

# Civil society asks government to ratify pact vs mercury

By Rhodina Villanueva (The Philippine Star) | Updated August 17, 2017 - 12:00am

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MANILA, Philippines - Civil society groups have urged the government to join 74 countries that have so far ratified a historic global agreement to combat mercury pollution, which enters into force this week.

In an urgent letter sent last week to President Duterte, over 80 environmental, health and labor rights advocates urged the government to work for the immediate ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and to secure the required Senate concurrence prior to the First Conference of Parties (COP1).

The groups also sent a copy of the letter to Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu and Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi.

While the Philippines through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has signed the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2013, the government has yet to ratify the historic treaty.

"We owe it to the people of Minamata, the Japanese city after whom the agreement was named, and to the Filipino people to ensure that the convention is ratified and enforced to protect public health and the environment against mercury pollution," said Eileen Sison, president of EcoWaste Coalition.

Minamata suffered heavily from decades-long dumping of mercury-tainted industrial wastewater from Chisso chemical factory into Minamata Bay, poisoning the fish that people ate and leading to crippling illnesses known today as Minamata disease.

To date, 74 governments have ratified the convention. None of the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), currently chaired by the Philippines, has ratified the agreement that enters into force on Aug. 16.

The groups are pushing for the treaty's expedited ratification so that the Philippines could attend the COP1 as state party and not as a mere observer. The COP1 will take place on Sept. 24 to 29 in Geneva, Switzerland.

"Ratifying the Minamata Convention on Mercury will further strengthen our nation's efforts to prevent, if not eliminate, threats of mercury pollution as this will allow the Philippines to effectively engage in the treaty processes, address gaps in existing regulations, and gain access to financial resources and beneficial technology transfer and capacity-building opportunities," the groups explained.

Highlights of the treaty include a ban on new mercury mines, the phase-out of existing ones, phase out and phase 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.

<http://www.philstar.com/science-and-environment/2017/08/17/1729786/civil-society-asks-government-ratify-pact-vs-mercury>