Opening remarks, Seminar on Geological and Environmental Research Methodologies for artisanal and small sale gold mining, 27 November 2021

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Expressed sincere gratitude to the organizers, the Daiichi Institute of Technology, as well as the Japanese Society of Geo-pollution Science, Medical Geology and Urban Geology for inviting the Global Mercury Partnership Secretariat at the event.

Pleasure to note that the Partnership welcomed last year Mr. Satoshi Murao (Professor, Department of Regional Revitalization Design and Engineering, Daiichi Institute of Technology) as new partner.

(Overview of the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership)

Initiated in 2005, the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership aims to protect human health and the environment from the releases of mercury to air, water and land.

With over 200 partners from governments, IGOs, NGOs, industry, academia, and the scientific community, the Partnership is a voluntary network that focuses on supporting timely and effective implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, providing state of the art knowledge and science and raising awareness towards global action on mercury.

The Partnership comprises eight areas of work, which represent sectors that use mercury or process raw materials that contain mercury, as well as key themes in mercury management and science, namely: Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM); Mercury releases from coal combustion; Mercury cell chlor-alkali production; Mercury in products; Mercury air transport and fate research; Mercury waste management; Mercury supply and storage and Mercury releases from the cement industry.

Work is also conducted in a cross-cutting manner across Partnership areas, currently on mercury from oil and gas and from non-ferrous metals mining and smelting.

Every year up to 15 per cent of the world's gold is extracted by artisanal and small-scale gold miners. It is estimated that there are about 10 to 15 million of artisanal and small-scale gold miners around of the world.

ASGM is a complex development issue, with often informal activities, where miners rely on simple techniques and work under conditions with poor health, safety and environmental protection, including the use by millions of mercury to extract the gold from the ore.

ASGM is actually the sector demanding the largest quantity of mercury and the largest source of mercury emissions to the atmosphere. Mercury releases to air, water and land from the sector are estimated to be over 2000 tonnes each year[1].

[1] United Nations Environment Programme 2019. Global Mercury Assessment 2018, https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/global-mercury-assessment-2018

The Minamata Convention on Mercury entered into force in 2017, with the objective to protect the human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

Parties under the Convention who determine that artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing in their territory is more than insignificant are required to develop and implement a national action plan.

Through the national action plans developed, data is collected, including from desk studies, interviews as well as field visits, in relation to baseline estimates of mercury use, mining and extraction practices, but also socio-economic, legal and regulatory as well as human health.

Additional information including with respect to environmental or human monitoring or sampling, data which for instance would indicate or confirm mercury contamination around ASGM sites, is very relevant and may help further estimate mercury use by the sector, and support decision making processes, guiding policy development and contributing to better understanding mercury fate and cycle.

Hence looking forward to the presentations today and fruitful discussions, and to exploring further possible opportunities and contributions of this work to mercury and the work of the Global Mercury Partnership, including re. applications to the ASGM context.

Thank you again