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PAN urges global uptake of effective and safe malaria control
NGOs worldwide applaud efforts to reduce reliance on DDT

On the occasion of next week's World Malaria Day, April 25, Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International urges governments around the world to redouble their efforts against malaria and adopt the safest and most effective approaches to combat this disease. PAN applauds the formation of the Global Alliance for Alternatives to DDT, an international multi-stakeholder process charged with reducing reliance on the pesticide DDT for malaria control worldwide.

"Cutting-edge science is finally being brought to the forefront in the fight against malaria," says Dr. Abou Thiam, director of PAN Africa. "New techniques are being developed and long-established, proven approaches are being strengthened through this process. Communities across Africa urge governments to support the Alliance, and not to be distracted by myths propagated by those who continue promoting the use of DDT."

PAN highlights the emerging global consensus that an approach that strongly relies on the insecticide DDT will not control malaria. DDT is often an ineffective tool in the field due to resistance developed in mosquitoes around the world and improper use on the ground. The only effective and sustainable way to control malaria in the long term is through integrated vector management, which deploys a range of methods and emphasizes non-chemical approaches with pesticides used as a last resort to minimize the build up of pesticide resistance. In addition, the latest World Health Organization (WHO) Assessment of DDT further strengthens the evidence for human health harms of DDT.

PAN fully supports the Stockholm Convention's approach to DDT, which allows its use only for malaria vector control in accordance with WHO guidelines, in countries where no locally safe, effective and affordable alternatives are currently available.

Each year, a handful of U.S.-based fringe groups mark World Malaria Day by aggressively promoting DDT as the most effective solution to malaria. PAN urges government officials to take note of the false arguments spread by these groups, whose promotion of DDT brazenly overlooks the latest science and on-the-ground evidence. Public health and malaria experts agree that the false debate created by DDT promoters distracts from the urgent need to address malaria with effective solutions.

Among the myths often used to stir up this false debate is the notion that DDT was used in the U.S. and other industrialized countries to control the disease in the past, and should therefore be available today in Africa and elsewhere. Yet history shows that malaria was already largely controlled in the U.S. by the time the chemical arrived on the scene.

"It was improved sanitation, environmental management and access to health care that beat malaria in the U.S. - not DDT," explains Karl Tupper of PAN North America.

“Rising standards of living were also key - bringing things like screened windows to rural areas in the southern states of the U.S. where the malaria problem was the worst.”

Many programs worldwide have successfully controlled malaria without using DDT, relying on community-based integrated vector management. Success stories of malaria control without using DDT abound - from Vietnam, where malaria deaths were reduced by 97% and malaria infections by 57%; to Mexico, where an integrated community-based disease control approach showed spectacular results; to Kenya where community surveillance combined with high use of treated bednets and environmental management halved malaria rates within three years.

“Spraying DDT is basically a poor technology. It urgently needs to be substituted by an integrated, safe, effective and sustainable approach to malaria control which protects the health of communities, is environmentally safe, provides improved livelihoods and is available in the short-term” says Carina Weber of PAN Germany.

Not only is DDT’s lack of effectiveness in malaria control, but even its serious human health harms are deliberately ignored by DDT promoters. In its recent assessment of DDT, the WHO found that Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS) with DDT puts residents at risk for delayed puberty and reproductive effects in females and possible genital birth defects in males. Male DDT spray workers risk reduced fertility and developing liver cancer, and DDT exposure is possibly associated with preterm birth, reduced childhood growth, and neurocognitive effects in children.

“In addition to the scientific evidence accumulated over the past few decades, the WHO’s latest assessment of DDT should convince everyone that DDT spraying is injurious to the health of IRS workers, and for communities who are exposed to it through indoor spraying,” says Javier Souza of PAN Latin America. “When empowered community members themselves make decisions on what strategies to follow to manage the problem, they achieve better results”

“We call upon the global community, especially decision makers in Africa, to tackle malaria with 21st century solutions - not antiquated, toxic and ineffective pesticides like DDT,” says Sarojeni Rengam of PAN Asia and the Pacific. “Communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America who suffer from the scourge of malaria deserve effective, community-based programs that are safe and protective of their health.”

Available for interviews:

Dr Abou Thiam, PAN Africa, Contact: abouthiam@pan-afrique.org

Sarojeni Rengam, PAN Asia and the Pacific, Contact: sarojeni.rengam@panap.net

Carina Weber, PAN Germany, Contact: carina.weber@pan-germany.org

Javier Souza, PAN Latin America, RAPAL Contact: javierrapal@yahoo.com.ar

Dr Medha Chandra, PAN North America, Contact: mchandra@panna.org

Resources:

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