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PAN Intervention on voluntary, multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach

Given by Dr. Meriel Watts

Thank you Co-Chair.

As one of the organisations that is enabled to express its views in the SAICM process, by the multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral nature of the Approach, PAN is naturally supportive of these aspects of SAICM. However support for its voluntary nature is dependent on SAICM being able to achieve real progress on the issue that lies at the heart of our work – human health and environmental impacts and human right abuses relating to pesticide manufacture, use and disposal.

Adverse human and environmental impacts of pesticides are NOT an emerging issues – they date back to at least the 15th century when arsenic, mercury and lead were applied to crops. Concerns have been raised historically, and famously by people such as Rachel Carson in the modern era, with her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, and they led to the formation of PAN in 1982. Such concerns gave rise to the development of the voluntary International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, first introduced in 1985. But how many people have died from pesticide poisoning since 1985?

In 2006 SAICM's founding documents drew attention to the global concern about the dependence of agriculture on pesticides and on the impacts of highly toxic pesticides. But it took until 2015 for SAICM to even recognise HHPs as an issue of concern. Attempts by a large number of countries and civil society and labour organisations to put in place a programme to deal with HHPs were thwarted by mainly pesticide-producing countries and industry, and still there is no programme under SAICM to deal with HHPs. Meanwhile poisoning continues, rights are abused, and the environment suffers. And this is NOT a problem that is fixed by simply putting in place a risk assessment process, although of course that helps. Even the US experiences problems with HHPs, such as paraquat, whilst industry fights tooth and nail to prevent just one formulation of paraquat being listed under the Rotterdam Convention which simply allows for information exchange and the privilege of saying I don't want that pesticide in my country.

So little attention has been paid to the pesticide problem that we have really no idea of the extent even of acute health effects. Back in 1990 the World Health Bulletin published an estimate of 25 million workers in developing countries likely to be suffering acute poisoning from pesticides. There is still no more recent, reliable figure, and there is every reason to believe that the situation has not improved, with countless surveys showing high levels of adverse impacts and systemic under-reporting of these impacts.

Something has to change. The voluntary, multi-stakeholder multi-sectoral approach of SAICM is not working for HHPs. 65 countries and organisations were denied their request for a programme to address HHPs. And still nothing is in place to stop the poisoning.

Industry continues to manufacture and promote HHPs, and actively prevent their listing under the legally binding conventions; countries continue to allow their use; farmers continue to die; and children to suffer birth defects, impaired development and reduced IQ.

Therefore PAN reiterates the request from CIEL, IPEN and other stakeholders for a paper on the options for improved governance of chemicals, with particular attention paid to the age old problem of highly hazardous pesticides, including the option of a legally binding instrument.

Thank you for your attention
