

June 27<sup>th</sup> 2012  
Punta del Este, Uruguay

## Chilean Deputy Cristina Girardi Addresses United Nations Environment Programme about the Chilean effort to ban Thimerosal – [Enhanced<sup>1</sup> Translation]

Honorable President, members of this esteemed assembly and our host country, Uruguay:

My name is Cristina Girardi. I am a Deputy in Chile's Congress, and I have the honor to have led a law project that bans the use of Thimerosal or ethyl mercury [thiosalicylate, sodium salt] in vaccines.

In 2010 parents of Bioautismo, a Non-Profit Chilean organization approached me with an aberrant reality. Their children had been born healthy but, due to the hefty amount of mercury to which they were exposed to at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months of age, they suffered important damages that affected their neurodevelopment. And their symptoms were the same as those outlined in mercury poisoning. All these children were exposed to mercury at an average of 400% above the daily limit established by the WHO for methyl and ethyl mercury each time they were inoculated with one vaccine from the immunization program. The most tragic part of this story is that only children who belong to wealthy families can afford Thimerosal-free vaccines sold in private clinics.

In view of this information, we decided to legislate on this matter. In 2010, together with other deputies and senators, we presented the law project that bans Thimerosal in all Chilean vaccines. This initiative has been an example of a political effort, uniting all, unanimously, in the need to protect the health of those who are most vulnerable; this also included our Ministry of Health, who supported this project by considering it an urgent matter. This project was approved unanimously in the lower chamber as well as in the Senate. Today [it] is being discussed in detail.

The WHO document where details were provided on the meeting held in Genève on April 3<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> this year has been brought to my attention. First of all, they mentioned a case study that was supposedly done in Chile; however I have no information on the case or references about it; please keep in mind that I am the author of this project. Secondly, it was asserted that the decision, which [supposedly] Chile took in isolation acquiring vaccines without Thimerosal before evaluating the cost involved, put our country's immunization program at risk. This is simply not true! Our Health Authorities never have stated that the change was out of the budget and have never requested more resources from the lower chamber. It seems to me that the information shared is doubtful, and it would be interesting to know from where it came.

Our own Advisory Vaccines Committee in Chile made a statement in regard to the safety of Thimerosal in vaccines on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, in its paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of their conclusions they established:

“There is no sufficient evidence to assure that Thimerosal in vaccines does not raise the risk of developing future problems in vaccinated children. There are unanswered questions that made us propose the precautionary principle in the use of vaccines with Thimerosal. Thimerosal is 50% mercury and has shown neurotoxicity and it accumulates in the body for years”.

Finally, it remarked,

“For all the facts shown above, it is advisable to decrease to the maximum any exposure to mercury in Chilean children. In this context it is recommended to the Ministry of Health to limit in the shortest period of time the content of Thimerosal in vaccines included in the local immunization program”.

Precisely this bill has been based on the application of the precautionary principle, which supports the adoption of precautionary measures from the authority when:

1. There is a suspicion that there is a risk for human health.
2. And, there is not definitive scientific evidence.

To date there are more than 100 studies published about the toxicity of Thimerosal since the year 2000, without considering those that existed before that year. No conclusive study exists which can demonstrate the safety of this compound that is not characterized by a conflict of interest.

Distinguished assembly; we cannot leave human pharmaceuticals out of this treaty, which seeks to reduce environmental exposures. We cannot keep accepting that this compound would be injected in pregnant women and newborns. If we keep this situation, definitely not only our children will be affected, but also the credibility of the vaccination programs which have proven successful. It is unacceptable that this compound would be inflicted on developing nations, which make us question the seriousness of our international health authorities and the respect of human rights for those who were born in poorer geographical areas. We cannot allow that these rights be given to only the wealthier people.

Finally, I hope, sincerely, that World Health Organization will not be an obstacle, so that Chile may finally have a law that assures vaccines without risks for all its population without any form of discrimination in terms of race, socio-economic status or continent.

Respectfully submitted by

H.D. Cristina Girardi  
Deputy, Republic of Chile.

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<sup>1</sup> Enhanced text is enclosed in brackets [...].