



# Mission to Minamata



How the **GEF** is helping reduce and eliminate mercury from the global environment

## The Problem

Emissions and releases of mercury can have devastating effects on the environment and human health. The most notorious example came to the public's attention in Japan during the mid-1950s, where a chemical plant was, for decades, dumping loads of mercury into the Minamata bay, resulting in large-scale poisoning of people and animals. Described as the Minamata disease, mercury poisoning is a debilitating neurological syndrome caused by the consumption of marine organisms heavily contaminated with mercury.

Like other heavy metals, mercury persists in the environment for a very long time. And because it is easily vaporized, mercury can be transported through the air over long distances far removed from its original emission source. With approximately 2000 tonnes per year of mercury being emitted as a by-product of industrial processes like coal burning and metal and cement manufacturing, it has now reached even the most remote corners of the planet, making its way into the air we breathe and the food we eat.

The damage caused by mercury in people is irreversible.

## Call to Action

The Minamata Convention on Mercury has become the prime global treaty created to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury. By naming the convention Minamata, the international community is sending a clear message that never again such a disaster be allowed to happen. The Convention opened for signature on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013. By October of 2014 the convention had gained 128 signatures and seven ratifications.

The Minamata Convention constitutes a significant and important step in the right direction to protect people and the environment against the dangers of mercury. However, the real work begins now. It will take a global effort to combat mercury and early ratification and implementation of the convention is urgently needed.

## The GEF Response

During the 5<sup>th</sup> GEF Replenishment Period (2010-2014), the GEF developed a strategy to support and inform the negotiations for a global mercury agreement, including providing financial resources for mercury projects, and for programs that support assessments and pilot activities. In GEF-5, the GEF provided \$25 million to developing countries to support 40 projects directed at reducing emissions and release of mercury.

The GEF has committed to providing support for developing countries and countries with economies in transition to help fulfill their obligations under the recently created Minamata Convention, designed to promote a safer and healthier global environment. At the 5<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly in May 2014 the GEF Instrument was amended to include the Minamata Convention and a new integrated Chemicals and Waste focal area, with the primary objective of preventing the exposure of humans and the environment to harmful chemicals and waste of global importance.

Recognizing its experience of financially supporting the implementation of other global environmental agreements, the GEF has been chosen to join in the Financial Mechanism of the Convention. In response to this expanding responsibility, the GEF has significantly increased its support to developing countries by allocating \$141 million for mercury-related initiatives over the course of the 6<sup>th</sup> GEF Replenishment period (2014-2018).

## Progamming of GEF Resources

The GEF-6 Strategy for the Chemicals and Waste focal area includes a specific program to support mercury management and reduction projects in priority areas. It also defines priority and eligibility criteria for projects. The GEF is also providing support to enabling activities that help countries plan actions that help them meet their obligations under the convention, including initial assessments and national action plans for the artisanal and small scale gold mining sector.

## About the GEF

The Global Environment Facility is a partnership for international cooperation where 183 countries work together with international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, to address global environmental issues.

Since 1991, the GEF has provided \$12.5 billion in grants and leveraged \$58 billion in co-financing for 3,690 projects in 165 developing countries. For 23 years, developed and developing countries alike have provided these funds to support activities related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, and chemicals and waste in the context of development projects and programs.

Through its Small Grants Programme (SGP) the GEF has made more than 20,000 grants to civil society and community based organizations for a total of \$1 billion.

Among the major results of these investments, the GEF has set up protected areas around the world equal roughly to the area of Brazil; reduced carbon emissions by 2.3 billion tonnes; eliminated the use of ozone depleting substances in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia; transformed the management of 33 major river basins and one-third of the world's large marine ecosystems; slowed the advance of desertification in Africa by improving agricultural practices—and all this while contributing to better the livelihood and food security of millions of people.



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