

Ministry of the Environment
Government of Japan

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To: Mr. John Buccini,
Director, UNEP Chemicals

Subject: Governing Council decision 23/9 on the mercury programme

Dear Mr. Buccini,

I am happy to respond to your letter of 20 May 2005 addressed to the Permanent Representative of Japan to UNEP concerning the follow up on the Governing Council decision 23/9 on the mercury program, on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment of Japan. Although this letter concerns my Ministry's intention, I have consulted other relevant ministries about this response.

As the country that experienced Minamata Disease, a severe health damage that occurred in the 1950s and 60s as a result of methyl mercury pollution, Japan places a considerable importance on the international co-operation addressing the mercury pollution. For this purpose, the National Institute for Minamata Disease (NIMD) of my Ministry is committed to a broad range of activities.

We are aware of the proposals from the United States about their partnership initiatives in five areas, i.e. chlor-alkali industry, coal combustion, gold mining, mercury-containing products and global fate/transport research.

Our first priority is our commitment to the fate and transport research initiative. We are willing to contribute with our activities on emission inventory and numerical modeling. We will be able to provide our national emission inventory including coal combustion and use/disposal of products (we do not have chlor-alkali plant that use mercury). Furthermore, we are now requesting budget for a research programme covering international aspects of inventory building, environmental modeling and monitoring. If we obtain this budget for the fiscal year 2006, we

will be able to consider pursuing our national research initiative within the partnership framework.

We will also be able to contribute to other partnership areas. With regard to health damage problems caused by mercury emission from chlor-alkali industry and coal mining, we have carried out and will continue a number of projects involving field survey by NIMD researchers, technology transfer on environmental monitoring, co-operative research and international workshops. This fiscal year, we plan an international forum meeting on health effects of low-level methyl mercury pollution and a Japan-Korea environmental health conference. Based on this experience and expertise especially in environmental and health monitoring, NIMD will be able to contribute to the partnership projects. Also, other institutes such as the National Institute for Environmental Studies will be able to contribute to the initiative with their experience in emission control and monitoring including in coal combustion and disposal of mercury-containing products, through the participation of experts in workshops or other events.

We very much look forward to working with you and our colleagues from other countries.

Eisaku Toda (Mr.)

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