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June 24, 2010

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International study & report document pesticide health harms

Global network calls for immediate action to reduce pesticide hazards

Brussels, June 24, 2010 – Pesticide Action Network International (PAN) today released its report, *Communities in Peril: Global report on the health impacts of pesticides used in agriculture*. The report release coincided with the Brussels meeting of CropLife, the global trade association for multinational pesticide corporations like Monsanto and Syngenta. PAN's study documents that hazardous pesticides are commonly used in unsafe situations around the world, and calls for assertive action by corporations, governments and international bodies to address pesticide hazards.

“The results of rigorous community monitoring banish any arguments pesticide manufacturers make about the ‘safe use’ of pesticides,” says Dr. Abou Thiam, Executive Director of PAN Africa. “The data shows that the conditions of use in the Global South are such that communities routinely suffer incredible health harms due to exposure to agricultural pesticides.”

The report presents the results of a wide-ranging survey of pesticide use in the field, conducted by communities in thirteen countries. More than 2,000 men and women were interviewed in Africa, Asia and Latin America, documenting wide spread ill health from use of a range of pesticides on diverse crops. Acute pesticide exposure symptoms reported ranged from headaches, nausea and dizziness to irregular heartbeat and convulsions.

“Very often communities don’t have information about the health hazards of the pesticides they use, and even when they have this information, they simply cannot afford the costly personal protective equipment needed,” says Javier Souza, Regional Coordinator of PAN Latin America. “The current mode of pesticide reliant agriculture sets communities up for pesticide poisoning and other health harms.” None of the people interviewed for the report used personal protective equipment that met standards in an industrialized country, and in many cases such equipment was simply not available in their communities.

The report also includes data gathered by communities the United States, using a simple air sampling device called the Drift Catcher. “The U.S. results show that when hazardous pesticides are used in close proximity to schools and homes, children and adults are exposed to toxic chemicals linked to health harms,” says Kathryn Gilje, Executive Director of PAN North America. “Living in a so-called industrialized country

provides no guarantee of protection from exposure to hazardous pesticides that continue to harm people everywhere.

PAN has developed a comprehensive list of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) – pesticides that are linked to poisonings, long-term illnesses and significant ecosystem harm. The surveys found that, for example, in Asia, 82 of 150 active ingredients used by farmers were HHPs, as were 7 of the 10 most used pesticides. “We demand increased investment and policy support for agroecological approaches safe for humans and the environment. Governments should increase investment in rural infrastructure and training strategies to reduce hazardous pesticide use, risks and dependence,” says Sarojeni V. Rengam, Executive Director of PAN Asia and the Pacific. “Both scientific analyses and field experiences show that pesticide-reliant agriculture is not the solution for increasing agricultural productivity.”

The report recommends that policymakers around the world increase support for agroecological agriculture and take assertive action to reduce the use of exposure to hazardous pesticides. Corporations responsible for manufacture, distribution and promotion of pesticides must be responsible for resulting health and ecosystem harms. Carina Weber, Executive Director of PAN Germany, joins Keith Tyrell, Director of PAN UK in saying, “We call upon decision makers across the spectrum– governments; development and aid organizations; agricultural universities and scientists; and the food and fiber industries to promote agroecological approaches rather than continue reliance on this toxic model of agriculture. Communities around the globe deserve no less.”

Pesticide Action Network International is a network of more than 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.

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Resources:

Communities in Peril, Global Report:

<http://www.pan-international.org/panint/files/PAN-Global-Report.pdf>

Other resources:

- PANNA’s drift catcher: <http://www.panna.org/drift/catcher>
- PAN’s report on Highly Hazardous Pesticides: http://www.pan-germany.org/qbr/project_work/highly_hazardous_pesticides.html
- PAN Asia Pacific: <http://www.panap.net>
- Communities in Peril, African version (in French and English): http://pan-afrique.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=27&Itemid=106
- PAN Latin America, RAPAL: <http://www.rap-al.org/>