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President Obama Urged to Support Mercury Treaty by Green Groups

Washington, DC—Today, at a meeting with state department officials, green groups will recommend that the U.S. Government support a legally binding treaty on mercury at the United Nations meeting next week in Nairobi, Kenya. The groups plan on distributing a letter signed by 50 U.S.-based groups and another 40 abroad, urging President Obama (and copied to Secretary of State Clinton, CEQ Director Sutley and EPA Administrator Jackson) to support a mercury treaty.

“The upcoming UNEP Governing Council meeting will provide the Obama administration with its first opportunity on the world stage to demonstrate a real change in the U.S. approach to international environmental issues,” said Michael Bender, a drafter of the letter, and co-coordinator for the Zero Mercury Working Group, a coalition of 75 groups around the world promoting mercury reduction.

The letter states that countries around the globe have been discussing options to control mercury pollution since 2001 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. Accordingly, the voluntary efforts promoted by the previous administration to reduce risks from mercury were not sufficient by themselves to address the challenges posed by mercury globally.

“We strongly recommend an approach that embraces cooperation and leadership, rather than the obstruction and inaction we have seen from the previous administration,” said Bender. “Therefore, we urge President Obama to seize this opportunity for leadership, and support an international agreement to control this dangerous pollutant.”

Of high concern is mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants and other sources of unintentional emissions of mercury. However, there are many intentional uses of mercury that also pollute the environment, like the use of over 1,000 tons of mercury each year in small scale gold mining that can pollute both the local and global environment.

Among the U.S. groups signing on to the letter are Physicians for Social Responsibility, American Nurses Association, Environment Illinois, NYPIRG,

Clean Water Action, Greenpeace and Health Care Without Harm. International co-signers include World Wildlife Fund – Guianas, the International POPs Elimination Network, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, the Basel Action Network, Friends of the Earth Malaysia, Indonesia Toxics-Free Network, Toxics Link (India), Health & Environmental Network (EU), Ban Toxics! (Philippines) and many others.

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, as well as to adults who are exposed to it.

For more information, and to access the letter to President Obama, see:
www.mercurypolicy.org.

For information on the upcoming UNEP Governing Council in mid-February, see:
<http://www.chem.unep.ch/MERCURY/GC25/Preparations.htm>

For more information on the Zero Mercury Working Group, see:
www.zeromercury.org

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