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Informal Exploratory Meeting
Addressing Primary Mercury Mining in Kyrgyzstan

Location Geneva, Varembe Centre, 17 Rue de Varembé
Timing 3 April 2009 (9.00 - 13.00)

Objective
Reflect upon the cost effectiveness of continued primary mercury mining and on the needs of Kyrgyzstan in transitioning to economically viable and sustainable economic activities.

Proposed Overview of Discussion
- Provide an overview of the implications of UNEP Governing Council 25 (UNEP)
- Discuss the current status of the mine and initial indications of options to be included in the action plan (Kyrgyzstan)
- Review current project and explore next steps (Kyrgyzstan / UNITAR / UNEP)
- Planning for international forum (UNEP)
- Explore financial implications, propose funding options and opportunities for leveraging (all)

Background
Reduction of mercury supply has been identified as a priority area by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council, which considers primary mercury mining as an important activity to be addressed in order to reduce global loadings of mercury to the environment in the near term. It is expected that global controls will be placed on mercury, making market demand for mercury minimal within ten years.

Overall, the reduction of primary mercury mining is estimated as a relatively inexpensive way of reducing mercury loading in the global environment. Mercury in ore is there naturally, and costs nothing to remain in that form. Any mercury generated from primary mercury mining activities bears significant long term costs to society both in terms of its local impacts, eventual impact on human health and the environment globally and the significant economic cost of proper long term management of mercury and mercury containing waste.

Kyrgyzstan's Haidarkan primary mercury mine is the last remaining major supplier of primary mined mercury to the international marketplace (accounting for approximately 10% of the global supply in 2005). The contributions of Kyrgyzstan to the global mercury supply over many years have been important but not indispensible. Kyrgyzstan has the largest mercury reserves in Central Asia. In 2007 the Haidarkan plant produced 331 tonnes of mercury. The current technical capacity of the production in Haidarkan is thought to be about 600 tonnes a year. Depletion of ore concentrations, difficult accessibility of new (deeper) mercury reserves and increasing technical complexity are the main obstacles in increasing production capacity.

The Haidarkan mine is state-owned, reporting to the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Fuel resources. In 2003, the facility was put on the market for privatization, with a reserve price of US$2 million, on condition that a further US$6 million was invested over the next three years. The Kyrgyzstan government has informally indicated that they are not against reducing mercury production but that very serious economic and social aspects must be considered in taking action, given that the facility is a major employer in the region, taxpayer to the government and supplier of mercury globally.

The meeting is open. Those interested should express interest to Ms Tatiana Terekhova (email: Tatiana.terekhova@unitar.org; tel.: +41 22 9178470).