



United Nations
Industrial Development Organization

Braving the Elements:

UNIDO and Mercury

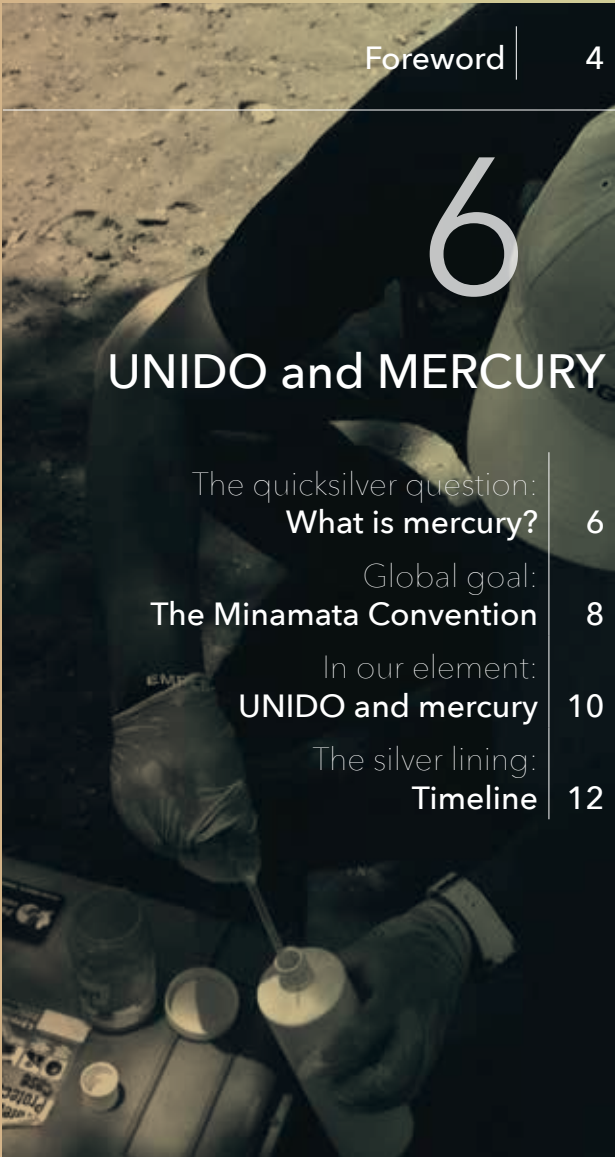




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UNIDO and MERCURY

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Li Yong

Director General of UNIDO

UNIDO has worked to reduce and eliminate mercury in developing countries and economies in transition for more than twenty years. Starting with the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector, UNIDO has expanded into other areas, such as zinc smelting and vinyl chloride monomer production. Since the milestone achievement of the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in August 2017, in addition to our global commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the role of the international community and specialized agencies like UNIDO has only become more pertinent.

Mercury poisoning poses a significant danger to human health and the environment, particular to women and unborn children. UNIDO's work in supporting member states in fulfilling their commitment towards the Minamata Convention protects societies and communities from the effects of mercury and helps governments to adhere to the Convention. UNIDO has been assisting enterprises to adopt sustainable practices that reduce and eliminate mercury from the environment, in support of the further development of enterprises.

This booklet showcases a selection of UNIDO's intervention in its Mercury Programme. In compiling this knowledge product, we draw on our projects in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector that introduces innovative, mercury-free techniques for miners, aimed at supporting the reduction of poverty through inclusive and sustainable industrial development. In the booklet, we also show how the incorporation of gender perspectives in UNIDO interventions aimed at promoting gender equality is important, and can make a difference to the overall development impact on the community and its well-being.

UNIDO has also learned from its experience that due to the wide number of sectors impacted by mercury use, the most effective way to reduce and eliminate mercury is through partnerships. Whether we are working with international refiners to ensure responsibly mined gold, or with the public and private sector to identify ways to decommission and decontaminate chlor-alkali facilities, it is clear that working in collaboration with donors, partners and our Member States delivers the needed development results. This is just the beginning. UNIDO, together with its partners will strive to continue to find practical avenues to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development, while protecting human health and the environment from the harmful effects of mercury.

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, connected strokes.

Li Yong

The Minamata Convention is a demonstration of the power that the international community, when determined to act together, can show.

The Convention was adopted in Kumamoto, Japan, by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in October 2013, aiming to address the devastating effects of mercury by tackling this natural element throughout its life cycle.

It was only four years before that the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme adopted the historical decision to develop a legally-binding instrument to confront mercury pollution. The text was agreed at the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC).

Mercury pollution is a global problem and thus requires global action. Mercury is emitted in the air and is transported very long distances in the atmosphere. It is also released in water and soil, and does not respect geographical or political borders. The INC, governments, international organizations, industry, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia and civil society at large, overcame their differences and united towards a common objective of global benefit.

The Minamata tragedy in Japan strongly influenced the decision to act. The Convention is, in effect, named after the beautiful Minamata Bay in Japan, which experienced a serious and long incidence of mercury poisoning in the 1950s. The Minamata disease diagnosis and suffering continue to be repeated around the world. This is exactly what needs to be stopped. The Minamata Convention is a testimony to the international community having learned the lesson. We all speak with one voice now against further losing lives to mercury and further polluting our environment with it.

The Convention celebrated the first year of its entry into force in August, and as of today it has 101 parties. A long but fruitful path has been followed since the early 2000s when Switzerland and Norway proposed the development of an international legal framework on mercury. Today, the hardest work lies ahead, as we now must implement the Convention as effectively and rapidly as possible, to minimize the risks posed to communities and the environment.

Meeting the commitments under the Convention will support the international community's efforts towards the various Sustainable Development Goals the Convention contributes to, directly and indirectly.

The hard, serious and committed work and support of all will make it possible to progress in our common objective and, over time, make mercury history!



Rossana Silva Repetto



Rossana Silva Repetto

Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention

The quicksilver question: What is mercury?



MERCURY HAS FASCINATED PEOPLE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

Dense and silvery-white, it is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature. It is a naturally occurring element that can be found in air, water and soil. Some mercury is released into the environment from natural sources, such as volcanic eruptions or forest fires. But the majority comes from human activity, such as gold

Did you know?

EARLY SIGNS
OF SICKNESS AT
MINAMATA WERE SEEN
IN HOUSEHOLD CATS.
THE CATS CONVULSED

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