

Ref: MC/ES/2021/22

12 April 2021

Subject: Update on the latest work and on the team of Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury

Dear Madam/Sir,

The Secretariat of the Minamata Convention is honoured to update the Parties to the Minamata Convention on the latest developments and activities held during the intersessional work period.

Firstly, I am pleased to inform you that since the beginning of this year, four new countries deposited their instruments of ratification and became parties to the Convention, bringing the **total number of parties to 130**. I would like to express my appreciation to Italy, Cameroon, Burundi and Cambodia and recognize steps taken by the countries to base their actions to protect the human health and the environment from mercury on a legally binding instrument.

Regional consultations on options for convening COP-4 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic

During the fourth meeting of the COP-4 Bureau held by teleconference on 3 March 2021, the Secretariat presented the document *Note on options for convening COP-4 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic*. Bureau members requested more time to further consult with their respective constituencies on the suggested options for COP-4. The Note was shared electronically with Permanent Missions to the UN Environment Programme and to the UN in Geneva and National Focal Points for the Minamata Convention on Mercury on 8 March 2021.

I would like to thank the President, Bureau members and regions for organisation and active participation in the consultative meetings, held online in the period of 23 March - 13 April 2021. I am looking forward to the next meeting of the COP-4 Bureau, to be held online on 14 April 2021, which is expected to decide on the format of COP-4.

Specific International Programme, Third Round

On 18 March 2021, the deadline for applications to the Third Round to the Specific International Programme was closed. I am extremely happy to report that 24 applications have reached the Secretariat.

It is worth mentioning that the submission of applications followed a busy preparatory time.

On 19 and 20 January 2021, the Secretariat hosted [webinar sessions in English, French and Spanish](#) on the application guidelines (which are available in English, French and Spanish). All materials shared at the sessions (recordings, and presentations) are available on our website, to also be accessible to Parties subsequently in case they could not attend the respective webinars, or if they wanted to refer back to the information shared. Given the time zone implications, the Secretariat also made special efforts to reach out to the Pacific region to ensure all relevant information on the Specific International Programme reached small island developing states in that region.

In February 2021, the webinars were followed up with an invitation to all prospective applicants to book a one-on-one Clinic session with the Secretariat to answer any questions that may have arisen during the course of the application preparation. A total of 9 Parties made use of this opportunity. From the Secretariat's perspective these clinics were especially insightful as a large number of the prospective applicants were ready to discuss details of their draft applications at the sessions.



The next step in the overall review process is that the Secretariat will do a technical review of the applications, including through the Cross-Secretariat Task Team (which includes Minamata Secretariat staff members, as well as members of the GEF Secretariat, the Special Programme Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Global Mercury Partnership). By 30 April 2021 the Secretariat will inform applicants in case any revisions are required or suggested from a technical perspective to the applications prior to their appraisal and consideration for funding by the Governing Board.

The Secretariat encourages all those in a position to do so to join with our generous donors to contribute to the Specific Trust Fund and thereby enable the Programme's support to reach all the eligible parties with well-articulated priority needs for assistance. We further note the Secretariat's ongoing interest in hosting a Junior Professional Officer to help advance the Programme if any country is able to support such a position.

Consultations on Monitoring Guidance

Further to my communication MC/ES/2021/19 from 18 February 2021, the Secretariat has been working with consultants following the [roadmap](#) for developing monitoring guidance. On 25 February, with the input from experts identified by Parties and stakeholders, the [Zero draft](#) of the guidance was posted on the website and an additional round of thematic online sessions were convened in March, as follows:

- 16 March: Chapter 7 (Human biomonitoring)
- 17 March: Additional session for early time zones (all chapters)
- 19 March: Chapter 6 (Biota monitoring)
- 23 March: Chapter 5 (Air monitoring)
- 25 March: Chapters 3, 4 and 8 (Generic chapters, cross-media analysis and modelling)

The next milestones in the intersessional work on development of guidance will be the posting of draft guidance for comments on 15 April 2021 and collecting Parties' and stakeholders' comments by 31 May 2021.

Proposed indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of the Minamata Convention

Following the Exchange Sessions held on 2 and 4 in February 2021, Parties requested the Secretariat to provide for an additional opportunity to engage on the initial views submitted on the proposed indicators. This Exchange Session was held on Thursday, 4 March 2021.

Other intersessional work

Expert groups on the review of Annexes A and B, mercury releases and mercury waste thresholds are working diligently under the leadership of the co-chairs towards the timelines established by the relevant COP-3 decisions. I will brief you on the progress of their work, including call for comments and inputs, in my next communication.

Secretariat team

I am glad to inform you that the Secretariat has finalized the recruitment of the vacant positions.

Manoela Pessoa de Miranda joined the Secretariat on 5 March 2021 as Programme Management Officer, P4. Manoela previously worked in UNEP, and the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity, specifically on Biosafety Protocol. She deals with scientific and technical support to Parties, including monitoring.



Richard Gutierrez will join on 19 April 2021 as Programme Management Officer (P3) and will cover matters related to effectiveness evaluation and reporting. Richard has long worked on mercury and the Minamata Convention in various roles, most recently in managing projects related to artisanal and small scale mining.

Let me also inform you that with the kind financial support of Japan, I have approved a one-year extension of a JPO contract for our team member Takafumi Anan, starting on 16 April 2021, on a 50-50 funding basis. The funding under chapter 1.3 on intersessional time-based expert groups mandated by the COP of the 2020-2021 budget has been used for this purpose. The funding was originally allocated for travels for a physical meeting, which due to the pandemic has not been possible to hold. Takafumi will continue supporting the work of various technical expert groups, as well as some tasks for Article 21 reporting and capacity-building. Let me express my appreciation to the Government of Japan for kindly providing additional funding.

I would also like to recognize the work of my colleagues in the Secretariat in the period when not all positions were filled, and who have gone above and beyond to cover all range of tasks while also responding and adapting to the new ways of working. While I recognize there are still needs for human resources in the Secretariat, I am very glad we can continue working towards COP-4 as a reinforced team.

I thank you for your work on the implementation of the Minamata Convention and your commitment to [#MakeMercuryHistory](#).

Yours sincerely,

Monika Stankiewicz
Executive Secretary

To: Governments through their official channels of communication to the UN Environment Programme

Cc: National Focal Points for the Minamata Convention on Mercury
Permanent Missions to the UN Environment Programme and to the UN in Geneva