

59th GEF Council Meeting – 9 December 2020

Remarks by Ms. Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention

I would like to congratulate Carlos Manuel Rodriguez for being elected as the CEO and the Chair of GEF, and to thank you for the opportunity to address the Council for the first time as Executive Secretary.

The Minamata Convention has just passed its three-year mark. We are a young convention and we enjoy the momentum of being a young convention.

The GEF and its Council members have played a pivotal role in this Convention and in reaching its objectives, including through the decision to include the Minamata Convention in the GEF Instrument.

Thanks to efforts beginning in GEF-5 and GEF-6, we have the groundwork in place, we have a good foundation of Minamata Initial Assessments which have been a useful enabling activity and helped many countries take on their obligations.

We are now reaching early milestones including the 2020 deadline for Parties to phase out manufacturing, import, and export of listed mercury-added products.

We already have 125 Parties, and these Parties are engaged and invested in the Convention.

We have excellent rates of national reporting and of identification of national focal points, and strong engagement in intersessional processes. We believe this also speaks to the interest of our Parties in full and timely implementation of the Convention, for which GEF investments have been, and remain, critically important.

GEF mercury investments are sound investments. Not only do they achieve global environmental benefits in terms of mercury use and emissions reductions, they also add value to and advance the overall GEF portfolio.

Investing in the Minamata Convention is investing in sustainable and inclusive development, with clear benefits to human health and well-being, to economy, to ecosystem goods and services derived from seas and oceans, to biodiversity and nature reserves. On the other hand, climate action brings clear benefits to our efforts to address mercury. Implementation of the Convention is a means to build back better and create a better world post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Let me update you on Convention activities as we implement decisions from the third Conference of the Parties in 2019 and move towards the fourth Conference of the Parties.

COP-4 is scheduled for 1-5 November 2021 in Bali, hosted by Indonesia. It will focus on several substantive issues.



The COP will further consider and decide on how to carry out the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Minamata Convention, based on comparable monitoring data, information on mercury trade, supply and demand, national reporting, and other information such as on the operation of financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity-building arrangements.

The COP will also review the first set of national reports, which has brought additional information from the national level forward on the supply of mercury, the trade in mercury, stocks of mercury currently held, as well as disposal sites of mercury. The COP will also focus on the work of the Implementation and Compliance Committee.

Further, the COP is expected to decide on a number of technical matters such as guidance on mercury releases, waste thresholds and management of mine tailings from ASGM, as well as on the results of the review of Annexes to the Convention on mercury added products and processes using mercury.

Regarding the financial mechanism which includes the GEF, it is to note that the COP will consider Terms of Reference for the second review of the financial mechanism.

These are all matters that are to support Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

When I became the Executive Secretary of the Convention early this year, I continued to be really impressed by the design of the Convention, and how well suited it is for implementation. While the Minamata Convention only deals with one chemical (which happens to be an element), it addresses that chemical across many sectors and at every stage of the lifecycle. Its measures are specific and actionable, and they include flexibility for countries to implement based on national circumstances as well as formal and informal supply chains.

The realities are very different in different countries. Some need to close down mercury mines, some need to address enormous amounts of mercury used in ASGM, some need to revamp production processes, some need to ensure that energy production does not come with a health price tag that populations should not have to pay.

These are real implementation challenges, and I would say that the GEF, up through this work programme, has met the challenges admirably, and must continue to do so.

Therefore, I would like to recognize the progress made to help countries through the GEF work programme, and note our continuing interest in engaging with Parties, GEF implementing agencies, and the GEF Secretariat in the project development stage.

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is an example of how implementation needs to match the complexity of the issue. GEF programming on this issue began many years ago in the International Waters window, and it remains a programme with benefits across focal areas. It was groundbreaking then, and it is groundbreaking today. GEF programming for ASGM includes enabling activities in the form of National Action Plans, to the broad programme known as PlanetGOLD and GOLD Plus.



I have used ASGM as an example, but as noted, the Convention works across many sectors. Full national reporting by our Parties is due December 2021. The reporting requirements have been very well designed based on collective experience of reporting under different other instruments in past years and also thanks the Convention is concrete – reporting is to give conclusive information on the level of implementation, for every important article of the Convention and also providing information on challenges and effectiveness. The result will help to identify gaps and needs so the Convention can provide support to the Parties in solving them, including through the financial mechanism. The reporting results will also be useful for implementation of GEF-8.

GEF investments to date are providing needed resources, expertise and strategic thinking. I would like to note that activity under the other part of our financial mechanism, the Specific International Programme, is proceeding apace, with the launch of a third round of applications opening next week. This programme, the GEF mercury programme, and the Special Programme on Institutional Strengthening for the Chemicals Cluster, all coordinate so as to avoid duplication of effort and, importantly, to ensure that we are leveraging the strengths of each.

Let me now look into the future – so what are the expectations from the GEF?

GEF-7 was designed when the Convention was not yet in force. This meant a strong investment in enabling activities and transformational, proof of concept approaches like GEF GOLD.

For GEF-8, I believe we are in a position to seek larger global environmental benefits in terms of emissions reductions.

We are also in a position to seek transformative change in trade and supply chains relative to mercury.

And we need to ensure that our implementation really matches the lifecycle design of the Convention, for example, to address the waste resulting from phasing out certain products and industrial processes.

The immediate and actionable step remains to reduce and where feasible eliminate the use of mercury in ASGM as it creates tangible results for the human health and the environment nearly instantly. In the modern world, we want to move towards no more mercury use in ASGM – knowing the devastating health effects of mercury, transboundary movement of mercury and that efficient, effective alternative approaches exist.

Together, we need to ensure that targets and monitoring for individual projects and across the portfolio match the ambition of the Convention. And the resulting information will be of significant interest in our evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention.

I have listened with interest to your discussion on the recommendations of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to look at environmental, social and economic co-benefits and trade-offs in projects. Science and indigenous people's knowledge have helped us to understand and demonstrate how requirements and interventions in mercury create benefits to human health.



The work could continue to gather and further build additional evidence, so we could be intentional in building linkages between different sectors and in maximizing the benefits.

As I close, I would like to also note the importance we place on knowledge management and on the need for all our Parties to learn from successful interventions and even from less successful actions. Sound knowledge management supports awareness raising and sharing of scientific information, all of which will provide multiplier benefits across our programmes.

To conclude, our expectations for GEF-8 are high, and the Minamata Convention COP guidance to the GEF provides information on overall strategies, policies and programme priorities.

Let me refer to the recent speech by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres at Columbia University. He said, "Making peace with nature is the defining task for 21st century". This also means making mercury history. Thank you.