

Comments on the Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”

**by Pesticide Action Network
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As this is the first time Pesticide Action Network (PAN) has contributed to UNEA Ministerial outcome documents, we take this opportunity to introduce ourselves. PAN is a global 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. PAN was founded in 1982 and has five independent, collaborating Regional Centres that implement its projects and campaigns.

Agriculture, and particularly the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, is a major contributor to environmental pollution and climate change emissions, as well as to human health impacts and human rights abuses. Children in rural areas in Asia are highly vulnerable to pesticides. Their schools, homes and playgrounds are surrounded by farms, increasing their risk of exposure pesticides. Many children are hired as labourers in India, for example, to pick flowers and cotton laced with pesticides. In areas near banana plantations in the Philippines, children are exposed to pesticides via aerial spraying, as well as through picking pesticide-drenched fruit with their parents.

It is our experience, working with farmers in many countries in all UN regions that the adoption of agroecological practices that work with nature rather than trying to control it, have resulted in reduced environmental pollution, decreased climate change emissions, improved climate change resilience, improved human health outcomes, improved incomes for farmers and communities, improved involvement of women, and improved food security for farmers and communities. Some of these experiences are reflected in PAN’s Book *Replacing Chemicals with Biology: Phasing Out Highly Hazardous Pesticides with Agroecology*.¹ The widespread adoption of agroecology is essential for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDGs 2 and 3.

These views are supported by Resolution IV/3² at the Fourth International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4), which established highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) as an issue of global concern, stating the following:

- *Recognizing* that highly hazardous pesticides cause adverse human health and environmental effects in many countries, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries,
- *Supports* concerted action to address highly hazardous pesticides,
- *Encourages* relevant stakeholders to undertake concerted efforts ... with emphasis on promoting agroecologically-based alternatives

¹ Watts M, Williamson S. 2015. *Replacing Chemicals with Biology: Phasing Out Highly Hazardous Pesticides with Agroecology*. PAN International, Penang. <http://panap.net/2015/11/replacing-chemicals-biology-phasing-highly-hazardous-pesticides-agroecology/>

² UNEP. 2015. 1V/3: Highly hazardous pesticides. Report of the International Conference on Chemicals Management on the work of its fourth session. SAICM/ICCM.4/15. http://www.unitar.org/cwm/sites/unitar.org.cwm/files/uploads/iccm4_adopted_resolution_on_nano.pdf

In light of these outcomes and our own experiences over decades, PAN therefore seeks recognition of the issue of highly hazardous pesticides and their replacement by agroecological practices in the Minister Outcome Document.

We note also that in conventional, chemical-based agriculture women have been marginalised from decision-making and leadership roles whilst still carrying the bulk of onerous tasks and being more vulnerable to the effects of hazardous pesticides. Children are particularly vulnerable to pesticides and are widely exposed to them, including through their mothers' exposures resulting in development impacts, which leave a legacy of problems that last their lifetime and into the next generations. Our experience has shown that women are better able to reach their leadership potential and productive capacity, and children are better protected, when chemical input-based agriculture is replaced with agroecology.

Pesticides are the only deliberately toxic chemicals that are intentionally released into the environment to kill. In this they differ from all other chemicals. They now contaminate every environmental medium – soil, sediment, surface waters, groundwaters, marine waters and sediment, the air, fog, rain, snow, ice, the bark of trees, grasses on the Himalayan mountains, human and wildlife food chains – throughout temperate, sub-tropical and tropical regions, and with many culminating in persistent pollution in the Arctic and Antarctic regions and the tops of mountains where they have never been used.

Therefore we offer the following proposed changes and additions to the document.

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In South America, young mothers like Maria handle raw mercury in artisan gold mines, because it is the only way to make a living. In North America, families like the Kellogg's relocate to areas where their children can play outside without fear of an asthma attack. In Europe, schools like Fatima Gunic hoist flags in the playground to monitor air pollution. In Africa, communities like Ogoniland try to survive in land saturated by oil pollution. In the Middle East, residents in places like Khuzestan must breathe through the growing number of sand and dust storms swallowing their homes and closing their schools. I ~~And in~~ Asia, people like 13 year old Lim Seong-joon are crippled because of chemicals being used incorrectly; and –23 school children died because their midday meal was cooked in oil stored in a highly hazardous pesticide container. In fact, during the next hour, another 1,500 people around the world will needlessly die from environmental causes.

We, the world's ministers of environment, gathered for the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, declare that this cannot and will not continue. We commit to securing a pollution free future for our people and planet and to fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And we commit to working with every possible stakeholder to rapidly explore and implement every possible solution to end the pollution of our air, soil, freshwater and oceans.

As the representatives of 193 nations, we believe that, regardless of gender or culture, faith or wealth, no child should die from dirty water or poor hygiene. Yet today, nearly 2,000 children below the age of five will do just that. No one should choke because they walk down a street or cook a hot meal in their home.

Yet every day, 9 out of 10 of us will continue to breathe air that is unsafe and 20,000 people will die because of it. No community should be contaminated by hazardous chemicals and waste. No child or adult should be poisoned by pesticides, nor should future generations be jeopardised by them, yet estimates of global pesticide poisoning range from 1 to 41 million annually.³ Yet of the 130,000 chemicals on the market, only a fraction is properly tested, labelled or tracked. No ecosystem should be so damaged by consumer choices that it ceases to function properly; no ecosystem should be jeopardised by the unsustainable dependency on pesticides. Yet every year, we dump up to 13 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans, 50 million tonnes of electronic waste on our land and 2-4 million tonnes of pesticides.⁴ No one should be left behind as we strive to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or other international agreements. Yet it is still the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, and particularly children and women, who are disproportionately affected; often paying the price for the action of the wealthiest.

This Assembly agrees that everyone on this planet has an equal right to live in a clean and non-toxic environment, with access to safe water, food and air. These are the most precious of natural resources. Any threat to them is a threat to our health, our society, our economy, our security and our very survival. Pollution is not new, but with the population expected to reach 10 billion people by 2050, these self-imposed threats have never been greater or more preventable.

However, we also agree that with leadership, determination, collaboration, public participation, improved access to knowledge and technology, our options for turning these threats into opportunities are increasing just as fast. The transition to a pollution free planet is not only achievable, but can help tackle poverty, improve health, reduce global warming, build peace, protect human rights, create rewarding jobs and drive sustainable economic growth. We must recapture and reinvest the 300 tonnes of gold buried in electronic waste every year; the \$100 billion in plastic packaging being thrown away; the \$1 trillion economic loss from exposing children to lead in paint; the \$5 trillion spent on healthcare because of air pollution; we must stop the economic loss of lowered intellectual development of children resulting from their mothers eating pesticides residues in food, which is estimated to be 125 billion Euros, every year, in the European Union alone. We must enable farmers to produce safe and nutritious food from healthy, living soils, in agroecological systems that sustain the environment, farmers and communities into the future. To do so, we must dramatically scale up and accelerate the financial support for solutions that countries, cities, businesses, farmers and individual citizens are already using, and for innovative solutions that support the SDGs.

Therefore, we acknowledge the magnitude of threats and opportunities reported in *Towards a Pollution Free Planet* serve and commit to preventing, mitigating and managing pollution in every form by:

- Supporting the development, collation and improved use of reliable scientific data. This includes better multidisciplinary indicators; more efficient data gathering and monitoring; easier access to and wider availability of information; and an increase in awareness raising and knowledge sharing. This will promote evidence based decision making in the public and private sectors, effective standard setting by all stakeholders and greater participation by citizens from all walks of life, especially communities and vulnerable groups suffering the worst impacts of chemical exposure and pollution.

³ PAN. 2007. A Position Paper on Synthetic Pesticide Elimination. A PAN International Position Paper, June 07, 2007.

⁴ There are no accurate figures but FAO Statistics and others suggest this level of use, at least. A. De et al. 2014. Targeted Delivery of Pesticides Using Biodegradable Polymeric Nanoparticles, SpringerBriefs in Molecular Science, DOI: 10.1007/978-81-322-1689-6_2.

- Targeting pollutants with focused environmental agreements and tailored action. This will be achieved in two ways: by enforcing existing global and national agreements, treaties and legislation to eliminate and control pollutants; by developing global policy to prevent, reduce and control pollutants where the science is clear, but actions do not yet exist or are inadequate; and by increasing research on pollutants where their environmental and health impact is not yet clear.
- Cultivating economic productivity and creation of jobs that are safe and rewarding by using incentives to increase innovation and the uptake of environmentally safe technologies that support people and communities. This makes it easier for producers and consumers to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and services.
- Nurturing integrated urban and rural development to create more livable villages, towns and cities, which thrive in harmony with the surrounding environment. This includes accelerating the sound management of chemicals and waste, encouraging responsible lifestyle choices, reducing use of agrochemical inputs and prioritizing agroecology, prioritizing access to clean energy and transport, and leveraging the power of big data.
- Promoting fiscal incentives to stimulate systemic and behavioural changes. This includes internalising the true cost of pollution in all financial decisions and policies, implementing polluter pays mechanisms, and redirecting investments from the short-term profits of polluting activities to the more sustainable profits of greener alternatives.
- Strengthening and enforcing more integrated policies, regulations and laws, at the global, regional and national level; strengthening coordination among governmental agencies; improving cooperation between international and governmental institutions, civil society and industry. This will be achieved by supporting institutions and building capacity; bolstering monitoring and accountability systems; ensuring transparency and accountability; ensuring public participation in decision-making processes; and sharing best practices, standards, policy instruments and tools.
- Creating and expanding transparent partnerships across the United Nations, as well as with governments, the private sector, academia, civil society, community groups, workers associations, and individual citizens, that respect the right to information, to health and a healthy environment, social, political and civil rights, and the rights of women, children and workers. This includes emphasizing enormous potential of partnerships between different stakeholders among developing nations.

As ministers of the environment, we recognize that we are accountable for delivering on those commitments. As just a few of the 7.5 billion people living on this planet, we urge our fellow citizens to recognize that every one of us is responsible for making that happen. And, as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, friends, colleagues, neighbours and communities, we cannot overstate the need to make it happen quickly. In the time it has taken you to read this declaration, some 200 people have died from environmentally modifiable factors; nearly half of that just from breathing.

Therefore, we warmly welcome the resolutions adopted at the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. We applaud the many pledges from diverse stakeholders that address critical environmental challenges. And we restate our commitment to work towards a pollution free planet for present and future generations.