

FAO Director General urged to begin new term with action to end pesticide industry partnership, phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides

Wednesday 26 of July 2023 - Today, 11 global civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations representing small-scale farmers, agricultural workers, trade unions, and rights holders urged Mr. Qu Dongyu to begin his new term as Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a positive note by ending a controversial partnership with the pesticide industry signed during his previous term, and taking leadership on global action to phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs).

At its 43rd Conference early in July, the FAO appointed Mr. Qu as Director General for a second term of four years. The appointment, which was uncontested with no other nominations, comes at the heels of an [investigative report](#) revealing shipments of pesticides that FAO made to several countries during the Director General's first term, while a partnership agreement with CropLife International (CLI), the association of world's largest agrochemical companies, was in place.

In a [letter to DG Qu](#), the groups asked the Director General to publicly clarify the status of the FAO's indefinite Letter of Intent (LOI) with CropLife. They reiterated their appeal to rescind the nearly three-year-old agreement that promotes deeper ties between the UN agency and the pesticide industry, an appeal echoed by more than 430 civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations, 250 scientists and academics, nearly 50 philanthropic groups, nearly 200,000 individuals from over 107 countries, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri.

The groups also asked DG Qu to "review and discontinue" shipments of all pesticides. Some pesticides included in the FAO shipments, such as paraquat and chlorpyrifos, are considered highly hazardous and are already banned in numerous countries. Paraquat, for example, is highly lethal and has been recommended by the Chemical Review Committee to be listed under the Rotterdam Convention, while chlorpyrifos is damaging to children's brains at low amounts and is being considered for a global ban under the Stockholm Convention. According to the report, the producers of pesticides shipped by FAO include Syngenta-ChemChina, a member of CropLife.

"Your new term as Director-General is a fresh opportunity for the FAO to show that the pesticide industry does not hold sway over its policies and decisions. All of the FAO's dealings with the pesticide industry must be subject to greater transparency and accountability," the letter to DG Qu stated.

The groups also underscored that an upcoming world chemicals conference is a not-to-be-missed opportunity for the FAO to act decisively on an earlier recommendation made by the FAO Council to phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) as a key step to significantly reduce global harm caused by pesticides.

“We ask the FAO to support the global phase-out of HHPs at the upcoming Fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management in September 2023. To remain relevant, a new policy framework under the Strategic Approach on International Chemical Management (SAICM) must set an ambitious target to phase-out HHPs and establish a clear, effective, and multistakeholder mechanism to achieve this,” the groups said.

The 11 civil society and Indigenous Peoples groups called on the FAO leadership to fulfill its human rights obligations as a key UN institution, and strengthen its commitment to sustainable agri-food systems by supporting the urgent demands of various stakeholders—led by African governments—to set up the Global Alliance on HHPs, a global mechanism to phase-out HHPs under SAICM.

“Many HHPs have been phased-out in several countries without affecting agricultural productivity...With adequate investment in scaling-up ecological alternatives—in which the FAO already plays a key role—it is possible to phase-out the relatively small share of pesticides that cause the most severe harm to human health and the environment,” the groups stressed.

Quotes from Pesticide Action Network:

Susan Haffmans, PAN Germany: *“Highly toxic, carcinogenic, endangering the unborn - Highly Hazardous Pesticides pose a serious threat to health, rural livelihoods and the environment. For decades, experts point out to the need, feasibility and benefit of replacing these most harmful pesticides with sustainable alternatives. Having come under fire for its partnership with the pesticide industry lately, FAO should act now to regain trust and credibility as an independent UN organization that values farmers over corporation profits. FAO should finally take the lead and promote ambitious targets and action on HHPs at the upcoming World Chemicals Conference ICCM5 in Germany and during the ongoing negotiation process.”*

Zimyl Adler, PAN North America: *“What can people on the frontlines of pesticide exposure expect from the Director General in his second term? Will we finally see the FAO do the right thing, and stop collaborating with producers of toxic pesticides? With 385 million poisonings each year, there isn’t any more time to wait for stronger action on phasing-out at the very least the most*

hazardous pesticides. We hope this new term comes with renewed action to uphold the FAO's role in achieving a just and sustainable food system."

Sarojeni Rengam, PAN Asia Pacific: *"The vast majority of pesticide poisonings, mostly caused by Highly Hazardous Pesticides, are in the Global South. FAO shipping out HHPs already banned in the Global North deepens existing inequalities that place lesser value on the life and rights of small food producers from the majority world. It is not too late for the FAO to correct this grave injustice. It should fully stand behind several governments from the Global South calling to phase-out HHPs, not the pesticide industry."*

Martin Dermine, PAN Europe: *"The EU being the main funder of the FAO, PAN Europe will continue advocating so that the EU conditions its funding to FAO so that it assists farmers in becoming independent from pesticides by prioritizing the implementation of agroecology and the replacement of Highly Hazardous Pesticides."*

Maimouna Diene, PAN Africa: *"Pesticides widely used by the agricultural industry in Africa are a danger to man and the environment. At the same time, many substances banned in Europe, such as paraquat and monocrotophos, continue to be authorized in many countries. Unfortunately, protective measures are very weak, foodstuffs are contaminated and assessments of the damage caused to ecosystems are almost non-existent. We therefore call on the FAO to cease its partnership with the toxic pesticide industry and to commit to a progressive ban on Highly Hazardous Pesticides in Africa."*

Javier Souza, PAN Latin America: *"In our research as PAN, food producers are already implementing agroecological strategies, practices and technologies not only to replace HHPs but to generate resilient and sustainable systems. These efforts must be promoted and supported by global decision-makers."*

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is a network of over 600 participating nongovernmental organizations, institutions and individuals in over 90 countries working to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives.