the Secretariat a snapshot of the progress made on the continent on phasing down dental amalgam and its readiness to make dental amalgam history

PROCESS

From the negotiations to the adoption of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2013, Africa, the second largest continent in size and in population, has led the way toward mercury-free dentistry. During the negotiations, Africa proposed a framework for how to reduce substantially amalgam use substantially, a framework that was largely adopted as Annex A-II. Immediately after its adoption, the Abuja Declaration for Mercury-Free Dentistry for Africa (2014) launched the campaign toward phaseouts; the next year, francophone Africa held a conference in Abidjan to focus on how to move toward mercury-free dentistry. In 2019, dentists from across the continent launched the network Dentists for a Mercury-Free Africa – bringing dentists together with governments and NGOs to work unified for mercury-free dentistry.

At COP3 in 2019, a unified Africa Region proposed the phasing out of amalgam; the proposal led to a landmark Decision of the Parties which called on the Parties to accelerate the phasing down of amalgam use and called on the Secretariat to produce two reports, one on alternatives and one on successful measures to phase down amalgam use. We provide this comment for the latter – to advise the Secretariat of the significant and diverse steps being taken by African countries in the transition to mercury-free dentistry.

Africa is ready for modern, non-toxic, tooth-friendly dentistry. Amalgam is none of these – it is a polluting material, tooth-unfriendly, little changed from the 19th century. As Europe moves to phasing out amalgam in this decade, Africa fully intends to keep pace. What the region will not accept is continuing shipment in Africa of a mercury materials being abandoned in the West. The era of shipping toxic products to Africa that are banned elsewhere is over, now!

Africa has focused on these measures and these strategies to transition to mercury-free dentistry:

1-End of amalgam use for children: Before Europe ended amalgam for children, Mauritius did, in 2014.

2-End amalgam use for women of childbearing age: Reaching beyond protecting women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and recognizing that a woman's body containing mercury is a risk to a future child she may bear, Tanzania in 2020 adopted, via the **Tanzania Guidelines**, an end to amalgam for all women of childbearing age, plus all children. The Guidelines are phased in, to take effect in 2023. See "Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, *The Second Guidelines for Provision of Oral Health Services in Tanzania* (2020)," <https://mercuryfreedentistry.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/tanzania-guidelines.pdf>

3-Stakeholder consensus to end amalgam: Zambia and Côte D'Ivoire have reached a consensus of all major stakeholders from civil society – dentistry, consumers, environmentalists – and the relevant government agencies that amalgam should be phased out. Guinea is moving toward that same consensus.

4-Dentist association support to end amalgam: The Nigerian Dental Association in 2020, agreeing with others from civil society, adopted a resolution to end amalgam for children in 2022, and to end amalgam for all in 2024; the dental association has written the government ministries to ask that the resolution be made into government policy.

5-Build consumer awareness via information sheets: Nigeria's federal government adopted an information sheet to guide parents and consumers to choosing mercury-free dentistry.

6-Africa Day for Mercury-Free Dentistry, October 13: Each year, NGOs across Africa launch public information campaigns marking this day and calling for action to phase out amalgam.

7-Media outreach by civil society: NGOs in Congo-Brazzaville and Ghana, and elsewhere, have done major media initiatives to alert consumers and parents about the risks of dental amalgam. The government of Djibouti has taken it upon itself to inform dental practitioners through several information and awareness sessions of the phase-down and ban measures that will be taken to move towards mercury-free dentistry. The Ministry in charge of the environment in Burkina Faso will undertake in 2021 a diagnostic study on the use of dental amalgam and the perception of the actors on the alternatives.

8-Model provinces programs: In Ben Arous, Tunisia; in Mombasa County, Kenya; in Edo State, Nigeria; and in Enugu State, Nigeria, conferences and programs focused on ending amalgam have occurred. At the top of the list in each of these model provinces is the end of amalgam for children.

9-Shift dental school curriculum to mercury-free dentistry: Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal have updated dental school curriculum to promote mercury-free dentistry as the basis for oral health care.

10-End of amalgam use in hospitals and health systems: Benin, Madagascar and Cote d'Ivoire in its military hospitals, and Cameroun in its Baptist chain of hospitals and clinics, have ended amalgam use entirely.

11-National conferences focused on a transition to mercury-free dentistry: Guinea, Togo, Burundi, Senegal, Cameroun, Lesotho, Nigeria, Ghana, Congo-Brazzaville – and there are more –have held a national conference of stakeholders to build awareness and to initiate coordinated steps to end amalgam.

The pandemic slowed progress in 2020, of course. However, several countries are on the verge of announcing decisions.

Sincerely yours,

On behalf of the Africa region,

Roger BARO, Vice-President COP4,
Ministry in charge of the Environment of Burkina Faso