



Hanoi, June 25th, 2020

To: Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury
11-13, Chemin des Anémones - 1219 Châtelaine, Switzerland

RE: We are ready for Mercury-Free Dentistry

Dear Minamata Secretariat,

Vietnam Odonto-Stomatology Association (VOSA), the national dental association with its local chapters in the provinces, and Center for Community Health and Injury Prevention (CCHIP), a Hanoi-based environmental and health NGO intensely involved in implementing the Minamata Convention on Mercury, jointly submit this letter to the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

We have worked together with our government to accelerate the transition to mercury-free dentistry. In Vietnam, the alternatives are technically and economically feasible. We are pleased to assist the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury to provide information on the availability, the technical and economic feasibility, and the environmental and health of the non-mercury alternatives to dental amalgam.

Here is the experience of Vietnam.

In Vietnam, non-mercury alternatives to amalgam are available in both urban and rural areas. Because they are available, the Vietnam Ministry of Health's Health Service Administration Department advised its provinces and its dental offices to stop using amalgam for children under 15, pregnant women, and lactating women by April 01st, 2019. It further called for a roadmap to stop using amalgam in dentistry.^[1] The goal is to end amalgam use in Vietnam in 2021.

Non-mercury alternatives benefit our environment by preventing dental mercury pollution. Approximately 52 tonnes of mercury is consumed for use in dental amalgam in East and Southeast Asia each year.^[2] This mercury can eventually reach the environment and pollute the air via cremation, dental clinic emissions, municipal waste incineration, and sewage sludge incineration; the water via dental clinic releases not caught by separators and human waste; and the land via landfills, burials, and sewage sludge used as fertilizer.

Non-mercury alternatives benefit our health by reducing human mercury exposure and preserving tooth structure. Amalgam's elemental mercury can convert to methylmercury, and contaminate the fish that are important to many people's diets in Vietnam, so using non-mercury alternatives will not only reduce direct exposure to amalgam filling in the



mouth, but will also reduce this mercury exposure through fish too. Modern dentistry recognizes that amalgam placement requires the removal of more tooth structure than non-mercury alternatives, and emphasizes the importance of preserving tooth structure as an important health and cost advantage of non-mercury fillings.

Vietnam's health system is now quite modern. Although we are one of the 20 most populous countries in the world, with almost 100 million people, we survived the COVID-19 pandemic without a single death! Having ended amalgam already for the most vulnerable, we believe our health care system is capable of completing the transition to mercury-free dentistry on a rapid timetable.

Thank you for considering these experiences from Vietnam.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Trinh Dinh Hai
President, VOSA
Hanoi, Vietnam

Assoc. Prof. Nguyen Thi Thu
Director, CCHIP
Hanoi, Vietnam

^[1] Ministry of Health's Health Service Administration Department, Directive No: 261/KCB - QLCL&CĐT (25 March 2019), <https://mercuryfreedentistry.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/vietnam-ministry-of-health-re-children-etc.png> (unofficial translation available at https://mercuryfreedentistry.net/directive-no-261-of-moh-on-dental-amalgam_mar-25/)

^[2] UNEP/AMAP, *Technical Background Report to the Global Mercury Assessment* (2018), https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29831/gma_tech.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, p.3-39 (61)