



# **“Mercury in the North: Sources of Contamination and International Policies to Protect Health and Human Rights”**

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Global Teleconference

PRESENTATION BY: Rochelle Diver

**International Indian Treaty Council**

*Working for the Rights and Recognition of Indigenous Peoples*

**Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios**

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# What is Mercury?

Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in rocks, soil, water, air and living things. Mercury is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature. In its pure form (often called metallic or elemental), mercury is a shiny, silver-white, odorless liquid. If heated, mercury vaporizes into a toxic, colorless gas that is odorless to people.

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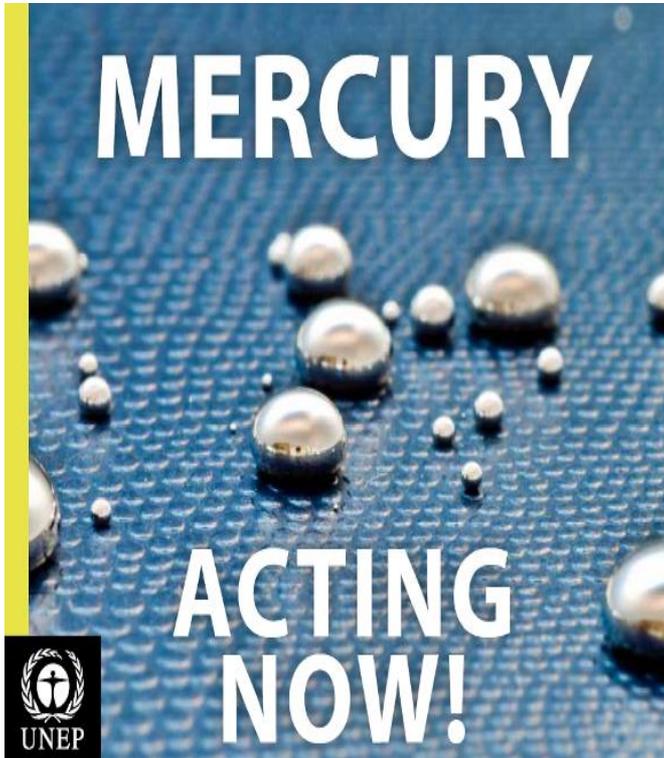


# Impacts of Mercury

- Mercury is a hazardous chemical and has severe impacts on women and children in particular.
- Mercury can damage the central nervous system, kidneys and liver. Both high level/short-term and low level/long-term exposures can lead to serious health problems.
- High level, short-term exposure can cause skin rashes, diarrhea, and respiratory distress. Repeated exposure to low levels, or long-term, low-level exposure, can cause muscle tremors, irritability, personality changes, or rashes.



# The Minimata Convention on Mercury



- In 2009, the UNEP adopted a decision on the development of a legally binding instrument on mercury.
- The intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) was carried out from June 2010 to January 2013

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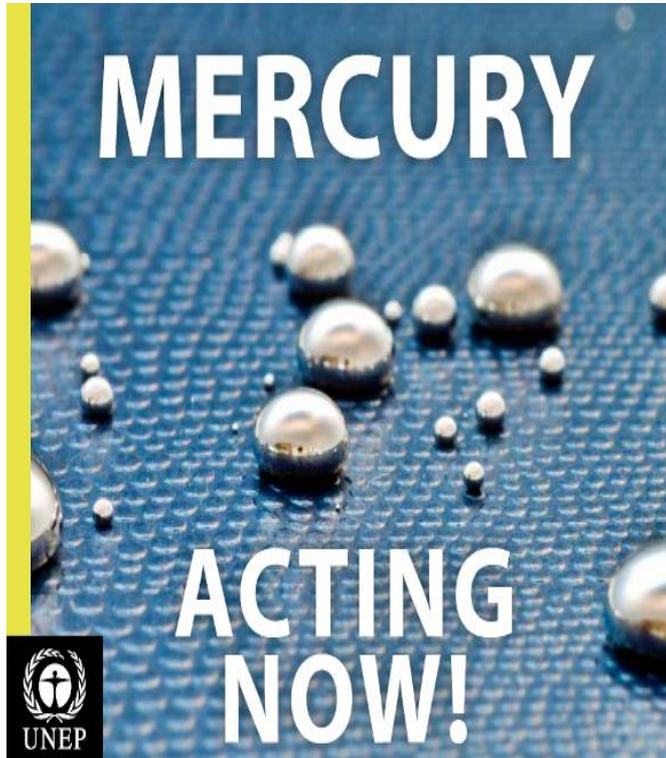
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# How do Indigenous Peoples Participate?

- Information Sharing: webinars and trainings
- Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus
- On-site with interventions, advocacy and contributing to the “contact groups”



**Global Indigenous Peoples' Caucus, INC5, Geneva, January 2013**

*LEFT TO RIGHT: Jackie Keliiaa, Danika Littlechild, Rochelle Diver, Parnuna Egede*

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# The Minimata Convention on Mercury: Indigenous Peoples' Priorities



- 1) A strong International Mercury Treaty recognizing human rights to health, culture, subsistence and FPIC
- 2) Elimination of new sources of contamination, i.e. from mining, damming and coal-fired power plants
- 3) Clean up of legacy mine sites
- 4) Full participation of Indigenous Peoples

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# The text of the Convention was signed by delegates from 140 countries on 19 January 2013

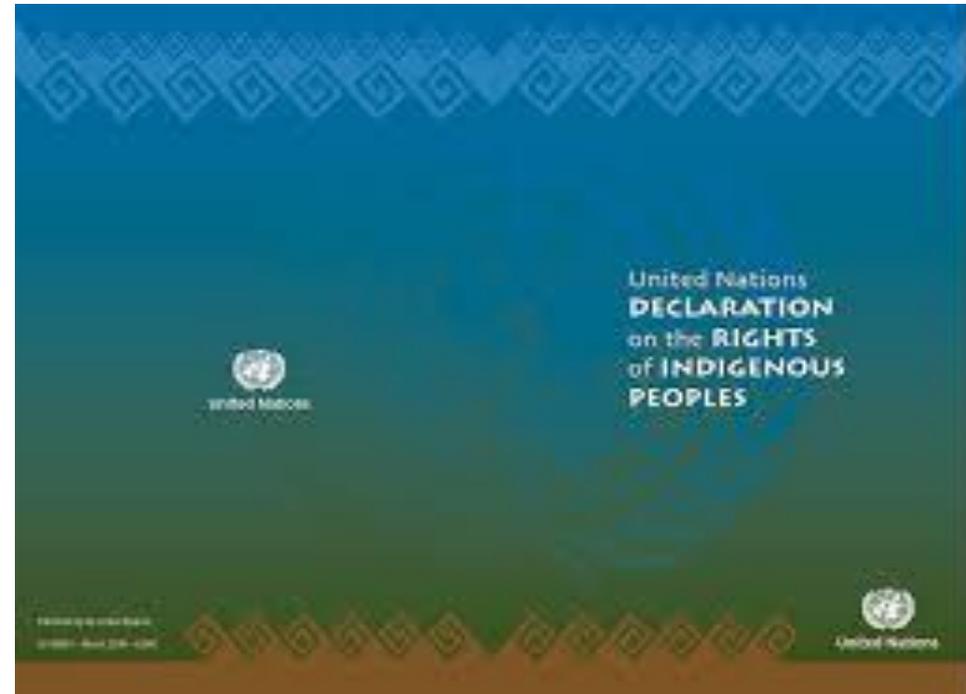
- 1) The term Indigenous “communities” rather than “Peoples”
- 2) Neither Indigenous Peoples nor communities were mentioned in the operative text
- 3) "Noting the particular vulnerabilities of Arctic ecosystems and indigenous communities because of the biomagnification of mercury and contamination of traditional foods, and concerned about indigenous communities more generally with respect to the effects of mercury,"



# The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Adopted in 2007

***“The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.”***

***--Article 43***



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# Sources of Mercury

- The mining industry
- Coal-fired power plants
- Medical waste incinerators / municipal waste combustors
- Dental amalgams

**\*NATIVE PEOPLES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY ALL OF THESE SOURCES\***

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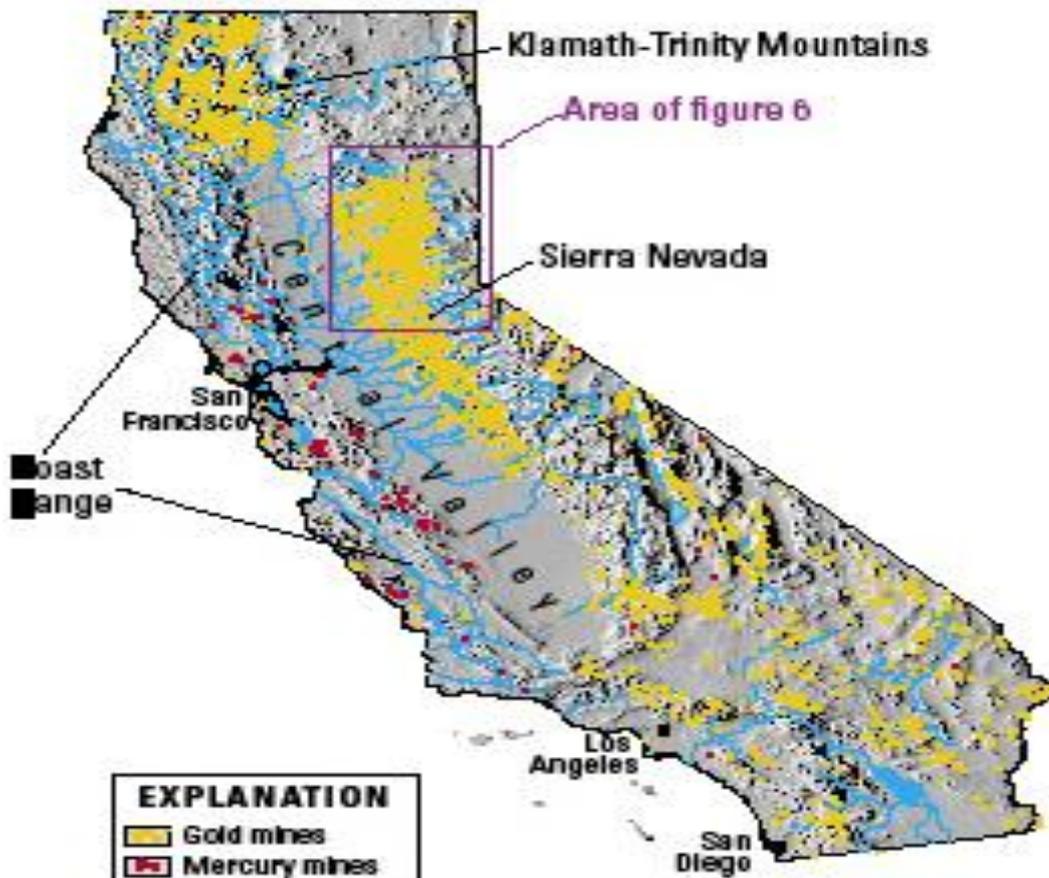
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# Mercury Contamination: Legacy of the CA Gold Rush



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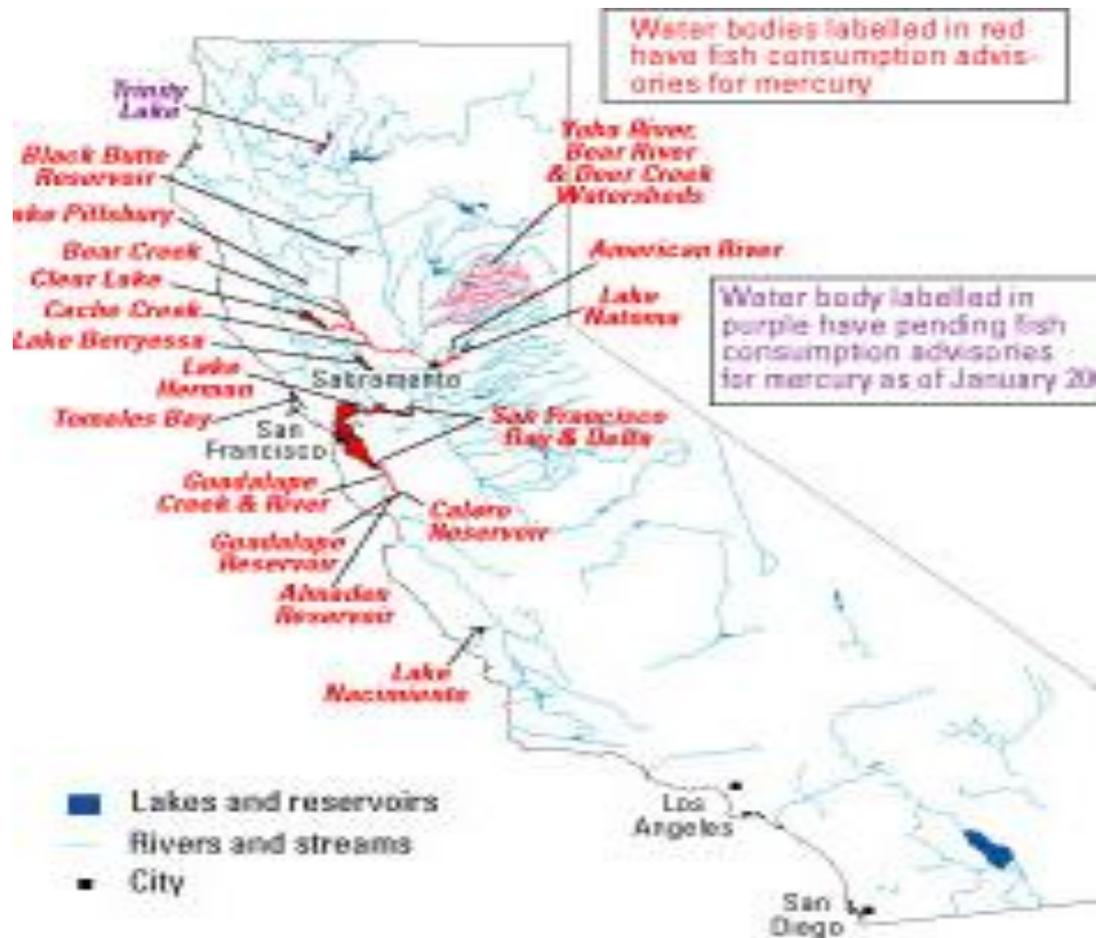
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# COAL FIRED POWER PLANTS

Women in rural communities, such as Grand Portage Reservation in Northern MN on the border of Canada, are passing on high levels of mercury to their unborn babies from simply living their traditional lifestyles off the land

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# Mercury in Dental Amalgams

Dental amalgam is a filling material containing 50% mercury (sometimes inappropriately called a "silver filling")

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# Women's Reproductive Health

- Almost all people have at least trace amounts of methylmercury in their tissues, reflecting methylmercury's widespread presence. What does this mean for child-bearing women?
- For fetuses, infants, and children, the primary health effect of methylmercury is impaired neurological development



# The Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive Health Initiative

Launched in 2009 in response to ongoing concerns expressed by Indigenous women about the severe effects of mercury, pesticides and other environmental toxics on their reproductive health and the health of their children. The Initiative coordinates information-sharing and network-building among women and girls from impacted communities and builds their leadership and capacity to be informed advocates in changing the policies, practices and laws which expose them, their families and future generations to dangerous environmental toxins.

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# Indigenous Women: Grassroots Activism to International Initiatives



Participants in the 2nd  
**INTERNATIONAL  
INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN'S  
ENVIRONMENTAL AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
SYMPOSIUM**, April 27th  
– 29th , 2012,  
Chickaloon Village,  
Alaska

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# INC7, Dead Sea, Jordan 10 – 15 March 2016

This meeting was relevant to NGO's and stakeholders as a final opportunity to be influential in key parts of ***negotiating reporting standards, guidelines for identification and remediation of contaminated sites, storage practices*** and other technical definitions and guidelines.



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# INC7, Dead Sea, Jordan

## 10 – 15 March 2016

### MEETING OBJECTIVES:

- Be present and vocal in contact group negotiations advocating for the rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Deliver intervention of behalf of IITC and affiliates from impacted regions
- Support International POPs Elimination Networks (IPEN)  
“Guidance on the identification, management and remediation of mercury contaminated sites”

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# INC7, Dead Sea, Jordan 10 – 15 March 2016

## RESULTS:

- The issue of contaminated sites has been pushed to the Conference of the Parties 1 (COP1).
- Storage guidelines are very weak and a lot more work will need to be done regarding this at COP1.
- NEED strong Indigenous participation at COP1!



# Chi Miigwech – Many Thanks



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***Rochelle Diver***  
***Environmental Health Program***  
***Coordinator***

**The International Indian Treaty Council**

IITC is an organization of Indigenous Peoples from North, Central, South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific working for the Sovereignty and Self Determination of Indigenous Peoples and the recognition and protection of Indigenous Rights, Treaties, Traditional Cultures and Sacred Lands.

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