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NGOs Support Libreville Declaration to End Mercury-added Skin Lightening Cosmetics

Libreville, Gabon—On Wednesday 22nd January 2025, Ministers adopted a declaration calling for the elimination of mercury-added skin lightening products. Non-government organizations from Africa and across the globe applauded the Ministers high level call to zero out mercury in skin whitening products.

ZMWG testing indicates that hundreds if not thousands of them are available in the global market. Products tested in a variety of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Europe and North America have contained from less than 1 to 57,000 parts per million (ppm) mercury.

“We applaud the declaration by the African ministers for health and environment in Gabon to end the marketing and sale of these harmful products in Africa. The declaration will support our efforts to end the illegal sale of mercury skin lighteners in Kenya, especially via the online platforms.” Said Griffins Ochieng, Executive Director Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD), Kenya.

Mercury is a persistent neurotoxin that can cause severe adverse health effects via absorption through the skin, inhalation or orally. Due to its ability to vaporize, mercury in cosmetics poses a risk not only to the consumer but also to others in the home. Infants, children, and the developing fetus are particularly vulnerable to the neurodevelopmental effects of mercury. Long-term exposure may damage the eyes, lungs, kidneys, digestive, immune and nervous systems.

“The upcoming Minamata Convention Sixth Conference of the Parties scheduled for later this year should endorse this forward-looking initiative and adopt a programme of work to tackle mercury added cosmetics and #MakeMercuryHistory,” said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo from the European Environmental Bureau and ZMWG International Co-ordinator

Mercury is added to SLPs because it lightens the skin by suppressing the production of melanin. Skin-lighteners are sold as creams, lotions and soaps.

We call on the government through KEBS to sensitize and create public awareness on the dangers of these harmful products.

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For more information:

[1] The Minamata Convention: (<https://mercuryconvention.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Minamata-Convention-booklet-Sep2019-EN.pdf>)

[2] Numerous peer-reviewed studies confirm the negative impacts of mercury added SLPs on human health. Moreover, the World Health Organization has recognized that mercury is a “major public health concern,” (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240023567> and has outlined its concerns about SLPs in a fact sheet (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240023567>)

[3] The Zero Mercury Working Group Skin Lightening Campaign:
www.zeromercury.org/mercury-added-skin-lightening-creams-campaign

[4] The Libreville Declaration on Eliminating Mercury Added Skin Lightening Creams.

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