***Mercury-Free Healthcare by 2020* initiative aims to end mercury exposure from medical measuring devices**

**GENEVA – 11 October 2013** – The World Health Organization (WHO) and Health Care without Harm organisation have joined forces to launch a new initiative to get mercury removed from all medical measuring devices by 2020.

The initiative '*Mercury-Free Healthcare by 2020'*, launched today to mark the signing of the *Min amata Convention on Mercury*
, calls for the phase out of mercury fever thermometers and blood pressure devices containing mercury. This will be done by ending the manufacture, import and export of these devices and by supporting the deployment of accurate, affordable, and safer non-mercury alternatives.
Mercury and its various compounds are of global public health concern and have a range of serious health impacts including brain and neurological damage especially among the young. Others include kidney damage and damage to the digestive system.
While the Minamata Convention allows countries to continue to use mercury in medical measuring devices until 2030 under certain special circumstances, WHO and the nongovernmental organization Health Care without Harm believe that the potential negative health consequences from mercury are so great that all should strive to meet the main target date of 2020 set out in the Convention.

"With the signing of the Minamata Convention on Mercury we will be going a long way in protecting the world forever from the devastating health consequences from mercury," says WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. "Mercury is one of the top ten chemicals of major public health concern and is a substance which disperses into and remains in ecosystems for generations, causing severe ill health and intellectual impairment to exposed populations."

The Convention provides a blueprint for country action to eliminate the most harmful forms of mercury use, reduce mercury emissions from industry, promote mercury free methods, protect children and women of childbearing age from mercury exposure, and take steps to improve workers health and well-being.

"WHO will tackle the critical areas of concern of mercury exposure and we will work with governments to ensure that they can meet their obligations under the Convention, especially those in the areas of healthcare," says Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director for Public Health and Environment. "This calls for the phase out of mercury fever thermometers and sphygmomanometers [1] in health care under the *Mercury-Free Healthcare by 202*0."

WHO and its health sector partners will furthermore work to:

- phase out mercury topical antiseptics and mercury skin-lightening cosmetics;
- develop public health strategies to address the health impacts of mercury use in

artisanal and small-scale gold mining;

- develop measures to “phase down” the use of dental amalgam;
- encourage health information exchange, public awareness-raising and health research.

Mercury is toxic to human health, posing a particular threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life.