

## **Report of the Meeting of the Mercury Supply and Storage Partnership Area of the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership (GMP)**

**Date: February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Time: 13:00-15:30h (CET)**

Ana Garcia (Spain), co-lead of the Mercury Supply and Storage Partnership Area, opened the meeting with welcoming words and the adoption of the agenda.

### **Agenda item 1.- Overview of previous activities.**

In her update on overall activities under the Global Mercury Partnership, Stephanie Laruelle (UNEP) indicated that there was a strong relationship between the Mercury Supply and Storage Partnership Area with other areas of work of the Partnership. She informed that new members had recently joined the area. She indicated that there was a series of webinars to be launched and the newsletter to be used as tools for dissemination of information. Finally she provided an overview of key outcomes from the eleventh meeting of the Global Mercury Partnership Advisory Group (PAG) held virtually on 15 and 16 December 2020<sup>1</sup>.

During the Minamata Convention Secretariat update, Eisaku Toda (Minamata Convention Secretariat) highlighted the collaboration between the Minamata Convention, a legally binding instrument, with the Global Mercury Partnership that complemented each other. He noted that the Secretariat looked forward to working with partners on intersessional work mandated by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, including in the development of a report on Mercury trade supply and demand in the context of effectiveness evaluation. He also informed about the different sessions of Minamata Online. He highlighted the submissions by Parties of information on primary mining, where information had been received from China and Mexico, mercury stocks inventories and waste management facilities for waste consisting of mercury, as per Article 21 on reporting, for which the first deadline was the end of 2020. As for stocks, the Minamata Convention Secretariat had received submissions from Parties that have storage and waste storage facilities containing mercury.

### **Agenda item 2.- Information-sharing on mercury supply sources.**

The Partnership Advisory Group at its tenth meeting<sup>2</sup> had called for work on 2 different priorities, one being mercury from oil and gas and the other mercury from non-ferrous metals mining and smelting. Draft study reports on these two topics were under preparation and would be shared for comments in the following weeks by UNEP.

Lilian Corra (ISDE), lead author of the study report on mercury from oil and gas, presented the report and gaps identified while working on the document. She indicated we were now aware of the mass balance of mercury in different stages of the oil and gas activity. Various actors and possible ways forward were also being identified.

Regarding chlor-alkali facilities, Ben Vauter (US-EPA), co-lead of the Mercury cell chlor-alkali production Partnership Area, informed the meeting that there were still hundreds of tons of mercury in facilities to be decommissioned by 2025 and which should be

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about PAG11, including the meeting report, may be found at:  
<https://web.unep.org/globalmercurypartnership/partnership-advisory-group-meeting-11>

<sup>2</sup> Further information about PAG10, including the meeting report, may be found at:  
<https://web.unep.org/globalmercurypartnership/partnership-advisory-group-meeting-10>

avoided from becoming a source of supply for artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM). There were opportunities for collaboration, in particular with respect to the lack of storage capacities for mercury coming from chlor-alkali facilities, especially in Latin America. For now, the solution has been exporting mercury to other regions.

It was highlighted that excess mercury from the decommissioning of chlor-alkali facilities should be considered mercury waste to be disposed of, using operations that do not lead to recovery, recycling, reclamation, direct re-use or alternative uses, as per the provisions of the Minamata Convention (article 3, paragraph 5 (b)). This was an important issue to be clarified to the sector to avoid this mercury entering the market.

The seizure of mercury was indicated as a potential source of mercury, i.e. when police officers confiscate mercury found on ASGM sites, where the mercury may end up stored in plastic containers with no clear storing destination. Guidelines would be useful for enforcement personnel with respect to storage, containers, transport, and final disposal of such seized mercury and also avoid its diversion back to ASGM. The Mercury Guidelines under the Basel Convention were recalled as a source of information regarding this issue<sup>3</sup>.

One participant remarked that it would be useful to have guidance on storage of small amounts of mercury with the aim of protecting the workers and avoiding the return of mercury to ASGM.

Another participant further noted that it was important to follow and record the chain of custody to prevent mercury from going back into circulation, as this would avoid mismanagement by local authorities.

### **Agenda item 3.- Information-sharing on mercury storage**

Regarding facilities around the world, it was highlighted that certain regions have facilities while others do not, such as Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean, where there is a lack of facilities for storage of mercury and mercury waste.

Participants were informed about a series of events on handling and storage of mercury waste as well as trade that were being planned by the U.S. Department of State jointly with the Organization of American States and to which the Partnership's contribution would be welcome. Work was also ongoing in Indonesia on the storage issue, on oil and gas as a source of mercury and, also from some of the commercial ships that have mercury contaminated sludges.

Daniel Merino (Artisanal Gold Council) could not be present and would be invited to share his presentation on the interim guidelines for mercury storage in ASGM after the meeting.

One participant presented a type of concrete cells used in Colombia for special waste and that he believed could be adapted to mercury contaminated waste and mercury containing waste, for countries that do not have cost effective treatment facilities for fluorescent lamps and other waste streams.

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<sup>3</sup>Technical guidelines for the environmentally sound management of wastes consisting of elemental mercury and wastes containing or contaminated with mercury available at:  
<http://www.basel.int/Implementation/MercuryWastes/TechnicalGuidelines/tabid/5159/Default.aspx>

Work was being done by UNEP on the last chlor-alkali facility in Mexico. There was a series of issues that needed to be addressed and it was an opportunity of collaboration with the Partnership Area. UNEP was also working on the supply chain of mercury in ASGM and has a project in LAC to try to manage mercury across borders. There are also projects on primary mining in Mexico and on trade in the LAC region. It was noted that collaboration was vital among the areas of the Partnership and the input of the Partnership area on the projects would be welcome.

One participant noted that a list of existing facilities but also their actual capacities available would be needed. It would be interesting if different Partnership Areas and the Partnership secretariat could collaborate with others to elaborate such a document. He further highlighted the need for guidance on mercury seizure for customs, and for enhanced regional collaboration including of customs official to prevent mercury entering the market.

Commenting on the availability of mercury treatment, another participant highlighted that one option could be to focus on safe local collection and short-term interim storage connected to stabilization and final disposal solutions as opposed to long-term storage of liquid mercury in the country, as this would be a way to lower the cost of management.

#### **Agenda item 4.- Discussions on the priorities of the Mercury Supply and Storage Area**

In the last part of the meeting, participants reviewed priorities for the Partnership area. Some were set during the recent PAG meeting and others suggested by the participants of this meeting.

The following priorities integrate those priorities identified in the Partnership Advisory Group meeting and the suggestions made by participants during this meeting:

- i. To close the information gap concerning the fate of mercury generated by industrial activities. Efforts to improve the information provided in the Reporting exercise should lead to reduce information gaps.
- ii. To gather information about mercury suppliers and supply chain in countries with ASGM and identify the sources of mercury: Hg primary mining, chlor-alkali, which is a complex sector, mercury as a by-product from large-scale Gold mining, other non-ferrous mining and metallurgy, oil and gas sectors. Collaboration with ASGM Partnership Area.
- iii. To call for information/guidance on storage/handling etc. for mercury seizure and to create a list of existing facilities with capacity to manage and permanently store mercury around the world, in collaboration with the ASGM, mercury waste management and Mercury cell chlor-alkali production Partnership areas and the GMP Secretariat (including through webinars on interim solutions).
- iv. To organize activities, including in collaboration with other areas of the Partnership.

#### **Agenda item 5.- Discussion on future workshops and meetings.**

Ana Garcia informed about different workshops and activities carried out by the Area in previous years. While financing for collaboration with other projects and areas was currently not available, it was noted that small amount of funding set aside under a

project could be helpful to plan a workshop that could be useful as the one done on dismantling a chlor-alkali plant.

Rodges Ankrah (US EPA), co-chair of the Partnership Advisory Group, thanked the group for the enlightening discussion and very useful food for thoughts. He noted the Partnership area may also wish to seize the opportunity of the webinars being organized in the context of the Partnership to share and disseminate information, including with respect to existing solutions for mercury storage.

It was further suggested to organize meetings focusing on concrete and specific single topics, including in a cross-cutting manner across Partnership areas of work.

Judith Torres (Uruguay) co-lead of the Mercury Supply and Storage Partnership Area made the wrap-up and the closing remarks of the meeting.