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Mr Marcos A. Orellana
UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and
Human Rights
Special Procedures Branch
UNOG-OHCHR
CH - 1211 Geneva 10,

3 February 2022

Dear Mr Orellana,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide inputs regarding the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM). The key contributions of WHO in this area are outlined in the following paragraphs.

In 2014, the 67th World Health Assembly agreed WHA Resolution 67.11 Public health impacts of exposure to mercury and mercury compounds: the role of WHO and ministries of public health in the implementation of the Minamata Convention. Among others, the resolution identified the development of public health strategies on the exposure to mercury of artisanal and small-scale gold miners and their communities as a key action for the health sector, including health ministries. The World Health Assembly has considered related progress reports at subsequent Assemblies in 2017, 2019 and 2021. The next report is scheduled for 2023.

WHO has published a number of technical reports, including *Environmental and occupational health hazards associated with artisanal and small-scale gold mining*. Geneva: WHO; 2016; *Preventing disease through healthy environments: mercury exposure and health impacts among individuals in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) community*. Geneva: WHO; 2013; and commissioned the study *Mercury exposure and health impacts among individuals in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining community: a comprehensive review*. Environmental Health Perspectives. 2014;122(7):667–72.

Parties to the Minamata Convention with more than insignificant artisanal and small-scale gold mining using mercury are obliged to develop national action plans including a public health strategy. WHO has developed guidance on addressing health when developing national action plans (2019) along with a step-by-step guide for developing the public health strategy, which includes a protocol and tools for conducting a rapid health assessment and an institutional capacity assessment (2021). I encourage you to closely review the tools, which includes instruments on involving the communities in the assessments and on social mobilization. The step-by-step guide was pilot tested in Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria, and their experiences were shared through country reports. The WHO guide has been included as the reference standard for the development

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of public health strategies in the updated Guidance on the Development of National Action Plans, proposed to be adopted by the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention, scheduled for March 2022.

Interest in measuring mercury biomarkers in human hair, blood and urine has been increasing as a result of implementation of the Minamata Convention. WHO has developed guidance on ethical and scientific principles for conducting human biomonitoring in artisanal and small-scale gold mining as well as a protocol and standard operating procedures that countries can use to undertake human biomonitoring surveys to assess prenatal exposure to mercury in populations in any setting. The protocol was used successfully to guide surveys in six developing countries, including in one ASGM setting.

WHO, through its regional and country offices provides technical advice and support to WHO Member States, in particular on the development and implementation of public health strategies to address ASGM. The majority of funding for developing countries to develop their National Action Plans including public health strategies comes from the Global Environment Facility. In addition to promoting the WHO guidance to Member States, WHO has called on UN partners and other stakeholders that are implementing or executing Global Environment Facility projects to use the WHO guidance in their work.

The materials referenced in this submission can be found in the WHO Annotated Bibliography in multiple languages: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341198>.

I trust that this information is useful for your mandate, and would be pleased to provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely,



Dr María Neira
Director
Department of Environment,
Climate Change and Health