



Project for  
**Promoting  
Minamata  
Convention  
on Mercury**



by making the most of Japan's  
knowledge and experiences

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# Proceeding report

## Custom Online Training 2

**Custom Online Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury  
Compounds**

*29 June 2025 (Online)*

UN environment programme | bri | RRC.AP Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific

Custom Online Training #2

**CUSTOMS TRAINING TO ENHANCE MONITORING OF TRADE OF MERCURY AND MERCURY COMPOUNDS**

TUESDAY, 29 JULY 2025  
15.30 -17:15 (UTC+7)

Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury | UN environment programme | by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences

Prepared by:

**Ashley Bastiansz, Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**

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## Background and Objectives

The **Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds**, held on **29 June 2025**, is part of a broader effort to build national capacity in support of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury**. The Convention is a key multilateral environmental agreement aimed at protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

This training is organized under the **Japan-funded United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) project** titled “*Project for Promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by Making the Most of Japan’s Knowledge and Experiences.*” The project seeks to strengthen implementation by facilitating **information exchange, awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity building** among participating countries.

Specifically, this session focused on **Best Practices/Available Resources for Managing Mercury Trade** and targeted **customs authorities, ministries of environment and health**, and other relevant stakeholders, with the goal of enhancing their understanding and practical ability to monitor and control mercury trade. By bringing together legal, technical, and enforcement perspectives, the training provided participants with an integrated view of the mercury trade landscape — covering:

- Managing Mercury Trade
- Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management
- Harmonized System (HS) Codes for Improved Mercury Trade Monitoring
- Controlling Mercury Trade

This training is the **second of a three-part online webinar series**, designed to complement in-person workshops and deepen stakeholder engagement across Asia and the Pacific.

# Participation Details

A total of **62 participants** joined the *Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds* held on 29 June 2025. The participants represented a diverse mix of sectors and countries, aligning well with the training's goal of engaging both customs and environmental stakeholders.

## Geographic Representation

The training drew participation from a wide range of countries, demonstrating broad regional interest and engagement on the topic of mercury trade monitoring. The top five countries by number of participants *based on registration* were: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Other countries represented included Maldives, India, Nepal, Gabon, Ghana, Cameroon among others, highlighting a strong subregional presence from South and Southeast Asia, and Africa.

## Institutional Background

Attendees represented a wide range of institutions, *list descending*:

- Government agencies
- Academia/Research institutions
- Other sectors (including NGOs and private sector)
- UN or International organizations

## Gender Representation

The gender distribution among participants *based on registration* was as follows:

- Male – 37 participants
- Female – 51 participants
- Prefer not to say

## Opening Remarks

The training session began with opening remarks from **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**. He opened the session by welcoming participants and highlighting the importance of the continuation of this training—the second in a three-part series designed to strengthen the monitoring of mercury trade under the Minamata Convention. He drew attention to the ongoing global challenges posed by mercury use, while the obligations of the Minamata Convention are in place to assist countries with the controlling mercury worldwide, mercury trade still remains a large challenge. A challenge that requires technical capacity, inter-agency collaboration, data exchange and international cooperation, which is what these trainings aims to foster. He further emphasized his gratitude in the continued engagement participants from ministries of environment and health, Customs and law enforcement agencies, and experts supporting these efforts. Mr. Verbaere concluded by wishing all participants a productive webinar.



This was followed by warm welcoming remarks from **Dr. Guilberto Borongan**, Director of the **Asian Institute of Technology – Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (AIT RRC.AP)**. Dr. Borongan expressed his appreciation to all participants to the second webinar in this training series. He recognized the Japan funded project, promoting the Minamata Convention by making use of Japan’s knowledge, under which this project is made possible as well as collaborators UNEP and BRI, and experts from the World Customs Organization (WCO) for their expertise. He provided a brief overview of the Asian Institute of Technology Regional Resource Centre for Asia and Pacific’s (AIT RRC.AP) role in supporting countries in the region to implement multilateral environmental agreements, including the Minamata Convention. He reaffirmed the center’s commitment to capacity building and knowledge-sharing, and highlighted the value of such training in helping countries fulfill their monitoring and enforcement obligations related to mercury trade under the Minamata



Convention. Dr. Borongan concluded by wishing participants an engaging and fruitful learning experience.

## Housekeeping and Session Orientation

The housekeeping and session orientation segment was delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**,

Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**, who also served as the session moderator.

Participants were welcomed once again and given essential technical and engagement guidelines to help ensure a smooth, interactive online experience. These included reminders on how to use the chat and Q&A features, information about the recording of the session, and details on resources that would be shared following the event.

Mr. Bhari emphasized the importance of a respectful and inclusive engagement throughout the second training and encouraged participants to actively engage with the expert speakers. A brief overview of the day's agenda was then provided, outlining the thematic segments, introducing the speakers with short bios and presentation topics, and highlighting the planned Q&A sessions. To foster a relaxed and welcoming virtual environment, the moderator used light humor and informal interaction, helping participants feel more at ease and engaged from the outset.

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# HOUSEKEEPING RULES WEBINAR

Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds

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*Mr. Bishal Bhari (AIT-RRCAP) providing housekeeping rules and session orientation*

# Presentation 1: Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade

The first technical session was presented by **Ms. Ashley Bastiansz** from the **Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**. Her presentation provided an **Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade**.

She began by introducing the importance of managing mercury trade due to ongoing issues; (1) persistence of illicit mercury trade; (2) smuggling of mercury through concealed or mislabeled shipments; (3) need for multi-agency response; (4) harmful impacts of illicit mercury trade; and (5) necessity of international and national collaboration. She then provided an overview of the Minamata Convention by highlighting the provisions of Article 3 and the guidance forms available for participants on the Convention's website.

Ms. Bastiansz segued into the discussing the key stakeholders (e.g., Customs agencies, Environmental and Health Authorities, and Law Enforcement), their respective roles in controlling mercury trade, and the importance of cross collaboration across agencies. She then highlighted the need for capacity building and training, and communication and collaboration in developing implementation strategies for cross collaboration. Following this, she provided an overview of the need for and key elements of standard operating procedures (SOPs) as a strategic adaptable reference tool for planning and inspection.

Ms. Bastiansz then shifted focus to available resources in controlling mercury trade by presenting on documents and resources that can be found through various agencies websites:

- WCO: Standard Operating Procedures for controls of waste shipments (2024), Illicit Trade Report (2023), Trade Tools platform – Harmonized System General Rules for interpretation
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA): Inventory of Mercury Supply, Use, and Trade in the United States 2023 Report
- Basel Convention: Guidelines for Waste Management
- Global Mercury Partnership (GMP): Website for technical assistance and identification of partners

She concluded by emphasizing the importance of using these aforementioned, among others, to assist with controlling mercury trade and meeting the obligations of the Minamata Convention.

This session effectively framed mercury trade as an issue that requires inter-agency cooperation, international and national collaboration, and available technical resources.

### **Q&A Highlights**

A question was raised by a participant who asked what the most underused resource was. In response, Ms. Bastiansz emphasized that all of the resources are important to use, however she felt that the GMP website is an important resource as it houses a lot of information that people can keep up to date on in this field, as well as resources and identifying partners that can assist with specific issues related to mercury trade.

## Presentation 2: Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management

The second session was delivered by **Ms. Chalani Rubesinghe**, National Consultant - Mercury and Health Project at the World Health Organization country office in Sri Lanka. Her presentation offered a comprehensive overview of legislative and institutional strengthening needs for improving management and trade of mercury, using mercury-added skin-lightening products as a case study.

Firstly, she provided an overview of existing legislations (e.g., Minamata Convention, Border Control measures, Prior informed consent (PIC)) which she learned more about during the National Customs Training Workshop organized under this Japan-funded project in collaboration with the GEF 10810 project on *Eliminating mercury skin lightening products* that took place on 2 June 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Ms. Rubesinghe presented on the identified gaps in mercury trade management including loopholes in existing regulations, implementation gaps, lack of awareness among border control personnel and inter-agency coordination, deficiency in facilities at border control points, and corruption and systemic lapses.

She posted the question in the chat on the which of these gaps poses the greatest challenge in your context. Many participants answered poor facilities and testing at borders, which Ms. Rubesinghe also agreed Sri Lanka faces as well.

If you're a Customs officer and an unclear shipment of cosmetics arrives at the border, what challenges would you face in verifying the compliance, if compliance exists. For example, in Sri Lanka cosmetics cannot exceed 1ppm of mercury. Participants mentioned no database or testing facilities.

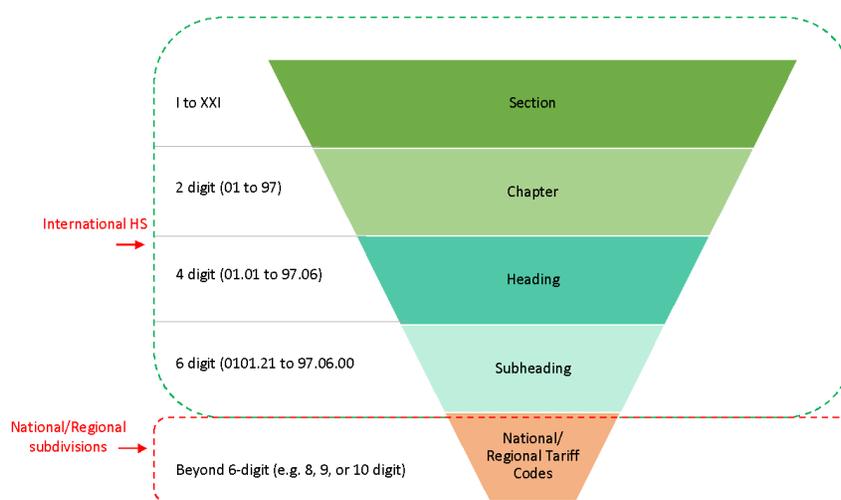
Ms. Rubesinghe shifted to Best Practices which included strengthening national regulations, improving inter-agency collaboration, promoting and facilitation mercury-free alternatives, strengthening testing and surveillance capacity, developing robust databases and inventory systems, and monitoring and managing mercury waste. She continued further by emphasizing enhancing regional collaboration, addressing informal trade routes and border leakages, regional harmonization of laws and penalties, and engagement of NGOs and civil society in strengthening mercury trade management.

She concluded with adding the Basel Action Network as another resource to add to Ms. Bastiansz's previous presentation.



## Presentation 3: HS Codes for Improved Trade Monitoring of Mercury-added Products

The third technical session was delivered by Dr. Kyaw Nyunt Maung, UNEP, focused on the use of Harmonized System (HS) codes for improving illegal mercury trade. His presentation started off by highlighting the need to meet Article 4 and 21 of the Minamata Convention through increased understanding of imports/exports of mercury-added products (MAPs) and the national use of HS codes and sub-codes. Dr. Maung briefly explained the development and maintenance of 6-digit HS codes by the WCO and noted that over 200 countries nationally using these codes. He discussed that sub-codes of more than 6-digits can be created by national and regional authorities, however most sub-codes do not segregate MAPs.



*Mr. Maung providing details of HS codes and sub-codes.*

Dr. Maung then followed by presenting present HS codes for products that may be used for MAPs. He then segued in the Minamata Initial Assessments (MIAs) of various countries and the MAPs identified in the respective countries as well as the HS codes used for reference. He provided an example of different HS codes used for similar products, pointing out that tariff codes used vary by countries. Using Uruguay as an example, Dr. Maung explained that the Minamata focal point – the Environment Directorate (DINAMA) – recognized the need for better information on MAPs and resultantly convened a Working Group consisting of the Ministry of Public Health, the Technological Laboratory of Uruguay and the National Directorate of Customs. This Working Group created new 10-digit HS codes for clinical thermometers and blood pressure measuring devices, which allows for national

governments and regional entities to better identify these products containing mercury. Dr. Maung then concluded his presentation by calling to attention proposed customs codes of more than 6-digits for participants to review, as stakeholders are not always aware of this process.

This presentation showcased the importance of creating more specific HS codes at the national level to better regulate MAPs, strengthening information collection of trade, and ultimately assisting with meeting the obligations of the Minamata Convention, more specifically Article 4.

## Presentation 4: Principles of Controlling Mercury Trade

The final technical session was delivered by Ms. Anna Kobylecka of the World Customs Organization (WCO), who presented on the principles of controlling mercury trade, in line with the Minamata Convention, specifically through the lens of Customs, to protect human and environmental health.

Ms. Kobylecka began her presentation with outlining Article 3 of the Minamata Convention that discusses the import/export of mercury trade, the need for Customs to ensure compliance with trade provisions as illegal trade may involve (1) misdeclaration; (2) transporting mercury without or falsified documentation; (3) disguising controlled goods within a shipment of uncontrolled commodities or hiding mercury among other goods; and (4) smuggling including “ant trafficking” techniques. She continued with Article 4 of the Minamata Convention and underscored that Customs need to ensure compliance issues resulting from (1) continued illegal trade and sale of MAPs; (2) availability of mercury-added skin-lightening products both online and in store; and (3) mislabeling or misdeclaration of products covered by restriction or prohibitions to evade Customs’ detection. Following this, Ms. Kobylecka, provided an overview of Article 11 of the Convention focusing on measures related to mercury waste. In regard to Article 11, Customs needs to take the appropriate measures to ensure that residual mercury is not smuggled, dumped or polluting the environment, and emphasized the key challenge associated with mercury waste.

Ms. Kobylecka then transition into mercury demand and trade dynamic where she pointed out that Customs agencies need to be aware of mercury demand fueled by presence of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), and gold prices, as mercury supply typically moves in the opposite direction of gold flow but travels along the same smuggling routes used for other contraband. In continuation, she provided an overview of safety measures and cooperation in controlling mercury trade by underlining Customs need for proper protective equipment (PPE) when inspecting mercury shipments, collaboration with environmental agencies for guidance on safe handling and disposal, and lastly information sharing to improve safety enforcement and protocols. For stronger enforcement implications to combat illegal trade under the Convention and national laws, Customs must implement strict border verification measures, coordination with environmental, police authorities among others to dismantle criminal networks, use risk profiling and seizure data to track illicit trade routes, and promote regional intelligence sharing and joint border enforcement actions.

In conclusion, Ms. Kobylecka stressed that controlling mercury trade requires Customs agencies must be proactive, informed on legal frameworks, specificity of the trade, and most importantly collaborative in order to meet the obligations of the Minamata Convention.

## Open Q&A session

The Open Q&A session invited participants to engage with all three speakers in a concluding discussion moderated by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**. The moderator initiated the segment with a question directed to Mr. Maung and Ms. Rubesinghe – what are the main challenges with switching from 6- to 8- or 10-digit codes? Mr. Maung responded that this type of information has not been widely disseminated to Parties, countries, or relevant stakeholders, making the process of distinguishing MAPs from other types of products unfamiliar to many. At the national level, establishing effective systems or processes requires strong coordination. As highlighted in Chalani’s presentation, coordination is often weak. Strengthening collaboration among agencies is essential, particularly in ensuring that decision-makers are both aware of this process and able to access reliable information at the national level.

Mr. Bhari then opened the feedback survey and initiated a final question for Ms. Kobylecka by asking her what are the common tactics of illegal trade? Ms. Kobylecka responded by explaining that, in principle, different types of mercury-containing commodities that require specific documentation and compliance with the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure among others. However, common issues at the border include the use of incorrect HS codes, false declarations of value, mislabeling, and smuggling in small quantities.



*Open Q&A Session*

## Closing Remarks

The training concluded with closing remarks delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**.

Mr. Bhari urged participants to complete the Customs Training Feedback Survey as well as to utilize the knowledge from this training and apply it to national legislation and Customs policies. He expressed hope for stronger inter-agency collaboration and capacity building, and for participants to use this workshop to train others. He mentioned that all of the presentations and additional training materials will be shared after this workshop.

To conclude, Mr. Bhari encouraged participants to attend the third and last online Customs training webinar taking place on 13 August 2025.

# Participant Feedback

## Post-Training Survey

Total Respondents: 10

- Gender: Male – 6, Female – 4

Countries Represented:

- Sri Lanka – 3
- Nepal – 2
- Myanmar – 1
- Philippines – 1
- Gabon – 1
- Listed as “test” or unspecified – 2

Organization Types:

- Academic/Research Institutes – 3
- NGO or Civil Society – 2
- Ministry of Environment – 2
- Customs Authority – 2
- Private Sector – 1

## Overall Satisfaction

- Very Satisfied: 5 respondents
- Satisfied: 5 respondents

## Self-Assessed Knowledge & Skills

Level of Skill/Knowledge at Start of Course:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Fair: 3 respondents
- Satisfactory: 4 respondents

Level of Skill/Knowledge at End of Course:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Very Good: 4 respondents
- Satisfactory: 3 respondents

Contribution of Course to Skill/Knowledge:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Very Good: 3 respondents
- Satisfactory: 4 respondents

Participants experienced clear improvement in knowledge from start to end. The training was especially effective for those who began with lower skill levels. All participants recognized some value added by the training.

How likely are you to apply the knowledge and techniques learned during this training to your current work?

- Very Likely: 6 respondents
- Likely: 4 respondents

### **Most Valuable Concepts or Takeaways**

- Regulatory Strengthening: Importance of closing legal loopholes in national regulations.
- Customs Knowledge: Insights on HS codes and their relevance.
- Mercury Trade Awareness: Understanding the overall trade landscape and associated loopholes.
- Monitoring & Compliance Tools: Knowledge of legal frameworks, support mechanisms, and tools for tracking mercury trade.
- Enforcement Techniques: Emphasis on monitoring, code tracking, and case-based learning.

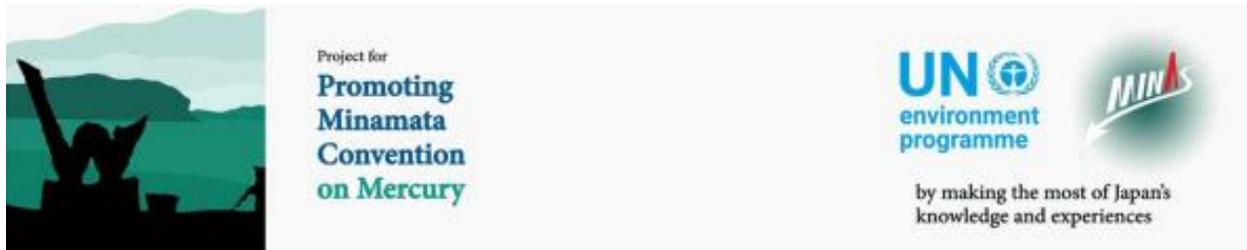
### **Unclear or Insufficient Aspects**

- Most responses left blank or marked “No”, indicating few perceived gaps.
- One participant emphasized the need for more detailed examples and deeper focus on:
  - Identifying source countries
  - Common misdeclarations
  - Use of real-world seizure cases for practical insights

### **Key Insights**

Participants found the training informative and relevant, especially around legal frameworks and trade monitoring. A few noted the need for more in-depth, practical content, such as case studies to strengthen real-world application.

# Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda



Online Custom Training #2

## Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds

29<sup>th</sup> of July 2025

Concept Note and Programme Agenda

### Background and Objectives

Minamata Convention on Mercury (the Convention) is one of the newest multilateral environmental agreements aiming at protecting human health and environment from anthropogenic emissions and release of mercury and mercury compounds. There has been a growing need for capacity building concerning appropriate mercury monitoring skills in developing countries to ensure the implementation of the required efforts to monitor the levels of mercury and mercury compounds.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is implementing a Japan-funded project called “Project for promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan’s knowledge and experiences<sup>1</sup>” to support its member states for the implementation of the Convention. The project has a special focus on the area of information exchange, awareness and education, research, development, and monitoring. A comprehensive programme was designed to strengthen enabling capacity, build on the resources in and around Minamata, and employ technologies held by institutions in Japan for the effective implementation of the Convention’s obligations.

In addition to the in-person workshop planned, kindly note that national stakeholders will also be invited to participate in a series of online training sessions to be held tentatively from May to August 2025. These brief online webinars will provide key context to the issues related to mercury, global mercury trade and the obligations of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Attendees of all sessions will receive a Certificate of Participation.

## Participation Details

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Date</b>          | Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> of July 2025   |
| <b>Time</b>          | 15:30 – 17:15 (UTC+7)   |
| <b>Registration</b>  | Please register for the webinar from the link or QR-code below:   |
|                      | <br><i><a href="#">Click Here to Register</a></i>                |
| <b>Venue</b>         | Virtual (Webex); Meeting Link will be sent to registered participants.  |
| <b>Project title</b> | Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences.                                     |
| <b>Webinar title</b> | Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury, Mercury Compounds   |
| <b>Participants</b>  | Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Health and Custom Authorities.   |
| <b>Language</b>      | English only (no interpretation provided)   |
| <b>Contact</b>       | <i><a href="mailto:japanmercuryproject@un.org">japanmercuryproject@un.org</a>; <a href="mailto:warm@rrcap.ait.ac.th">warm@rrcap.ait.ac.th</a></i> |
| <b>Project web</b>   | <i><a href="#">Click Here</a></i>   |

## Programme Agenda

Online Custom Training #2 will focus on exploring the best practices and available resources for managing mercury trade. Detail agenda is as follows:

|                    |  |   |
|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>15:30-15:36</b> | Opening Remark   | Thomas Verbaere, UNEP<br>Guilberto Borongan, AIT<br>RRC.AP                    |
| <b>15:36-15:40</b> | Housekeeping Announcement  | Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)  |
| <b>15:40-16:00</b> | Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade.                       | Ashley Bastiansz,<br>Biodiversity Research<br>Institute (BRI)                 |
| <b>16:00-16:20</b> | Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management. | Chalani Rubesinghe,<br>World Health<br>Organization (WHO) Sri<br>Lanka Office |
| <b>16:20-16:40</b> | Harmonized System (HS) Codes for Improved Mercury Trade Monitoring                       | Kyaw Maung, UNEP  |
| <b>16:40-17:00</b> | Principles of Controlling Mercury Trade  | Anna Kobylecka, World<br>Customs Organization<br>(WCO)                        |
| <b>17:00-17:15</b> | Q&A  | Facilitated By: Ashley<br>Bastiansz (BRI)                                     |