REPORT TO WFPHA
MINIMATA MERCURY TREATY IS SIGNED
Kumamoto, JAPAN, October 10, 2013
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The Minamata Convention on Mercury was adopted on Thursday, 10 October 2013 at 11:11 am in Kumamoto, Japan, following decades of increased awareness regarding the toxicity of mercury and mercury-related compounds. The WFPHA, pursuant to its policy Mercury pollution, participated in the intergovernmental negotiations preparing this convention as a professional Non Governmental Organization collaborating closely with the World Health Organization, Health Care Without Harm, and the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE). Concern about the developmental neurotoxic effects of exquisitely low doses of methyl mercury, converted in the environment from metallic mercury, propelled the involvement of WFPHA and the decision by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council to initiate these negotiations in February 2009.

Though the largest source of mercury environmental contamination is energy generation from coal power plants; and highest localized exposures, as well as second most important global source, from artisanal gold mining; the major emphasis of the WFPHA’s involvement centered on the use of mercury in health care, principally thermometers and sphygmomanometers. In addition WFPHA intervened in plenary and lobbied delegates over the 2 year period of negotiating meetings to include a specific provision on health in the final draft.

The Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries was attended by over 1,000 participants from over 140 countries, IGOs and NGOs. The Convention was signed by over 91 countries and the European Union (EU). The Convention aims to protect human health and the environment from emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds produced by people. It calls for the removal of mercury blood pressure devices and thermometers from health care by 2020 and the phase-down of the use dental amalgam. Other measures include: the phase-out of existing primary mercury mining; and provisions for national action plans to reduce and, where feasible, eliminate mercury use in the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM).

A section on health was included that encouraged the parties to promote the development and implementation of strategies to protect populations at risk, particularly vulnerable populations, and promote appropriate health-care services for prevention, treatment and care for exposed populations; and strengthen the institutional and health professional capacities for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of health risks related to the exposure to mercury and mercury compounds.

In response to the call of the meeting to begin implementing the provisions of the treaty as promptly as possible, WFPHA collaborating organizations, WHO and Health Care Without Harm, have launched an initiative to achieve the Convention’s goal to end the manufacture, import and export of mercury-based medical devices by 2020. The WFPHA Environment Working Group will explore how the organization can continue to collaborate in this effort.