

February 9, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Legally binding treaty to reduce mercury exposure

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned groups, strongly urge you to support an international agreement to control mercury pollution and reduce human exposure to mercury.

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that can make its way up the food chain into humans, and poses an increased exposure risk to developing fetuses and young children, causing permanent learning disabilities. Mercury is also a persistent, bioaccumulative, transboundary pollutant. Emissions to and from the United States contaminate the earth's air, soil, water and fish. Because of this global contamination, mercury pollution requires a coordinated international response.

Of high concern is mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants and other sources of unintentional emissions of mercury, and indeed these are important sources of mercury pollution in the United States and throughout the world. However, there are also intentional uses of mercury that can pollute the environment. As you know, mercury is also a *commodity metal* (like iron or copper), traded on the global market, and is used for many industrial and commercial purposes including over 1,000 tons per year in small scale gold mining.

As a result, the continued trade in mercury also contributes to global mercury pollution. Because of its toxic nature and increasingly available alternatives to its use, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to address this contamination through international regulation or ban of its trade. Since 2001, countries around the world have been discussing options to control mercury pollution and in 2003 agreed that enough was known to warrant immediate action to reduce global mercury pollution. Most countries now favor the negotiation of a legally binding international agreement as the most viable approach to deal with this problem. However, over the past six years, the Bush administration consistently opposed this position.

In mid-February, the world will take up this question again at the 25th meeting of the United Nations Environment Program Governing Council. At this meeting, the United States must change its current position on mercury and come prepared to support a legally binding agreement to reduce mercury exposure.

The UNEP Governing Council meeting will provide your administration with its first opportunity on the world stage to demonstrate a real change in approach to international environmental issues, an approach that embraces cooperation and leadership, rather than obstruction and inaction. Therefore, we urge you to seize this opportunity for leadership, and support an international agreement to control this dangerous pollutant.

We welcome any questions or comments on our letter. Please feel free to forward them to: mercurypolicy@aol.com or call: 802.223.9000. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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