

Mercury INC-1, Stockholm, Sweden – June 11, 2010
Minamata Treaty

Takeshi Yasuma, Citizens Against Chemicals Pollution (CACP) in Japan

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,

I am from Citizens Against Chemicals Pollution (CACP) in Japan.

My intervention is with respect to the proposal for calling this historic mercury treaty the “Minamata Convention”.

The Minamata Convention would directly connect the tragedy of human mercury poisoning to our global efforts to protect human health and the environment. If the treaty bears this name then we must honor Minamata and learn from its lessons.

The Chisso Corporation used mercury in an industrial process. The resulting disaster teaches us that the mercury treaty must phase-out mercury-based products and processes and replace them with sustainable, non-toxic, alternatives.

The dumping of mercury into Minamata Bay by the Chisso Corporation and the additional contamination at the plant teaches us about the need for the polluter pays principle and private sector responsibility for clean-up of contaminated sites.

In Minamata more than thirty thousand people suffered horrible crippling illnesses and many had to struggle to be recognized. A treaty named after this tragedy must include measures for liability and compensation for victims and communities.

The citizens of Minamata received no information about mercury in their seafood or environment. A treaty named for Minamata must correct this situation. The treaty must honor the public’s right to know. Information must be free, accessible, and understandable.

The contaminated seafood eaten by Minamata residents poisoned them as it poisons all people around the world who depend on fish for protein. A treaty named after Minamata must establish a global monitoring system for mercury in fish and humans to monitor its effectiveness.

To conclude Mr. Chair, Minamata is NOT just a name, a place or a disease. It is tragedy, pain, corporate irresponsibility, loss, and discrimination. Minamata is about people, of community. It is about their struggle to survive, and their determination to live. This is the real Minamata. We at the INC cannot do no less but to honor and respect the real Minamata. We can show our respect by substantial actions for a strong global treaty that eliminates all human sources of mercury.

Thank you very much.