

# Johannesburg Declaration on Mercury-Free Health Care

25<sup>th</sup> October 2007

**Aware** that Mercury is a bioaccumulative global toxicant and hence poses an acute threat to health care workers, patients, and ultimately a long-term persistent threat to the global environment;

**Understanding** that healthcare contributes to the global mercury problem through broken and discarded mercury containing medical devices;

**Appreciating** UNEP's efforts to promote mercury-use reduction and that WHO has issued a policy promoting the elimination of mercury in the health care sector;

**Noting** that in the US and Europe mercury-based medical devices have been phased out; that the European Union is developing a mercury export ban; and that several health care systems in Asia and Latin America are phasing out mercury.

**Noting further** the existing successful local initiatives in the African region to phase out mercury containing devices.

**Mindful** of the challenge that the awareness level of decision makers, health workers and the general public, regarding the impacts of mercury on environment and human health is very low;

**Worried** that Africa may ultimately become a dumping ground of banned mercury containing devices; and

**Comforted** by the fact that affordable, effective and accurate mercury-free alternatives are available.

***We, the participants in the First Southern Africa Conference on Promoting Alternatives to Mercury in the Health Care Sector, commit ourselves to***

**Raise awareness** by providing information, education and training to decision makers, health care workers, and the community, focusing on the impacts of mercury and the need to replace it.

**Advocate/lobby** for appropriate regulation, legislation and enforcement of mercury-free health care (*mercury use phase out*) at the national, provincial and local levels.

**In the short term promote/advocate for** the planned and progressive replacement of mercury containing instruments and devices used by the health care sector; and for cleaning up mercury contaminated areas-- starting from our work places, and moving up to the local, provincial and national levels.

**Create National, Regional/Sub-Regional networks** for mercury-free initiatives as well as platforms for sharing knowledge, experiences, technologies and expertise in mercury-free health care devices. Conduct monitoring and evaluation of progress on implementation.

**Develop and offer courses** on environmental and occupational health--with particular focus on mercury use--to practicing nurses, doctors, environmental health advocates and health care workers in general.

**Advocate for the incorporation** of environmental and occupational health--with particular focus to mercury use--into education curricula at all levels,

**Promote mercury-free health care research** and share results in order to achieve fast mercury elimination and its replacement with safer alternatives.

**Promote the creation of infrastructure** to adequately manage and dispose of mercury waste.

**Strongly advocate for** Extended Producer Responsibility for mercury-based medical devices.

**Collaborate with industries** that produce economically viable mercury-free health care devices.

**Change purchasing patterns** in health care institutions, by phasing-in mercury-free medical devices. Lobby governments to introduce tax incentives to promote mercury-free medical devices.

**At Regional and Sub-Regional level,** advocate and promote Government collaborative efforts to protect the region from turning into a dumping ground of mercury containing health care devices. In this aspect, sensitize the Africa/SADC Health and Environmental Ministers to take up this matter in their regular meetings as a matter of urgency.

**At a global level,** strongly advocate for an international legally binding instrument to regulate production, trade and use of mercury, and mercury containing products, as well as to promote the transfer of mercury-free technologies.

**Urge African delegates** to the forthcoming UNEP Ad-Hoc Open Ended Working Group meeting in Bangkok (12-16 November 2007) to have a common stand in favour of a legally binding instrument.