9 November 2015

Hon. Angeline T. Chua Chiaco,
Acting Chairperson
Professional Regulation Commission

Hon. Jose Luis Martin C. Gascon
Chairperson
Commission on Human Rights

Dear Chairpersons Chua Chiaco and Gascon,

Subject: Appeal to Stop Harassment Complaints against Toxicologist Dr. Romeo F. Quijano

We, leaders of public interest environmental health and justice groups across the globe, submit this letter to express our solidarity with our highly respected colleague Dr. Romeo F. Quijano, President of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Philippines and Steering Committee member of PAN Asia Pacific. Dr. Quijano is also a former Co-Chair of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), a global civil society network pursuing safe chemicals policies and practices.

Through this letter, we earnestly request your offices to ensure that Dr. Quijano’s exemplary work for chemical safety and public health is duly honored and protected against dubious complaints that seek to cast doubt on his professional integrity as a medical doctor, scientist and retired professor in Pharmacology and Toxicology at the College of Medicine of the University of Philippines (Manila).

The complaints of “unprofessionalism” were filed before the Professional Regulation Commission purportedly by six residents of Sitio Kamukhaan, Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, that were reportedly orchestrated by the banana and pesticide companies. They cited Dr. Quijano’s study, “Poisoned Lives,” as “questionable.” “Poisoned Lives,” published in 2000, brings to light the detrimental health and environmental consequences of the aerial and ground spraying of pesticides Baycor, Decis, Dithane, Furadan, Gramoxone and Nemacur in privately-owned banana plantations in the said village. The study, originally published at the now defunct Philippine Post, became the subject of long-drawn-out libel and damage lawsuits by the companies against Dr. Quijano and his daughter Ilang-Ilang that were eventually dismissed in 2007 and 2013.
The complaints were unkindly filed over 15 years after the publication of the study, after Dr. Quijano spoke in June 2015 at a Congressional inquiry in favor of House Bill 3857, which seeks to ban aerial spraying as a method of applying chemicals and similar substances on agricultural crops. Please note that at the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management held in Geneva from September 28 – October 2, 2015, delegates from 130 countries recognized the harmful impact on human health and the environment of highly hazardous pesticides, in particular in developing countries, and agreed to take concerted action with emphasis on promoting agroecology as an alternative to highly hazardous pesticides.

As we deplore the callous persecution of Dr. Quijano by powerful and moneyed business interests, we ask the Professional Regulation Commission to dismiss outright the harassment complaints filed against him, noting that these are recycled complaints intended to intimidate expert witnesses like Dr. Quijano against speaking their minds about the adverse impacts of aerial spraying of pesticides to human health and the ecosystems.

We likewise ask the Commission on Human Rights to use its legal and moral authority to halt the malicious harassment against Dr. Quijano and to support his efforts to ferret out the truth and obtain justice for the victims of pesticide poisoning, which is totally in line with the Commission’s “The People’s Right to Chemical Safety: A Fifteen-Point Human Rights Agenda.”

We thank you very much for heeding our request for action to stop the unjust persecution of Dr. Romeo Quijano.

Sincerely yours,

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NOTE: Please e-mail your reply to the IPEN Secretariat at ipen@ipen.org and PAN AP Secretariat at panap@panap.net, or send to IPEN, 1962 University Ave., Suite 4, Berkeley, CA, 94704, USA, and PAN AP, P.O Box 1170, Pulau Pinang, 10850, Penang, Malaysia.
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