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**PRESS RELEASE:**

**Global Treaty on Mercury Pollution Gets Boost from United States**

**UNEP's Achim Steiner Welcomes First Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury**

**Nairobi, 7 November 2013**—The United States has strengthened the international effort to bring down emissions and releases of a notorious heavy metal after simultaneously signing and ratifying the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The treaty, adopted on 10 October in the Japanese city of Kumamoto and named after the place where thousands of people were poisoned by mercury in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, has now been signed by 93 countries.

The United States has become the first nation to complete the next and final step after Kerri-Ann Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs deposited the 'instrument of acceptance' at the United Nations' headquarters on Wednesday.

Dr Jones said: "The Minamata Convention is a major step forward to address mercury exposure and improve public health. The UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) essential role in facilitating the successful negotiation of this convention is deeply appreciated. The Minamata Convention is an important achievement for the health of people around the world and the U.S. is pleased to be able to join the Convention."

The move, which marks an important step forward towards the global agreement coming into force was today welcomed by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director.

"I would like to thank the United States for this important act that assists in paving the way for a new era on international cooperation on mercury pollution and global efforts to lift a serious health and environmental threat from the lives of people everywhere," he said.

Mercury's impacts on the human nervous system have been well known since Greek and Roman times. Its potential impacts include impaired thyroid and liver function, irritability, tremors, disturbances to vision, memory loss and cardiovascular problems.

Mr Steiner added: "UNEP has been proud to facilitate and support the treaty negotiations over the past four years because almost everyone in the world—be they small-scale gold miners, expectant mothers or waste-handlers in developing countries—will benefit from its provisions".

The Minamata Convention provides for controls and reductions across a range of products, processes and industries where mercury is used, released or emitted. The treaty also addresses the direct mining of mercury, export and import of the metal and safe storage of waste mercury.

Pinpointing populations at risk, boosting medical care and better training of health-care professionals in identifying and treating mercury-related effects will all result from adherence to the obligations of the new treaty.

The Convention will come into force when 50 signatory countries have ratified it.

In a statement the United States State Department said Wednesday: The United States has already taken significant steps to reduce the amount of mercury we generate and release to the environment, and can implement Convention obligations under existing legislative and regulatory authority. The Minamata Convention complements domestic measures by addressing the transnational nature of the problem".

**Editors' notes**

The full text of the treaty can be found [here](#)

For more information about the Diplomatic Conference, please see [here](#)

For a list of the countries that have signed the Convention so far, please see (from 10 October) [www.mercuryconvention.org](http://www.mercuryconvention.org).

For more information about the effects of mercury, please click [here](#)

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