

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes

Ref.: AL ARE 5/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

3 September 2025

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/10.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning alleged human rights violations, mercury poisoning and environmental degradation that may be linked, through their supply chains, to gold refining companies based and operating in the United Arab Emirates. The information received suggests that policy and regulatory gaps in the United Arab Emirates may increase the demand for gold. This could lead to increased pressure to mine gold, which would consequently lead to mercury pollution, exposure and environmental degradation, particularly in mining communities in countries where gold is mined.

According to the information received:

The United Arab Emirates is the world's largest importer of gold, with 75.2 billion US dollars of gold purchased in 2023. According to official Emirati statistics, gold imports from Africa to the UAE doubled between 2012 and 2022, rising from 243 to 609 tonnes.¹ However, a study found that between 2012 and 2022, 2596 tonnes of gold not declared for export were imported from Africa to the UAE.² Further, approximately 400 to 500 tonnes of raw gold were imported into the country, most destined for the UAE's gold refineries. The actual figure may be higher than 500 tonnes. Almost all gold produced from Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM) results from amalgamation using mercury or cyanide, which becomes raw gold or gold doré.³

Raw gold or gold doré refers to a bar composed of a mixture of precious metals, though these bars generally contain gold and silver. A doré bar is usually produced as part of the mining and refining process, but can also be created from scrap gold. It is a very imprecise term applied to numerous forms of partially refined gold. On average, a doré bar contains 50-75% pure gold; the rest could be silver. Gold doré requires further refinement before the metal can be used as raw material for producing gold items or other purposes. Gold doré is therefore neither ore nor bullion, but metal bars, nuggets or flakes with a high gold

¹ UN Comtrade HS 7108 data, as reported by the UAE between 2012 and 2022.

² Swissaid, "On the trail of African gold", 30 May 2025 (<https://www.swissaid.ch/en/articles/on-the-trail-of-african-gold/>).

³ Yoshimura, A., Suemasu, K. & Veiga, M.M. (2021). Estimation of Mercury Losses and Gold Production by Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM). DOI: 10.1007/s40831-021-00394-8

content.

UAE Good Delivery (UAEGD) is a standard that provides a framework for the gold sector, in line with international best practices, it is operated by the Executive Office UAE Bullion Market Committee which is chaired by the Ministry of Economy. It covers quality and technical specifications of refineries and gold production facilities in the UAE. There are 8 active Dubai Good Delivery Gold Members of which only three refineries are based in the UAE: Al Etihad Gold Refinery DMCC, Emirates Gold DMCC, and Sam Precious Metals FZ-LLC.⁴ Given that there are around 10 active gold refineries in the UAE, it is noteworthy that the majority of refineries are not accredited by the UAEGD, largely because accreditation is voluntary, the process is often lengthy, and accreditations in other countries are often more attractive.

Reportedly, 66.5 per cent of the gold the UAE imported from Africa was smuggled from African countries.⁵ The report revealed that the UAE contributes to gold laundering, as large quantities of gold gain a legal status once they enter the country. The report also indicated that smuggling on this scale not only causes a loss of tax revenue for countries but also raises concerns about the existence of an illicit economy. Legally, it can be exploited for money laundering, terrorist financing, and sanctions evasion.

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining is growing rapidly and often uncontrollably in more than 70 countries, especially when the price of gold peaked due to the geopolitical progress worldwide.⁶ One of the most devastating aspects of this mining is the use of mercury, a dangerous and persistent metal that poses a global environmental threat. More than 2,000 tons of mercury from artisanal and small-scale gold mining are released into the environment each year.⁷

Globally, 380–870 tonnes of gold are produced by artisanal and small-scale gold mining each year, with a median value of 520 tonnes. The Hg use in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector was estimated to be 640–1000 tonnes annually, with a median of 892 tonnes. Consequently, 248–838 tonnes of Hg are emitted from the sector each year, with a median value of 615 tonnes.⁸

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining emissions comprise between a third and 47% of total emissions in 2015, totaling 952.61 tons per year globally.⁹ The emissions from Central & South America were the largest emitter (37%), followed by artisanal and small-scale gold mining in the Asia-Pacific region

⁴ UAE Good Delivery (UAEGD), "Active UAE Good Delivery Gold Members" (<https://ugd.gov.ae/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/UAEGD-Gold-Membership-Validity-02-07-2025-version-63.pdf>)

⁵ Swissaid, "On the trail of African gold", 30 May 2025.

⁶ Abubakar Abdullahi and others, "Not All That Glitters: How Global Demand and Lax Laws Fuel Illicit Gold Flows From Africa", Africa Uncensored (2015) and Taylor Kuykendall, "Illegal mining rises globally along with gold price", 30 June 2025.

⁷ "Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM)", Global Mercury Partnership, United Nations Environmental Program.

⁸ Yingchao Cheng and others, "A review of gold production, mercury consumption, and emission in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM)", Resources Policy Volume 81 (March 2023).

⁹ Flora Maria Brocza and others "Global scenarios of anthropogenic mercury emissions", Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, Volume 24, issue 12 (" June 2024).

(31.6%), and then Africa (29.41%). The mercury emission will be deposited in the forest, soil, and water after more than 6 months, lingering in the atmosphere and travelling as far as 2000 km from its source.¹⁰ Another study shows that the atmospheric mercury on Earth could be the legacy from 500 years.¹¹

A large part evaporates in the atmosphere, while another significant portion contaminates rivers and oceans. Much of the damage to the rivers and forests of the Amazon Basin is irreversible and accelerating. Indigenous women of childbearing age in the Amazon region have been found to have extremely high blood mercury levels. This is true even in communities that do not conduct gold mining activities and where fish is the only known source of mercury exposure.¹² Furthermore, in Africa, mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining sites is traded illegally and smuggled from one country to another, including in war-torn countries.

There is a risk of illegally importing gold into the United Arab Emirates, with the possible human rights violations that this may entail. The risks in the gold sector emphasize that neither current legislation nor voluntary private sector standards prevent the importation into the United Arab Emirates of gold extracted in violation of human rights.

Lack of due diligence on adequate human rights regulation and adverse impacts associated with mercury and small-scale gold mining.

According to the information received, the current legislation in the United Arab Emirates has not prevented the entry of illegally sourced gold into the country, thereby contributing to human rights violations. Reportedly, between 80% and 85% of all gold mined in Africa in 2022 by artisanal or small-scale methods was exported to the UAE, either directly or via African transit countries. Allegedly, the UAE was the world's leading mercury trading hub in 2022 and continues to be a significant mercury exporter and global player, exporting 309,570 Kg of mercury, with a trade value of \$10.35 million. In 2023, the UAE exported 648,344 Kg of mercury worth \$19.62 million, mainly to Togo, Tajikistan, Ghana, Chile, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, South Africa, the Russian Federation, and Morocco.

In 2022, the UAE Ministry of Economy had already regulated the responsible supply chain for minerals. The new law applied to gold refineries, importers, those dealing with scrap gold and those dealing with gold mining. This rule will apply to companies in the UAE mainland and free zones as part of the UAE's efforts to implement the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime. However, no public information is available

¹⁰ Ian Michael Hedgecock and others, "Modelling the Fate of Mercury Emissions from Artisanal and Small Scale Gold Mining", EGU sphere Preprint Repository (03 April 2024).

¹¹ Lars D Hylander and Markus Meili, "500 years of mercury production: global annual inventory by region until 2000 and associated emissions", Science of The Total Environment Volume 304, Issues 1–3, (20 March 2003).

¹² Paulo Cesar Basta and others, "Mercury Exposure in Mundurucu Indigenous Communities from Brazilian Amazon: Methodological Background and an Overview of the Principal Results", Journals Environmental Research and Public Health, Volume 18, Issue 17 (01 September 2021).

on the application of this regulation or the results of its implementation.

Law on the control of precious metals in the UAE.

The control of gold and other precious metals in the United Arab Emirates is governed by the Federal Law No. 11 of 2015 concerning monitoring trade in precious stones, precious metals, and their stamping¹³ and the Ministerial Decree No. (68) of 2024.¹⁴

Federal Law No. 11 of 2015 establishes rules for trading, hallmarking, and certification of precious metals and stones, including gold, silver, and platinum jewellery. The law also defines legal purity standards for gold, silver, and platinum. Requires all precious metal and stone jewellery to adhere to specific hallmarking requirements set by the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) to guarantee authenticity and purity. Mandates testing and hallmarking by accredited laboratories before items are sold.

The law also stipulates penalties for forging hallmarks or certificates or selling/trading in jewellery with forged marks: imprisonment for at least two years and/or fines between Dh500,000 and Dh1,000,000 (around 136,000 and 272,000 USD). The law also applies sanctions for dealing without proper hallmarking or certification: imprisonment for one year and/or fines between Dhs250,000 and Dhs500,000. Reports related to the enforcement of this law are not available. The UAE gold trade lacks transparency in its supply chain, particularly regarding the origin of gold entering Dubai, which has been linked to illicit activities like money laundering and conflict financing. This lack of transparency stems from weak oversight and inadequate controls, allowing for conflict and high-risk gold trade.

Following the New Federal regulation, particularly the Cabinet Decision No. 127 of 2024 on The Application of the Reverse Charge Mechanism on Precious Metals and Precious Stones among Registrants in the State for the Purposes of Value Added Tax, requires more information on the origin of gold imported into the United Arab Emirates. However, according to the information received, current legislation is still insufficient, as it lacks traceability requirements requiring refineries to know where and how the gold was extracted.

In the gold trade, this definition of country of origin can be interpreted as either the country from which the gold was extracted or the country from which the gold was refined. The Ministerial Decree No. (68) of 2024 requires refineries to declare the origin, i.e., the country where the gold was extracted, and not just the country of provenance, i.e., where the gold was refined. However, as refineries' failure to demonstrate to demonstrate the origin of the gold, as stipulated in accordance with the Federal Law. No. 64 of 2024, as a reaction to SwissAid report, your government has suspended 32 gold refineries in the local market, representing 5% of the gold sector in the country, for 3 months, starting

¹³ United Arab Emirates, Federal Law No. (11) of 2015.

¹⁴ United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Economy. Ministerial Decree No. (68) of 2024.

from 24 July until 24 October 2024.¹⁵

The UAE is not a full member of the OECD but participates in the OECD's [Development Assistance Committee](#) (DAC) as a [Participant](#) and has been a development cooperation provider since 1971. The DAC is a unique international forum of many of the largest providers of aid aiming to promote development co-operation and other relevant policies that contribute to the sustainable development of developing countries. The United Arab Emirates' development co-operation is guided by its foreign assistance policy which is relevant as the UAE seeks to become a leading global donor¹⁶ and aims to reduce poverty, enhance stability and peace, strengthen relationships, and foster trade and investment ties, contributing to international efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2024, the United Arab Emirates established a dedicated aid agency. The United Arab Emirates' official development assistance (ODA) focuses on supporting fragile countries and contexts and is channeled mainly through bilateral country partnerships for development through multi-year programmes. The United Arab Emirates' total ODA (USD 1.7 billion, preliminary data) decreased in 2024, representing 0.32% of gross national income (GNI). Cooperation with gold-producing countries in Africa, like with Nigeria in 2021,¹⁷ could be improved and strengthened through this mechanism.

The OECD's five-step framework for the duty of risk-based diligence in the mineral supply chain requires that refineries know where the gold was extracted.¹⁸ The lack of appropriate traceability requirements in the UAE law is inconsistent with the OECD recommendations. Furthermore, since the Responsible Gold Guidance of the London Bullion Market Association¹⁹ (the international trade association representing the gold and silver bullion market) is based on OECD standards, the lack of appropriate traceability requirements in UAE law is inconsistent with the market association's guidelines.

While I do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, I would like to express our grave concern about the significant human rights impacts, including mercury poisoning and environmental degradation, caused by some companies based and operating in the United Arab Emirates, which may be linked to them through their supply chains. The lack of an adequate response to these issues, particularly the failure to adopt specific policies and regulations and ensure the effective implementation of the law, exacerbates these impacts. The information received suggests that the UAE authority has not proposed other solutions to improve the traceability and transparency of gold imports.

¹⁵ Ernest Hoffman, "UAE suspends 32 gold refineries for 256 violations in crackdown on money laundering, terrorist financing", 08 August 2024.

¹⁶ Development Assistance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/the-ministry/the-foreign-policy/development-assistance>).

¹⁷ Vanguard, "Nigeria, UAE to track illegal gold trade — Minister", 21 July 2021.

¹⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Responsible business conduct (RBC), An introduction to the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains for Upstream Actors.

¹⁹ London bullion market, LBMA RESPONSIBLE GOLD GUIDANCE Version 9, November 2021.

I wish to express my grave concern about the adverse human rights consequences and environmental degradation caused by the use of mercury and gold mining waste in the pursuit of profit for the gold mining industry, including gold refineries. As mercury use is driven by demand for gold from financial markets, electronics, and jewellery, primarily in wealthier countries, addressing the global mercury threat is not only the responsibility of countries where mercury is used in gold extraction, but also the responsibility of the countries that host the refineries that buy the metal.

The Special Rapporteur, through his thematic report,²⁰ drew attention to the impact of artisanal and small-scale gold mining on mining communities, Indigenous Peoples and children. In most small-scale gold mining locations child labour is endemic, they risk disease, mercury poisoning, drowning and myriad injuries from rock falls, explosions, tunnel collapse, machinery accidents and falls into disused pits and shafts. The report calls for the adoption of national strategies to eliminate mercury use, criminal sanctions against mercury use in mining, and specific actions to protect affected communities and remediate contaminated areas.

I am concerned that refineries in the United Arab Emirates that purchase gold lack due diligence to address human rights abuses associated with its extraction, including the use of mercury in small-scale gold mining. Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates lacks an adequate traceability and transparency system, requiring refineries to know where and how the gold was extracted. The United Arab Emirates' current traceability requirements apply to the country's intermediate.

As a global hub for gold refining, I am concerned that the United Arab Emirates does not have an adequate traceability system that would require UAE's refineries to know where and how the gold was mined. The traceability requirements currently applied in the United Arab Emirates stop at the country of gold export to the United Arab Emirates, which is often an intermediary country. I am concerned that this gap could be exploited by criminal syndicates, warlords, and drug cartels that traffic in mercury and gold.

I am further concerned that UAE legislation does not establish standards for exercising due diligence equivalent to the OECD and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. I am also concerned that current legislation is inadequate to prevent the importation of gold produced in a manner that violates human rights. In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the annex on international human rights law attached to this letter, which cites relevant international standards applicable to these allegations.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful

²⁰ United Nations. (2022). Report of the Special Rapporteur on toxic substances and human rights: *Mercury and small-scale gold mining*. A/HRC/51/35, p. 18-20.

for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the measures the UAE has taken or considered, including policies, laws, and regulations, to fulfil its obligations to protect against human rights violations committed by companies operating on its territory and/or falling under its jurisdiction.
3. Please provide information on the measures the UAE has taken to include the obligation to disclose the gold supply chain, particularly with regard to amending the meaning of the term “country of origin” in article 10 of the Ordinance on Foreign Trade Statistics to better align with the OECD definition, which specifies where the gold was mined, where it was refined, and from which country it was shipped to the United Arab Emirates.
4. Please provide information on any measures the UAE has taken to enhance the collection and publication of information regarding the origin of imported gold. Additionally, kindly provide details on any other solutions proposed to improve the traceability and transparency of gold imports.
5. Please provide information on any measures the UAE has taken to amend the money laundering law to encompass transactions upstream of the supply chain, such as those between mines and refineries.
6. Please provide information on steps the UAE has taken to amend the Precious Metals Control Act to align it with the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict Areas? Or has high risk and is on the Principles of the United Nations on Business and Human Rights.
7. Please provide information and/or updates pertaining to any advice the UAE has provided to companies operating in its territory, including those involved in gold refining, on respecting human rights in all activities, following the United Nations Guiding Principles. This guidance may include measures, among others, the exercise of due diligence, reasonable consideration of human rights and environmental risks, stakeholder consultation, potentially significantly affected, and correcting any negative impacts.
8. Please provide information on the measures the UAE has taken to implement the recommendations by human rights mechanisms including those in the report on mercury and small-scale gold mining of the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights.
9. Please provide information on the measures the UAE has taken to ensure that the five measures required by the OECD for due diligence are met.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

I may publicly express my concerns in the near future as, in my view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that I have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Marcos A. Orellana

Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to draw your attention to the relevant international norms and standards that apply to the issues raised by the situation above.

I would like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 of 8 October 2021 and General Assembly resolution 76/300 of 29 July 2022, which recognize the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right.

As highlighted by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 36, the duty to protect life also implies that States parties should take appropriate measures to address the general conditions in society that may give rise to direct threats to life or prevent individuals from enjoying their right to life with dignity, including degradation of the environment (para. 26). Environmental degradation, climate change and unsustainable development constitute some of the most pressing and serious threats to the ability of present and future generations to enjoy the right to life. Implementation of the obligation to respect and ensure the right to life, and in particular life with dignity, depends, inter alia, on measures taken by States parties to preserve the environment and protect it against harm, pollution and climate change caused by public and private actors (para. 62).

The right to health protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (article 25(1)) and the CESC (article 12) includes the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of both physical and mental health. Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ensures the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

Further, I wish to refer to article 24(2)(c) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), that the United Arab Emirates ratified on 3 January 1997. The CRC requires States to take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the provision of clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.

General comment No. 26 (CRC/C/GC/26) by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which states that children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is implicit in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and directly linked to, in particular, the rights to life, survival and development (article 6), to the highest attainable standard of health, including taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution (article 24), to an adequate standard of living (article 27), and to education (article 28), including the development of respect for the natural environment (article 29, para. 63).

Further, adverse impacts on human rights of the release of hazardous substances into the environment disproportionately affect children and women, as reported by the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights in his report, "Gender and hazardous substances" (16 July 2024, A/79/163).

Both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council recognized the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment with the adoption of resolutions A/RES/76/300 and A/HRC/RES/48/13. In this regard, I would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the 2024 report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment (A/79/270) including an overview of the right, highlighting the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfill the right to a healthy environment, including in relation to the right of everyone to enjoy a non-toxic environment in which to live, study and play, as well as the right to access to information, public participation and access to justice.

States have a duty to prevent exposure to hazardous substances and wastes, as detailed in the 2019 report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights implications of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes to the General Assembly (A/74/480). This obligation derives implicitly, but clearly, from a range of rights and duties enshrined in the global human rights framework, under which States are obliged to respect and fulfill recognized human rights, and to protect those rights, including from the consequences of exposure to toxic substances. These rights include the human rights to life, health, food and safe drinking water, a healthy environment, adequate housing, and safe and healthy working conditions.

The Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment are detailed in the 2018 report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment (A/HRC/37/59). The principles provide that States must ensure a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment in order to respect, protect and fulfill human rights (principle 1) and must respect, protect and fulfill human rights in order to ensure a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (principle 2). The commentary on principle 2 details that States should therefore protect against harmful environmental interference from business enterprises, other private actors and natural causes.

Principle 7 of the Framework concerns the right of access to information on environmental matters and requires that States regularly collect, update and disseminate environmental information, including information about: the quality of the environment, including air and water; pollution, waste, chemicals and other potentially harmful substances introduced into the environment; threatened and actual environmental impacts on human health and well-being; and relevant laws and policies. Moreover, States should provide affordable, effective and timely access to environmental information held by public authorities, upon the request of any person or association, without the need to show a legal or other interest.

In the same vein, Framework principle 10 clarifies that States should provide for access to effective remedies for violations of human rights and domestic laws relating to the environment. This requires States to ensure that individuals have access to judicial and administrative procedures that meet basic requirements, including that the procedures: (a) are impartial, independent, affordable, transparent and fair; (b) review claims in a timely manner; (c) have the necessary expertise and resources; (d) incorporate a right of appeal to a higher body; and (e) issue binding decisions, including for interim measures, compensation, restitution and reparation, as necessary to provide effective remedies for violations.

In addition, Framework principle 12 establishes that States should ensure the effective enforcement of their environmental standards against public and private actors. This requires States to monitor and effectively enforce compliance with the standards by preventing, investigating, punishing and redressing violations of the standards by private actors as well as governmental authorities and to take effective steps to prevent corruption from undermining the implementation and enforcement of environmental laws.

I wish to recall article 7 of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, that United Arab Emirates ratified on 27 April 2015, which requires States to take steps to reduce, and where feasible eliminate, the use of mercury and the emissions and releases to the environment of mercury in the context of artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing. In this context, the Special Rapporteur, in his report on the impact of toxic substances on the human rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/77/183), highlighted that artisanal and small-scale gold mining is the largest source of mercury pollution, with immediate and long-term effects on human health and the environment. Consequently, the Special Rapporteur recommended the effective implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, particularly integrating free, prior and informed consent and the rights to participation, information, access to justice, and effective remedy.

In the report, the Special Rapporteur also emphasized that toxic exposure from releases of hazardous substances is a form of violence against Indigenous Peoples to the extent that it affects the spiritual and material bonds between their culture, lands and natural resources and threatens the survival of indigenous cultures and languages. Consequently, the Special Rapporteur recommended the adoption of a national strategy to eliminate mercury in small-scale gold mining, informed by human rights principles and consultations with Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, I would like to stress that the Special Rapporteur on the environment has identified non-toxic environments in which people can live, work, study and play as one of the six substantive elements of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as recognized by the Human Rights Council and General Assembly. In his report on the topic, written in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, (A/HRC/49/53), he concluded that “the substantive obligations stemming from the right to a non-toxic environment require[s] immediate and ambitious action to detoxify people’s bodies and the planet. States must prevent toxic exposure by eliminating pollution, terminating the use or release of hazardous substances, and rehabilitating contaminated communities.” The Special Rapporteur has also recommended to “prohibit the production and use of substances that are highly toxic, bioaccumulative and persistent (including carcinogens, mutagens, endocrine disruptors, reproductive toxins, immune system toxins and neurotoxins) with limited exemptions where uses are essential for society”.