



**MINAMATA
CONVENTION
ON MERCURY**

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**Conference of the Parties to the
Minamata Convention on Mercury
Fifth meeting**
Geneva, 30 October–3 November 2023
Item 4 (g) (ii) of the provisional agenda*

**Matters for consideration or action by the Conference
of the Parties: financial resources and mechanism:
Specific International Programme to Support
Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance**

Governing Board of the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance: meeting reports

Note by the secretariat

1. Decision MC-1/6 of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury provides for the establishment of a governing board of the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance, to oversee and implement the guidance of the Conference of the Parties, including decision-making on projects and project management, with the functioning of the governing board covered by the terms of reference of the Specific International Programme, set out in annex II to the decision.
2. The annex to the present note sets out the report of the seventh meeting of the Governing Board, which was held online on 22 and 23 November 2022 to consider, among other matters, the status of the specific trust fund, the midterm evaluation of the Specific International Programme and the second review of the financial mechanism. The report of the eighth meeting of the Governing Board, which was held online on 30 August 2023 to consider, among other matters, the status of the specific trust fund, the midterm evaluation of the Specific International Programme and the second review of the financial mechanism, will be posted on the Minamata Convention website.¹ The annex to the present note is reproduced without formal editing.

* UNEP/MC/COP.5/1.

¹ See <https://mercuryconvention.org/en/implementation/specific-international-programme/board>.

Annex*

Report of the seventh meeting of the Governing Board of the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance (held online on 22 and 23 November 2022)

I. Opening of the meeting (agenda item 1)

1. The Seventh Meeting of the Governing Board of the Specific International Programme to support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance (SIP) was opened at 13:00 Geneva time on Tuesday, 22 November 2022, by the outgoing Co-Chairs of the Governing Board, Mr. Reginald Hernaus (The Netherlands) and Mr. Prasert Tapaneeyangkul (Thailand).
2. Speaking on behalf of both Co-Chairs, Mr. Hernaus warmly welcomed all Board Members, introduced himself as current but outgoing Co-Chair and noted that it has been a pleasure for him to serve the Governing Board as Co-Chair for two terms.
3. The outgoing Co-Chair congratulated the three Board Members who have returned for their second term (Brazil, Nigeria and Suriname) and welcomed the seven new Members (Croatia, Germany, India, North Macedonia, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the United States of America) to the Board, one of whom returned as Member to the Board after having served as a Member to the Founding Governing Board (Sri Lanka).
4. The outgoing Co-Chair shared some overall reflections on the Specific International Programme, including:
 - (a) Noting that the negotiating path that led to the approval of the Convention text and included the establishment both of an Implementation and Compliance Committee (Article 15) and a Financial Mechanism (Article 13) which in turn included the Specific International Programme (SIP) to support capacity-building and technical assistance had not been without challenge. From the donor community the agreement to the SIP was initially met with worry about duplicating the role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Special Programme. The Co-Chair further noted, that experience showed that these initial worries can be put aside as the SIP was negotiated at COP-1 to have its specific niche, and further that the operationalisation of the SIP since COP-1 has been done in the manner instructed by the COP so as to ensure that support provided through the SIP does not duplicate the efforts of the GEF and also to ensure the SIP is complementary to the Special Programme.
 - (b) The Co-Chair thanked the Secretariat for the excellent support provided to the Governing Board during his two terms, and to the Programme overall to deliver three rounds of project applications entailing much detailed work from the preparation of application guidelines, to undertaking the assessments of all submitted project applications, which enabled the Governing Board to make informed and fair decisions on the applications, as well as the management of the project portfolio once projects went into implementation mode.
 - (c) The Co-Chair emphasised that the guidance given by the COP, and the subsequent Rules of Procedure and the respective Application Guidelines per Round, had enormously facilitated the work of the Governing Board and the overall functioning of the Programme.
 - (d) The Co-Chair noted in conclusion the frustration to see in the Third Round that despite the high quality of the applications received, a number of projects could not be approved due to limited funding available in the envelope for that Round. He encouraged the Board to explore ways to ensure that there will be good basis for project funding in the future, including considering ways to broaden the donor base.
5. The other outgoing Co-Chair, Mr. Tapaneeyangkul, also provided some comments and reflections including to thank the donor Parties that have enabled 24 projects to be approved by the Governing Board. He expressed the hope that the SIP will attract more funding from donors to support eligible Parties in their implementation of Minamata Convention obligations effectively and expeditiously. He also expressed concerns that the available funding envelope has not been sufficient to support all the merited applications in the Third Round. He highlighted that for all future

* The annex has not been formally edited.

considerations of applications to the Programme, emphasis must remain on approving projects that are most relevant, useful and that can rapidly achieve the obligations of the Minamata Convention.

6. The outgoing Co-Chairs then invited the Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, Ms. Monika Stankiewicz, to deliver a welcoming message, also on behalf of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

7. The Executive Secretary welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of the financial mechanism to the success of the Minamata Convention and the achievement of its goal. She thanked the donors – Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America – who have supported the Programme thus far, and noted that the Secretariat is pleased that five projects have successfully reached completion, with many important results, while 17 are underway. She outlined that the successful operations of the SIP is a pivotal concern for the Secretariat. She also underlined that contributions to the Specific Trust Fund are not sufficient yet to recommend launching the Fourth Round of applications. Furthermore, she explained that the Secretariat has been actively engaging with donors on further contributions to the SIP in line also with the Executive Director's recommendations to strengthen the SIP.

8. Following the welcome remarks by the Executive Secretary, each Board Member shared reflections on their hopes and expectations for the SIP in a brief tour de table. This was followed by Members of the Secretariat presenting their roles in support of the Governing Board, the operation of the Programme and the overall Minamata Convention Secretariat. The list of participants is attached as Annex I.

II. Organizational matters (agenda item 2)

A. Adoption of the agenda

9. The outgoing Co-Chair Mr. Tapaneeyangkul directed the Board's attention to the meeting documents relevant to the agenda item and available in the online workspace: SIP/GB.7/1 Provisional Agenda, SIP/GB.7/1/add.1 Annotated Agenda, SIP/GB.7.INF.1 List of documents for the Seventh Meeting, SIP/GB.7.INF.2 Draft list of participants.

10. Subsequently, the Co-Chair invited the Board Members to check the contact and other details in the draft list of participants and let the Secretariat know in case of any updates or corrections to be made.

11. Upon request of the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat presented in more detail the overall documents prepared for the meeting, the provisional agenda and the proposed organization of work.

12. The Co-Chair invited Board Members to propose any additional agenda items under Agenda Item 7: Other matters. No additional agenda items were proposed.

13. The Co-Chair proposed the adoption of the agenda, and the Board agreed to the agenda as attached in Annex II.

B. Election of Co-Chairs

14. The outgoing Co-Chair Mr. Tapaneeyangkul drew the Board's attention to the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Board and requested the Secretariat to present the provisions for the election of the two Co-Chairs.

15. The representative of the Secretariat presented paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedures of the Governing Board of the SIP. She recalled that, according to paragraph 1, the Board will have two Co-Chairs, elected from among the Members of the Board, reflecting the composition of the Board and the purpose of the Programme. She also recalled that two Co-Chairs were elected by the Board at its first meeting, according to paragraph 2 of Rule 9, and that the Co-Chairs' term ends when the next Co-Chairs take up the next term.

16. The outgoing Co-Chair informed the Board Members that the Secretariat had received two nominations for the positions of Co-Chairs of the Governing Board and requested the Secretariat to formally announce the proposed names. The representative of the Secretariat informed the Board that it has received the nominations of Ms. Gina Griffith from Suriname and Mr. Andrew Clark from the United States of America. Furthermore, she noted that the Co-Chairs of the Governing Board represent the intent of the Programme, one of them being from a Party eligible to be supported by the SIP and

the other one from a Party contributing to the Specific Trust Fund. The representative of the Secretariat informed the Board that both Members had confirmed to the Secretariat their availability to take up these offices.

17. The outgoing Co-Chair asked if there was any objection to the election of Ms. Griffith and Mr. Clark as Co-Chairs for the Third Governing Board. Since no objections were raised, the outgoing Co-Chair congratulated the two newly elected Co-Chairs on their election and invited them to make initial remarks.

18. As elected Co-Chair, Ms. Griffith thanked the Board for the support and trust and noted that this meeting will consider a number of important issues, notably the annual report of the Secretariat on the operations of the Specific International Programme, the status of the Specific Trust Fund, the Mid-Term Evaluation of the SIP, and the Second Review of the Financial Mechanism.

C. Request for disclosure of any possible personal and/or financial conflict of interest

19. The Co-Chair Ms. Griffith recalled that, in accordance with Rule 23 paragraph 2 of the Rules of Procedure for the Governing Board, Members have an obligation to promptly disclose to the Board, at the commencement of the meeting, any potential personal or financial interest in any aspect of a project presented for discussion and approval by the Board.

20. The Co-Chair further noted, that at this meeting no projects were being presented for discussion or approval, yet as this matter has been decided to be a standing agenda item of all Board meetings for overall transparency and accountability purposes, it was raised formally to be noted. The Co-Chair opened the floor for any questions or comments.

21. No questions or comments were raised.

III. Operations of the Specific International Programme (agenda item 3)

A. Operations of the Programme, including status of implementation of the First, Second and Third Round projects

22. The Co-Chair Mr. Clark invited the Board to consider the meeting document SIP/GB.7/2, on operations of the Specific International Programme, including the status of the Specific Trust Fund, 2022 annual report. He highlighted that this is the fifth year of implementation of the SIP.

23. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat first presented the following five key messages on the SIP:

- (a) the SIP is supporting eligible Parties in all regions, including Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries;
- (b) there is a high demand for support from the SIP;
- (c) almost the entire amount of the SIP funding goes directly to the approved projects;
- (d) SIP projects are selected by the Governing Board after a thorough technical review and appraisal, according to the agreed criteria; and
- (e) the application process allows Parties to have built-in opportunities to revise and improve their projects.

24. The Secretariat updated the Board on the implementation status of the first five projects receiving support from the Specific International Programme. The five projects were approved in the **First Round** namely Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Iran and Lesotho. They were approved in late 2018 and began implementation in 2019. There were some COVID-related delays and disruption with two projects requesting six month no-cost extensions within the 36-month time frame, and a further two projects requesting six month no-cost extensions beyond the 36-month time frame. This notwithstanding by November 2022 all five projects had completed activities, two projects were still reporting and with one project with an unspent balance. For a full overview of the status of the five projects, as of 21 October 2022, see Annex III.

25. The representative of the Secretariat highlighted that one project (Benin) is expected to have an unspent balance. She explained that the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) for the project was signed on 20 May 2019 for an initial duration of 36 months. Following the disbursement of the first

instalment of funds in 2019, the project suffered delays from the start. As a result, by December 2020 only USD 12,628 had been spent. The representative informed the Board that the Secretariat had on various occasions and through various interactions urged the project manager to accelerate the implementation of the activities. This notwithstanding, only USD 36,355 had been spent by May 2022. The Secretariat engaged in consultations with the project manager and officials from the broader Ministry in April 2022 given the continued delayed implementation status. After this, Benin formally requested a six-month extension of the legal agreement be able to conclude as many project activities as possible. The Secretariat consulted with the Co-Chairs of the Governing Board on this matter, as this request would extend the maximum time frame for SIP projects, as per SIP application guidelines. Based on the formal agreement of the Co-Chairs the project was extended exceptionally by six months beyond 36 months. The amendment to the PCA was signed in May 2022 to extend the project at no cost until 19 November 2022. The representative of the Secretariat further noted it had come to the attention of the Secretariat that despite this exceptional extension, it seems Benin was not able to utilise all funds and that there will be a balance of USD 70,000 or more. Furthermore, Clause IX of the PCA requires unspent funds to be returned to UNEP within two months of the end of the project. The project ended days before the Board convened. The final narrative and financial reports had not yet been received by the Secretariat and were due within two months of the completion of project activities. The representative sought the Board's guidance on whether an unspent balance of the First Round can be made available for the Fourth Round.

26. The Co-Chair sought Board Members views on whether the Board agreed that an unspent balance of a closed project from the First Round can be made available for the Fourth Round.

27. The Board deliberated carefully on this matter for some time, noting that the purpose of the SIP was to support capacity-building and technical assistance, and in this case the Party, a Least Developed Country party, certainly faced great need for support. The Board considered whether additional time for implementation may help Benin to utilise the unspent balance. The representative of the Secretariat noted that as the agreement has expired, it could not be extended. Further, the actual unspent balance and remaining activities, if any, could only be confirmed once Benin submitted the final narrative and financial reports. A Board Member supported the proposal to consider allowing Benin to retain access to the remaining project funds to enable the completion of the activities, provided that quality results can be achieved. Another Board Member suggested that the Secretariat review the final reports, once submitted by Benin, assess the achievements and outstanding activities and, if appropriate, engage with Benin to discuss the option of entering into a new agreement for the remaining project funding.

28. The Co-Chair noted that the Secretariat will need time for the review of the final reports, and to engage with Benin on the option and viability of a new agreement. He also noted the observation from the Secretariat that it was not usual UN practice to offer a second agreement in such cases. Recognising that this may be a special case he suggested that the Secretariat assess the situation based on the final reports and in dialogue with Benin, and if there is to be a new agreement to consult with the Board on the duration of the agreement and its provisions before signature. The Board supported the proposal.

29. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the Secretariat then presented the ten projects approved in the **Second Round**, recalling that these were from Antigua and Barbuda, Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Moldova, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Zambia. She noted that all legal agreements were in place, and that the projects were in full implementation mode since late 2020 or early 2021. The Secretariat had deemed the numerous COVID-19-related delays and disruptions to be manageable. Despite some projects' slowness in reporting, overall, the periodic reports had generally been received as per the agreed deadlines. She highlighted that some partners had formally requested minor shifts in budget categories and budget years due to costs higher than the initially planned budget, all of which were considered reasonable and were approved by the Secretariat. Lastly, she explained that one project had requested a no-cost extension within the 36-months timeframe to complete its work, but the amendment to the tripartite legal agreement had not yet been signed by the third party. For a full overview of the status of these ten projects, as of 21 October 2021, see Annex III.

30. The Co-Chair opened the floor for any questions or comments about the implementation of the Second Round projects. One Board Member offered support to the Secretariat in following up with project partners in his region who seemed delayed in terms of reporting on their projects.

31. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the Secretariat then updated the Board on the implementation status of the nine **Third Round** projects. She noted that, of the nine projects approved, namely Burundi, Cuba, Gabon, India, Iran, Jordan, North Macedonia, Rwanda and Senegal, seven legal agreements were in place by November 2022. She noted that the Secretariat had provided one-on-one

technical and legal support to all project managers to finalize as timeously as possible the project documents, taking into account the Board comments during the approval process in 2021, and thereafter the draft legal agreements. For some projects, the first instalment of project funds had already been disbursed. For a full overview of the status of the nine projects, as of 21 October 2022, see Annex III.

32. For the remaining two unsigned agreements (India and Iran), the representative of the Secretariat outlined that while these two draft agreements were at an advanced stage, they were now outside of the initial guidance given by the Board on the completion of legal agreements. She recalled the instruction received by the Governing Board at its Sixth Meeting were to include in the letters to all the successful applicants the deadline of June 2022 for the signature of all legal agreements. The representative sought the Board's guidance on the way forward on an urgent yet suitable deadline for the conclusion of the agreements. The Secretariat also noted that previous deliberations had included that the inability to conclude legal agreements could mean the funds remain available in the Specific Trust Fund for the use of the Programme.

33. The Board considered this issue carefully, and with the intent to be as supportive as possible of the two projects, requested the Secretariat to work with the project managers of India and Iran to complete the items of remaining signature (in the case of India) and remaining details on agreeable banking details (in the case of Iran) as soon as possible and ideally by the end of 2022. At the conclusion of this discussion, one Board Member raised that it would be important that the legal agreements be completed as soon as possible, and before the launch of the Fourth Round is to be discussed.

34. The Co-Chair concluded that, although the Board largely agreed on the importance of being flexible, it did not want funds to be tied up indefinitely if they can be used in other ways.

35. Thereafter, the Co-Chair invited the Secretariat to present its additional observations on the overall implementation experience of the 24 projects. The representative of the Secretariat drew attention to five observations: Firstly, many First and Second Round projects have achieved notable results in implementing specific obligations of the Convention through a range of capacity-building activities and awareness raising efforts. Secondly, regarding project reporting, she observed that it is recommended that project partners include as much information as possible in narrative form in their semi-annual reports, and to provide a thorough explanation on the project implementation status, the outputs and activities implemented, the challenges encountered, the needs and the mitigation plans, without over-relying on the submission of attachments. Thirdly, she noted that the Secretariat noticed continued undue delays between the Governing Board's approval of projects and the finalisation and signature of the legal agreements and stressed that it will be important that all future applicants be clear about their ability to meet the project management requirements and be prepared to work with the Secretariat according to the set timelines to complete legal agreements. Fourthly, she noted the Secretariat's concern that since the Second Round, there has been an increase in the number of tripartite legal agreements, which have added complexity and prolonged the time required to sign agreements, and/or amend them if required at a later stage. She noted that this type of agreement ought to remain the exception rather than the rule. Lastly, with respect to gender, the Secretariat noted that that all applicants are requested to reflect carefully on gender dimensions and mainstreaming in their project and that the application guidelines provide guidance in this regard. Gender is one of the appraisal criteria and is a required application element, and applicants are to provide a detailed description of how gender perspectives are integrated in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their projects. In general, the projects under implementation have addressed gender considerations. The Secretariat considers the gender dimension to be of utmost importance to continue to promote, also in light of the COP-4 decision to prepare a gender action plan.

36. The Co-Chair thanked the Secretariat for its hard work despite the challenges related to COVID-19 and for the helpful presentation of the status of implementation of the projects, and especially the additional observations based on the implementation experience thus far.

37. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the Secretariat informed the Board of various communication and outreach activities to bring greater attention to the SIP including: Firstly, that the webpage of the SIP had been updated to present information more clearly for both project managers and Parties to the Minamata Convention. Secondly, she explained that the Secretariat worked closely with the project partners to produce fact sheets that provide an overview of their projects, including their objectives, results, budgets, duration, and activities. She highlighted that fact sheets had been produced for all projects of the First and Second Rounds, and that the Secretariat is in the process of producing those for the Third Round projects. Thirdly, she outlined several other communication and outreach activities carried out by the Secretariat, including the SIP Matters newsletter and a video on the SIP to

showcase its work and impact, including examples of successful projects in Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. Fourthly, she brought to the Board's attention the Secretariat's participation in a regional workshop in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova, the deep-dive information session on the financial mechanism that the Secretariat held in February 2022 as part of Season 2 of Minamata Online, and the side events organized in the margins of COP-4.1 and COP-4.2 to showcase the impacts of the SIP. Fifthly, she informed that the Secretariat developed guidelines for the terminal reviews and terminal evaluations of SIP projects, and communication and visibility guidelines for SIP project managers. Both guidelines had been shared with all SIP project managers. Lastly, she emphasized that "SIP virtual coffees" were organized to provide SIP project partners with an online space for informal discussion and to answer any SIP-related questions.

38. One Board Member volunteered that all Board Members could support the Secretariat's communication and outreach efforts, for instance through their personal social media accounts, with the aim of raising the profile of the SIP and to mobilise resources. The Co-Chair reiterated that all Board Members could indeed provide such support.

B. Status of the Specific Trust Fund

39. Next the Co-Chair turned to the matter of the status of the Specific Trust Fund. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat recalled that the Programme is open to receive contributions for a period of ten years from the establishment of the Specific Trust Fund, and that the Conference of the Parties may decide to extend this period, not exceeding an additional seven years, taking into account the regular review process of the financial mechanism. She explained that SIP financial resources are used for approved projects of eligible parties, the meetings of the Governing Board, and the operations of the Programme, and that the Specific Trust Fund contributions are subject to 13% programmatic support costs (PSC). She recalled that besides the 50% of the Programme Management Officer for Capacity-building and Technical Assistance post, the General Trust Fund does not make staff posts directly available for the operations of the SIP. Instead in addition to the above-mentioned officer who manages the full lifecycle of SIP projects, various Secretariat staff Members also service the SIP. Since 1 November 2021 the Secretariat was strengthened in its ability to provide sound substantive and administrative support to SIP projects, through the provision of a Junior Professional Officer by the Government of Italy. This staff post is the first post in the Secretariat fully dedicated to the SIP and is funded by the Government of Italy for two years. She further outlined that the SIP's support to Parties has been made possible due to the generous contributions from ten donor Parties, listing them in order of amount made to the Specific Trust Fund: Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, the United States of America, Austria, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and France.

40. As part of its annual report on income and expenditure the representative of the Secretariat outlined the contributions to the First and Second Rounds of the SIP, and explained that, as of 21 October 2022, the projected cash balance after the conclusion of the First and Second Rounds projects, including the projects' terminal reviews or evaluations, the mid-term evaluation of the SIP and the development of a PowerBI dashboard, was USD 35,294. Regarding the Third Round, she presented the contributions and explained that the envelope was entirely used for the projects approved in 2021. Furthermore, the representative of the Secretariat recalled that, at its Sixth Meeting, the Governing Board approved the Secretariat's request to use up to USD 100,000 per year for support to the Secretariat in its management and administration of the Programme to support the increased workload with the expansion of the project portfolio under the Programme. Given the provision of a Junior Professional Officer for two years by the Government of Italy in 2021, the Secretariat has not needed to make use of this allocation. As the Government of Italy is able to co-fund the post for a third year, if the Secretariat is able to provide the remainder of the post cost, the Secretariat recommended that USD 70,000 of the allocation is utilised for the co-funding of the Junior Professional Officer for the third year.

41. The Co-Chair thanked the Secretariat for the thorough reports and requested the Board Members to consider endorsing the use of USD 70,000 of the allocation agreed at the Sixth Meeting (USD 100,000) for co-funding the Junior Professional Officer for the third year of the post.

42. The Board supported the proposal and thanked the Government of Italy for the generous support.

43. Thereafter, the Co-Chair turned to the matter of funding received for the Fourth Round and invited the Secretariat to inform on the contribution status. The representative of the Secretariat showed that the total amount of contributions and pledges to the Fourth Round and the operations of the Programme, as of 21 October 2022, was USD 689,576.10. She informed that this amount is lower

than had been received at this stage for previous rounds, and that the Secretariat is reaching out to current and potential donor Parties.

44. A Board Member suggested waiting for additional funding prior to launching the Fourth Round, especially considering that the number of applications had increased from one round to the next. Another Member suggested launching the Fourth Round before the fifth meeting of the COP, while seeking more financial support. Board Members also offered to do more to raise the visibility of the SIP, expressed the hope to see a broader donor base for the SIP and offered to discuss this matter with other Parties. Overall, the Board was disappointed that the level of current funding did not yet allow the launch of the Fourth Round. The continued urgency of the Programme to be able to provide resources was also stressed by a Board Member who did not want the lower amount raised thus far to be a reason not to launch the Fourth Round before COP-5.

45. The Co-Chair noted that there is indeed a certain urgency to launch the Fourth Round and suggested to set a mid-2023 target date for launching the Fourth Round, with the hope that more funding will be available by that time. He further suggested that a Board meeting would be convened for this purpose, as a Board discussion on related items would be required prior to the launch. The Board supported the proposal.

C. Work programme for 2022-2023

46. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat informed the Board of the overall work programme of the SIP for 2022-2023, which included: Firstly, assisting the project partners of 24 projects on a daily basis, including through one-on-one sessions, not only in English, but also in French and Spanish when needed. Secondly, fully closing the five projects from the First Round. Thirdly, supporting the terminal reviews and evaluations of closed projects (one terminal review undertaken by Iran for its First Round project was available on the Minamata Convention website, and that the Secretariat is in the final stages of engaging a consultant to undertake the first three terminal evaluations). Fourth, developing a Power BI dashboard to enable easier access to key data on the projects under implementation that will be available on the website. Fifth, supporting the mid-term evaluation of the SIP and the second review of the financial mechanism (two consultants have been hired, and the Secretariat is working to provide them access to all relevant information and documentation on the SIP, as well as to facilitate their connection with the relevant stakeholders.) Lastly, the Executive Secretary and the Secretariat are working on resource mobilization and are planning more fundraising interactions to encourage contributions to the Fourth Round.

47. The Co-Chair acknowledged that managing 24 projects represents a significant effort for the Secretariat and welcomed the efforts at communicating the work and impact of the projects. The Co-Chair further recognized that the mid-term evaluation of the SIP and the second review of the SIP are important activities for the SIP and the overall financial mechanism. The Co-Chair invited the Board Members to consider to engage in a call for funding for the Board to be able to launch the Fourth Round by mid-2023 and requested the Secretariat to draft such a call on the Board's behalf.

IV. Mid-term evaluation of the Specific International Programme of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (agenda item 4)

48. The Co-Chair Ms. Griffith invited the Board to turn to the meeting documents SIP/GB.7/3 Mid-Term Evaluation of the Specific International Programme: Update for the SIP Governing Board and SIP/GB.7/INF/5 Information on support to the Minamata Convention: GEF, SIP and Special Programme.

49. The Co-Chair recalled the decision made by the Governing Board at its Sixth Meeting to undertake a mid-term evaluation of the SIP. She reminded that the end of the year 2022 marks five years into operation of the SIP, which is the mid-point of its initial term. She recalled that the Board determined that a mid-term evaluation would serve to provide evidence of performance and results to meet accountability requirements and the objective of the Convention; and to ensure continuous operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing. Lastly, she reiterated that an external expert consultant had been engaged by the Secretariat to undertake the mid-term evaluation.

50. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat presented the preparatory activities undertaken by the Secretariat to prepare the mid-term evaluation of the SIP. She noted that the Minamata Convention Secretariat had consulted the UNEP Evaluation Office and the Special Programme Secretariat, and that it had prepared terms of reference for the consultancy and posted an opening on the Inspira platform as per usual practice. Following the expiry of the opening, the Secretariat had screened the received applications and had issued a consultancy contract.

The representative then noted that another external consultant is being recruited to carry out the terminal evaluation of three completed First Round projects. The Secretariat introduced the external expert consultant hired to undertake the mid-term evaluation of the SIP, who had joined the meeting.

51. The Co-Chair noted that evaluations are important tools to reflect on and manage programmes and processes, and that this evaluation comes at an important time for the SIP. She acknowledged that the Board has important insights and experiences to contribute to the mid-term evaluation on the SIP and invited the consultant Ms. Valerie Gordon to deliver her presentation.

52. Ms. Gordon emphasised that mid-term evaluations are particularly important to review the performance of the SIP in achieving the objectives, results and impacts envisaged during its design process and whether there are aspects that can be corrected to better guide the activities in the coming years. The consultant presented the proposed objectives and elements of the mid-term evaluation of the SIP, previously presented to the Secretariat during the inception meeting on 17 November 2022. She also illustrated the proposed methodology, objective and format of the inception report and informed the Board that the inception report will be made available a few days after the Board meeting. The consultant also informed the Board of her intention to interview a number of stakeholders identified during the inception phase. Ms. Gordon also presented the draft SIP Stakeholder Analysis and Theory of Change, prepared in consultation with the Secretariat, which will form part of the inception report.

53. One Board Member welcomed the methodology described by the consultant and expressed interest in having the report present in which areas the SIP project partners have made the most progress, so that the Board could be guided to identify the most urgent needs in the next rounds of applications to the SIP. The consultant confirmed that the recommendations provided in the mid-term evaluation report will give the Board elements to guide its future work.

54. The Co-Chair informed the Board that as Member Representatives of their respective regions they may also provide information and regional perspectives and reflections on the SIP that may assist the consultant in preparing the mid-term evaluation report. These could include, for example:

- (a) the value of the SIP
- (b) its responsiveness to needs
- (c) its effectiveness
- (d) its level of funding
- (e) its guidance (including terms of reference of the SIP and the Governing Board Rules of Procedure)
- (f) its administration by the Secretariat.

And in particular:

- (g) How has the SIP serviced Parties of the different region?
- (h) What are the needs in different regions going forward, and what can be the role of the SIP in that regard?

55. The consultant clarified that such perspectives and reflections could also be shared during the one-on-one sessions. Subsequently, the Co-Chair proposed that the Board Members consult within their regions with a view for Members to submit to the Secretariat, for use in the mid-term evaluation, views collated from their region on these issues. The Co-Chair suggested that the Secretariat could send out information on the next steps in the evaluation and a request for Members to consult within their regions and provide written perspectives to the Secretariat for submission to the consultant. This step would need to be taken in December 2022 in order to be impactful to the evaluation.

56. The Co-Chair informed the Board Members that, according to the indicative timeline included in the Annex to document SIP/GB.7/3, the consultant will prepare an inception report. The Co-Chair urged Board Members to be available to provide timely input to Ms. Gordon when contacted for interviews, surveys, or responses to questions she might have. The Co-Chair noted that the consultant will draft a formal draft evaluation report, which will be shared with the Governing Board in February 2023. The Board will be invited to provide comments, which will be taken into account in the preparation of the final evaluation report. The final report will tentatively be shared with the Governing Board around mid-April 2023. The consultant will be available to respond to follow-up questions from the Secretariat and the Governing Board for a brief period following submission of the final report.

V. Second review of the financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention on Mercury: Specific International Programme (agenda item 5)

57. The Co-Chair Mr. Clark invited the Board to turn to the relevant meeting documents SIP/GB.7/4 Update on the Second Review of the Financial Mechanism and SIP/GB.7/INF/5 Information on support to the Minamata Convention: GEF, SIP and Special Programme.

58. The Co-Chair noted that regular reviews of the financial mechanism are required according to the Convention text and are an important tool to review:

- (a) the level of funding
- (b) the guidance provided by the COP to the two components of the financial mechanism
- (c) the effectiveness of the two components of the financial mechanism,
- (d) the ability of the two components of the financial mechanism to address the changing need of eligible Parties (see Article 13, para 11), and
- (e) based on such reviews the COP is to take appropriate action to improve the effectiveness of the financial mechanism.

59. The Co-Chair recalled that the first review of the financial mechanism was completed at COP-3 and that COP-4 decision 7 adopted the terms of reference for the second review of the financial mechanism and invited Parties, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and stakeholders to submit information, consistent with the terms of reference for the review and organized by the listed performance criteria, on their experience gained through their interactions with the financial mechanism, as soon as possible and not later than 30 September 2022.

60. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat first provided the overall context for the financial mechanism's work, grounded in Article 13 of the Minamata Convention. She then presented the activities undertaken by the Secretariat to prepare the second review, the elements of the terms of reference for the second review that were adopted by COP-4 in Decision MC-4/7, and the scope and timeline of the review. She informed the Board that, surprisingly, the Secretariat had received very few submissions as input to the second review by November 2022, despite the Secretariat's calls for submissions. One received submission is from a Party to the Convention and one from the Special Programme Secretariat. She mentioned that the submission from the Global Mercury Partnership is expected to be received in the coming days. The representative also presented the elements that will be included in the draft report that the Parties to the Convention will consider at COP-5. Lastly, she underlined that the review of the financial mechanism will highlight the distinct nature of the two parts of the financial mechanism, the SIP and the GEF, as well as the Special Programme; and acknowledged that the review will inform the programming decisions in GEF-8 and the design and programming directions of GEF-9, as well as future rounds of the SIP. She also shared the Secretariat's appreciation that the GEF funding allocated to mercury had increased in GEF-8.

61. The Co-Chair acknowledged that the Board, as one of the entities entrusted with the operation of the Convention's financial mechanism, has important insights and experiences to contribute to the second review of the financial mechanism, including from regional perspectives. The Co-Chair invited the Board Members to consider the role and contribution of the Governing Board to the second review of the financial mechanism, as outlined in document SIP/GB.7/4. He recalled that the mid-term evaluation of the SIP will also be an input to the second review of the financial mechanism, along with the report of the Executive Director of UNEP on strengthening the SIP, and that the second review will be submitted to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its Fifth meeting.

62. The Co-Chair asked the Board for any preliminary views and perspectives on the second review, and any further reflections that the Board Members may have. Because the evaluation and the review are closely related, input with respect to either one was welcome. Board Members were invited to reflect on, for example:

- (a) The ability of the SIP to address needs of eligible Parties
- (b) Its effectiveness
- (c) Its level of funding
- (d) Broader perspectives on the financial mechanism's effectiveness and efficiency and the complementarity between the GEF and the SIP

(e) Considerations of the Special Programme and its relationship with the SIP

(f) Any other considerations relevant to the performance criteria set forth in the TOR for the second review.

63. As no questions or comments were raised on the second review of the financial mechanism, and upon invitation by the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat further noted that an external consultant had already been engaged and that any input from the Governing Board on the Board's view and perspective from their regions on the overall performance of the financial mechanism against performance criteria would be extremely valuable.

64. The Co-Chair requested the Secretariat to compile information on next steps in the review and a call for input from Board Members to circulate to Board Members, with a request for them to consult within their regions and provide written perspectives to the Secretariat for submission to the consultant. This step would need to be taken by 15 January 2023.

VI. Dates and venue of the next meeting (agenda item 6)

65. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair Ms. Griffith, the representative of the Secretariat noted that at its meetings the Board is to oversee the operations and administration (including implementation of projects and their closeouts) of the Programme, the launch of Rounds of the Programme, and the decision-making on applications to Rounds of the Programme. She recalled that the Secretariat is to provide an annual report to the Board, but that it is up to the Board to make decisions on its next meeting.

66. The Co-Chair recalled that the Board had discussed its intent to discuss the launch of the Fourth Round by mid-2023 and that a meeting prior to such a launch would be required. Upon invitation from the Co-Chair, the representative of the Secretariat outlined, that for past launches of application rounds, the Board had met to consider the application guidelines and forms, and also to agree on the dates and timetable of the particular application round.

67. The Board supported the proposal to hold its eighth meeting online in mid-2023. The Secretariat will be in contact with the Co-Chairs for its preparation.

VII. Other matters (agenda item 7)

68. Since no other matters were raised, the Co-Chair Ms. Griffith turned to the following agenda item.

VIII. Adoption of the meeting report (agenda item 8)

69. Upon invitation by the Co-Chair Ms. Griffith, the representative of the Secretariat informed the Board that the draft meeting report will be reviewed by the Co-Chairs and shared with all Board Members for their final review prior to adoption by electronic means.

70. The Board supported the proposal.

IX. Closure of the meeting (agenda item 9)

71. The Co-Chairs thanked the Board Members for their work, the previous Co-Chairs for opening the meeting, and the Secretariat for the preparation of and support to the meeting over the past two days.

72. The Co-Chair declared the meeting closed at 15:40 on Wednesday, 23 November 2022.

Appendix I

List of participants

Governing board (2022-2023)

Africa

Nigeria

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Eastern Europe

Croatia

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Latin America and the Caribbean

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Western Europe and others

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Robert Gunawardana Mawatha Battaramulla
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Eastern Europe

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Western Europe and others

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Secretariat

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Executive Secretary
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International Environment House 1
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Ms. Marianne Bailey
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Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury
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Ms. Linh Doan
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Appendix II

Agenda

Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting

Agenda item 2: Organizational matters

- (a) Adoption of the agenda
- (b) Election of co-chairs
- (c) Request for disclosure of any possible personal and/or financial conflict of interest

Agenda item 3: Operations of the Specific International Programme

- (a) Operations of the Programme, including status of implementation of First, Second and Third Round projects
- (b) Status of the Specific Trust Fund
- (c) Work programme for 2022-2023

Agenda item 4: Mid-term evaluation of the Specific International Programme of the Minamata Convention on Mercury

Agenda item 5: Second review of the financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention on Mercury: Specific International Programme

Agenda item 6: Dates and venue of the next meeting

Agenda item 7: Other matters

Agenda item 8: Adoption of the meeting report

Agenda item 9: Closure of the meeting

Appendix III

Overview of the Implementation of projects from the First, Second and Third Round as at 21 October 2022

Table 1
First Round of Applications (2018)

<i>Party name</i>	<i>Agreement details</i>	<i>Status</i>
Argentina – COMPLETED		
1 August 2019 – 31 December 2021 (29 months, extended)	Project Cooperation Agreement with National Institute of Industrial Technology in cooperation with Basel Convention Regional Centre for South America	The project is completed. The Partner requested a five-month no-cost extension to December 2021 (for a new total duration of 29 months) to allow for additional time to finalize the project activities. Five rounds of reporting received, plus the final report. Minor amendment to the budget to shift funds to year two and away from travel requested due to COVID-19-related impacts. Three of four instalments of funds disbursed to date. Disbursement of the final instalment will follow the submission of the reviewed final expenditure report. Terminal evaluation is in progress.
250 000 USD		
Armenia – COMPLETED		
1 June 2019 – 30 November 2021 (30 months, extended)	Small-Scale Funding Agreement with the Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Center State Non-Commercial Organization of the Ministry of Environment	The project is completed. The Partner requested a six-month no-cost extension to November 2021 (for a new total duration of 30 months) to allow for additional time to finalize the project activities. Five rounds of reporting received, plus the final report. The project has experienced some limited delays in implementation due to COVID-19. All four instalments disbursed. Terminal evaluation is in progress.
162 000 USD		
Benin		
20 May 2019 – 19 November 2022 (42 months, extended) *	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Living Environment and Sustainable Development	The project is moving forward in implementation, but it is unlikely that all agreed project activities will be completed by the end date. Initial disbursement experienced delays but the project has been in implementation status since February 2020, with significant delays over the project duration time both in its initial stages, then later due to COVID-19-related impacts and national reforms in the procurement procedures. Three rounds of reporting received. One of five instalments disbursed to date. A second instalment of funds will be disbursed after acceptance of complete reporting, but a significant part of the project budget will remain unspent after project closure.
249 113 USD		
Iran (Islamic Republic) – COMPLETED		
5 May 2020 – 4 August 2021 (15 months)	Small Scale Funding Agreement with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Research Institute of Petroleum Industry	The project is completed. All reporting including final reports were received. All instalments were disbursed. Terminal review was undertaken, completed and submitted by the project Partner and accepted by the secretariat.
100 000 USD		
Lesotho		
10 May 2019 – 9 November 2022 (42 months, extended) *	Project Cooperation Agreement with Department of Environment of the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture	The project is in the final stages of implementation. Project activities commenced in January 2020. The project experienced some delays including due to COVID-19, but all agreed activities are anticipated to be completed by the end of the project. Five rounds of reporting received. Four of five instalments of funds received to date. Terminal evaluation to be conducted shortly after project closure.
200 550 USD		

* Projects with duration exceeding the 36-month maximum time set for SIP projects, were extended exceptionally with formal agreement of the Co-Chairs of the Governing Board

Table 2
Second Round of Applications (2019)

<i>Party name</i>	<i>Agreement details</i>	<i>Status</i>
Antigua and Barbuda		
13 October 2020 – 12 January 2023 (27 months) 210 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Department of Analytical Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs	The project is well underway. The implementation of some in-person activities was disrupted due to COVID-19. Two of three rounds of reporting received. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date. Note: This is a regional project, also including Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.
Ecuador		
6 July 2021 – 5 July 2024 (36 months) 250 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition jointly with Investment Fund for Sustainable Environment	The project is underway. Following extensive communications delays, first redraft to respond to Governing Board comments was provided by Ecuador in October 2020. The legal agreement was finally signed in July 2021, but the project implementation only began in January 2022 due to delays in the national contracting process. Two of five rounds of reporting received. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Ghana		
4 December 2020 – 3 June 2023 (30 months) 250 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Health	The project is well underway. There have been some delays, including due to a lengthy transfer of funds process and a change in the project focal point, but the project has accomplished a number of planned activities and is largely on track. Two of four rounds of reporting received. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Indonesia		
21 September 2020 – 20 March 2023 (30 months) 143 340 USD	Small-Scale Funding Agreement with Ministry of Health jointly with Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for Southeast Asia	The project is underway. An amendment to the Small-Scale Funding Agreement has been drafted to extend the ending date for implementation of the project activities until March 2023, revise the workplan and undertake minor shifts in budget categories and budget years, but it is yet to be signed. Some difficulties in communicating with one project partner. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date. Two of three rounds of reporting received.
Iran (Islamic Republic)		
3 February 2021 – 2 February 2024 (36 months) 149 800 USD	Small-Scale Funding Agreement with Department of Environment	The project is underway. The secretariat awaits overdue reporting to determine progress against milestones. Significant difficulties in communicating with the project partner. One of four rounds of reporting received. One of three instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Moldova		
3 September 2020 – 2 June 2023 (33 months) 219 765 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment	The project is well underway. An amendment to the Project Cooperation Agreement was concluded in September 2022 to undertake minor changes to the project logical framework and budget table, including by planning additional activities to be implemented within the project period with savings resulting from COVID-19 impacts. Four of five rounds of reporting received. Audit report of the first year of implementation of the project accepted by the secretariat. Three of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Nigeria		
6 April 2021 – 5 July 2023 (27 months) 250 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Federal Ministry of Environment	The project is well underway. Two of four rounds of reporting received. Two of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Peru		
27 January 2021 – 26 March 2023 (26 months) 126 000 USD	Small-Scale Funding Agreement with Ministry of Environment	The project is underway. Following extensive communication delays after the signing of the agreement, as well as burdensome national procedures to access the project funding, the project only began implementation in September 2021. Significant difficulties in communicating with the project partner. One of three rounds of reporting received. One of three instalments of funds disbursed to date.

<i>Party name</i>	<i>Agreement details</i>	<i>Status</i>
Sri Lanka		
24 March 2021 – 23 September 2023 (30 months) 178 659 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment	The project is underway. Due to internal reforms and extensive procedures, the beginning of the project was delayed, and implementation of the activities only began in September 2021. To make up for lost time, several activities are being implemented simultaneously. Two of four rounds of reporting received. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.
Zambia		
23 February 2021 – 22 February 2024 (36 months) 200 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Zambia Environmental Management Agency	The project is underway. There were initial delays due to COVID-19-related restrictions and impacts, and recent delay in reporting. One of five rounds of reporting received. One of four instalments of funds disbursed to date.

Table 3
Third Round of Applications (2021)

<i>Party name</i>	<i>Agreement details</i>	<i>Status</i>
Burundi		
7 June 2022 – 6 June 2025 (36 months) 250 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Burundian Office for the Environment Protection, Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Livestock of Burundi	Legal agreement has been signed and implementation has begun. One of four instalments of funds has been disbursed.
Cuba		
13 October 2022 – 12 October 2025 (36 months) 249 210 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Center for Environmental Studies of Cienfuegos, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment jointly with Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for the Caribbean	Legal agreement had been signed and implementation has begun.
Gabon		
4 July 2022 – 3 July 2024 (24 months) 249 500 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Forests, Oceans, Environment and Climate Change	Legal agreement has been signed and implementation has begun. One of four instalments of funds has been disbursed. Note: This is a regional project, also including Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Congo, and Sao Tome.
India		
TBC (30 months) 240 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change	Legal agreement has not been signed yet.
Iran (Islamic Republic)		
TBC (30 months) 238 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade	Legal agreement has not been signed yet.
Jordan		
20 October 2022 – 19 April 2025 (30 months) 250 000 USD	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment	Legal agreement has been signed.

Party name	Agreement details	Status
North Macedonia		
8 June 2022 – 7 June 2025 (36 months)	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning	Legal agreement has been signed and implementation has begun. One of four instalments of funds has been disbursed.
248,500 USD		
Rwanda		
5 September 2022 – 4 September 2025 (36 months)	Project Cooperation Agreement with Rwanda Environment Management Authority	Legal agreement has been signed and implementation has begun. One of four instalments of funds has been disbursed.
220,000 USD		
Senegal		
14 July 2022 – 13 July 2025 (36 months)	Project Cooperation Agreement with Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development jointly with Regional Center of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions for French-speaking Countries of Africa	Legal agreement has been signed and implementation has begun. One of four instalments of funds has been disbursed. Note: This is a regional project also including Burkina Faso and Togo).
248 632 USD		

Appendix IV

Overview of Parties supported in the three rounds of applications to the Programme to date

<i>First round</i>	<i>Second round</i>	<i>Third round</i>
Argentina	Antigua and Barbuda	Burundi
Armenia	Ecuador	Cuba
Benin	Ghana	Gabon
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Indonesia	India
Lesotho	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
	Nigeria	Jordan
	Peru	North Macedonia
	Republic of Moldova	Rwanda
	Sri Lanka	Senegal
	Zambia	