

## **US, EU, Canada oppose health provision in mercury treaty; NGOs urge reconsideration**

By [Mercury Policy Project](#)

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PUNTA DEL ESTE, Uruguay, July 6, 2012 -- /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Joined by the European Union, Canada and other developed countries, the U.S. opposed a separate health provision during the fourth (of five) mercury treaty negotiation earlier this week in Punta del Este, Uruguay. While a U.S. representative recognized that health is important to the Mercury Convention, it is "not in a position to accept" and has "significant concerns" about a separate health article, which was proposed by Latin American countries and supported by 92 countries from the developing world.

"This is an example of north-south double standard over whether health issues will be addressed equitably, even though the whole reason for negotiation is to protect human health," stated Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project, who attended the negotiation. "Mercury is a basic human rights issue, as it affects millions of people. Health strategies to address reducing exposure to mercury must be included in this treaty."

The Latin American countries proposed a separate article calling for health programs to identify and protect populations at risk, through the development and implementation of health-based guidelines targeting mercury exposure reduction. During the negotiations, a representative of the Latin American countries explained why a health article is needed:

- First, there is a need to have clear directive to the Ministries of Health in developing countries to address mercury exposure, since there is "no clear mandate on this," and therefore "no possibility to address problem clearly," as "these agencies already have 100-200 responsibilities."
- Second, a separate treaty health article would help "designate mercury as a priority along with all the others," and
- Finally, it would provide developing countries with the assistance and specific guidance needed to reduce mercury exposure risks.

"While some developed countries have established risk communication programs to warn vulnerable populations at risk from exposure to mercury, many countries have not," stated MPP Director Bender during the meeting. In addition, Bender urged governments "to support mercury biomonitoring in populations at risk and in the fish they eat."

Biomonitoring is an important tool to identify and characterize exposure in high risk populations, including Indigenous Peoples, and to evaluate progress in reducing exposure to mercury, according to Bender.

The anticipated Mercury Convention, projected to be finalized in January 2013 at the fifth negotiation in Geneva, is expected to address mercury pollution globally.

SOURCE Mercury Policy Project

<http://www.sacbee.com/2012/07/06/4614019/us-eu-canada-oppose-health-provision.html#storylink=cpy>