



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **EU-funded Lead Paint Elimination Project Launched for a Better and Healthier Living for our Next Generation**

(Colombo, Sri Lanka) the European Union (EU) funded IPEN Asian **Lead Paint Elimination Project**, launched a special event Yesterday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012 (Tuesday), at Gall Face Hotel in Colombo 03. The Project aims at eliminating lead in paint and raising widespread awareness among business entrepreneurs and consumers about the adverse human health impacts of lead-based decorative paints, particularly on the health of children under six years old.

The project is being implemented in seven different countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) with a total EU funding of EUR 1.4 million over a period of three years by IPEN - an international network with 700 participating organizations working in 116 countries that promotes safe chemical policies and practices aimed at protecting human health and environment.

(Colombo, Sri Lanka) The Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) will implement this project through awareness programs, monitoring and advocacy. It was a great achievement of CEJ to initiate a campaign on this matter in order to bring up the mandatory standards for Lead level in paints, also will ensure the success of this effort bringing paint market in Sri Lanka to be recognized as Lead free globally.

Mr. Hemantha Withanage, Executive Director of the CEJ said that obtaining a **MANDATORY LEAD PAINT STANDARDS** is a victory of the born and unborn children in Sri Lanka considering the serious health impacts cause by adding lead into the paint. In 2009 CEJ found as high as 135,000 ppm of lead in some local enamel paint brands where as the permissible limit will be 600 ppm starting January 2013, he added.



Center for Environmental Justice is a partner organization of the Asia Lead Paint Elimination Project, a project of IPEN. IPEN is an international organization promoting safe chemical policies and practices that protect human health and the environment.



This project is funded by the European Union

Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines  
30/F Tower 2 RCBC Plaza  
6819 Ayala Avenue  
Makati City, Philippines



The European Commission is the EU's executive body.

"The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development while maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedom. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and people beyond its borders."

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Mr, Ali Sabry Attorney-of-Law, the senior counsel to the public interest case filed by the CEJ said that this application was filed in the Supreme Court in Sri Lanka to establish the right to life as a fundamental right of the citizens, to bring the lead standards to decorative paints. He made a request to the media and the other parties to help implementing these regulations by making citizens aware.

Dr. Ananda Jayalal of the Ministry of Health explained the health effects of Lead on human is serious and it heavily affect the IQ of the population while high levels of lead accumulation in the body can even cause death.

Miss. Harshini Halangoda, the representative of the EU delegation to Sri Lanka said that this project is a part of its Switch Asia project to deal with the pollution caused by the production cycles of consumer goods.

Mr. S.M. Werahara, Assistant Director, Ministry of Environment, said that elimination of Lead and Mercury contamination is a priority to the Ministry. Ministry of Environment Coordinated among other stakeholders and agreed the Consumer Affairs Authority to gazette the Lead in paint standards produced by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution, he said.

Mrs. Wathsala Mudalige, Assistant Director, Sri Lanka Standard Institution, aware the audience about the process of standardization and standards exists for paints. Only 5 companies have obtained the SLS standards for emulsion paint for interior and exterior use and only two companies for enamel paints so far she added.

Mr. Raja Hewabowita, President, Paint Manufacturers Association of Sri Lanka, made clear that once the companies started to use the non-Leaded raw materials it dropped down the Lead level in the final product drastically, but the quality raw material is still a problem to make the Lead free paint. He claimed that the lead level in paints manufactured by all 5 companies in the Paint Manufacturers Association of Sri Lanka, is now very much below the new permissible level which is 90 ppm.

Addressing the gathering Mr. Gerald De Saram, Managing Director, Akzo Nobel Paints Lanka (Pvt) Ltd, 5 Cs in business management which is Commitment, Capability, Consistency, Continuity and Cost are very much important, not only from the paint companies but the regulators and other authorities in this case. . He added that it is the social responsibility of any company to protect its consumers and the environment. Referring to the new paint standards he said he cannot understand why the Floor paint and Enamel paint was given 600ppm compared to the 90 ppm for toy paints and emulsion paints. “Children do bite toys, lick the walls and walk on the floor so how come they have different standards?” he asked.

Dr. Champika Amarasinghe, Medical officer, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, explained on the Lead exposure among workers is a serious health issue. Paint is not the only source of lead exposure, but lead acid batteries and other sources. It must be made compulsory to wear personnel protectors and better practices that avoid contamination in workers, she added

Participants questioned how the regulated levels will be tested, whether the imported toys from various countries will be tested as well. However, Consumer Affaires Authority was not present at the meeting to respond to these queries.

Participants also suggested it's better to regulate paints and its raw materials at the customs. Small and Medium manufactures present at the meeting wanted some technical assistance to overcome some issues related to producing low lead paint.

The Sri Lanka Customs in an official letter to share with the participants state that there is no control on lead in paint in imported pant. However they will fulfill the standards in the new regulations when it comes to force.

## LEAD ELIMINATION – TWO

Lead is much more harmful to children than adults and the health effects are often irreversible and can have a lifelong impact. The World Health Organization included lead-caused mental retardation in its 2002 list of diseases. Recent World Health Organization guidelines now indicate that there is no (zero) tolerable weekly intake for lead.

Lead affects health in numerable ways. Lead in the body can cause problems in growth and development in children including behavior problems, hearing problems, learning problems and slowed growth. Dust and soil contaminated by lead in paint has been identified the most common source of lead exposure especially for children and pregnant women.

In 2010, Centre for Environmental Justice in collaboration with IPEN and the Indian NGO, Toxics Link, carried out a global scientific study of “Lead in New Decorative Paints”. Altogether 10 countries participated in this study. The findings revealed that, among tested enamel paints in Sri Lanka, 69% exceeded the current standard of 600 ppm, The highest content of lead was 137,325 ppm (14%), 1,526 times greater than the U.S. limit of 90 ppm and 228 times greater than the Sri Lankan limit. Other samples also contained 133,463 ppm, 55,237 ppm etc.

At the discussions made with all the stakeholders including paint companies in November 2010, paint companies have agreed to reduce the level of Lead in enamel paints to less than 90ppm and requested this to be included in the SLSI specifications. Also the Sri Lanka Standard Institution (SLSI) invited CEJ to take part in renewal of SLS (the standard certification given by the SLSI) guidelines for paints. CEJ brought the matter to the Supreme Court with a petition asking to reduce the lead level in paint in order to protect children's health. As a result, the Consumer Affairs Authority made a gazette notification establishing new standards for lead levels in paint to take effect January 1, 2013.

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**IPEN Asian Lead Elimination Project** is ongoing in seven Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The project will include: periodical testing of lead in paints of all brands available in Bangladeshi market and informing the results to all manufacturers, consumers and other concerned agencies; information and technical support to small and medium paint manufacturer, dealers, retailers to help them to shift from lead based to no added lead paints; third party certification and labeling that includes information on lead; help to government institutions to enact the standard for LEAD in paints; preparation and dissemination of awareness materials and mass awareness raising programs about lead paint and their impact on especially children health and environment etc.

**CEJ (Centre for Environmental Justice)** is an organization that conducts projects and programs in the areas of science, law and advocacy. It provides free legal aid and trainings to marginalized communities to protect their environmental rights.

So far CEJ had conducted projects dealing with chemical management with special remarks such as initiating awareness on POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) and initiating the campaign to establish mandatory standards for Lead (Pb) in paints. There are several ongoing efforts addressing chemical management such as legal cases to reform the laws and regulations related to pesticides, implementing laws for importation of PCB contaminated equipment, phasing out hospital mercury equipment, and initiating dialogues to phase out asbestos.

It is CEJ's objective to take necessary actions, where improper environmental management occur in order to give environmental justice for all!