

The Minamata Convention

The Minamata Convention is a Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) with the objective of protecting human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury. It was agreed at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on mercury in Geneva, Switzerland, 19 January 2013 and adopted later that year on 10 October 2013 at a Diplomatic Conference which was held in Kumamoto, Japan.

The Convention draws attention to a global and ubiquitous naturally occurring metal that has broad uses in our everyday life and is released into the atmosphere, soil and water from numerous sources. The adoption of the life cycle assessment approach towards the management of the anthropogenic releases and emissions of mercury has been a key factor in the finalisation of the obligations under the Convention.

The Minamata Convention covers the following issues

- The ban on new and the phase-out of existing mercury mines.
- The phase out and down of mercury use in a number of products and processes,
- Control measures on emissions to air and on releases to land and water, and
- The regulation of the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
- The interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, mercury contaminated site, as well as health issues.

Zimbabwe signed the convention on the 11th of October 2013 and the nation is currently conducting national mercury inventories in a bid to gather information on the quantity of mercury emissions and release as well as their distribution in land, air and water. The data will inform the nation towards the ratification of the convention.

For more details on the provisions of the Minamata Convention on mercury you can download the convention text from the official Minamata website.

Key terms on MEAs

Signature

Where the signature is subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, it does not establish the consent to be bound. However, it is a means of authentication and expresses the willingness of the signatory state to continue the convention-making process. The signature qualifies the signatory state to proceed to ratification, acceptance or approval. It also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the treaty.

Ratification

Ratification defines the international act whereby a state indicates its consent to be bound to a treaty if the parties intended to show their consent by such an act.

Acceptance and Approval

Acceptance or Approval of a treaty has the same legal effect as **ratification** and consequently express the consent of a state to be bound by a treaty.

Accession

Accession is the act whereby a state accepts the offer or the opportunity to become a party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other states. It has the same legal effect as ratification. Accession usually occurs after the treaty has entered into force.