



February 25, 2021

Director-General Dongyu Qu
UN Food and Agriculture Organization
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy

Dear Director-General Dongyu Qu,

We are following up on two requests from Pesticide Action Network International for a meeting to discuss our concerns regarding the FAO's plans to enter a formal partnership with CropLife International, sent on December 2nd and 23rd. As we have not heard a response from you, the 11 global networks and organizations that co-sponsored our letter sent to you on November 19th have joined together to request this meeting take place as soon as possible.

In your response to our letter, delivered on behalf of these 11 co-sponsoring global networks/organizations and 352 organizational signatories from around the world, you made note that the FAO takes seriously its mandate to act independently, neutrally and honestly, in which all stakeholders are involved in the FAO's efforts to achieve zero hunger. Additionally, you noted, "FAO remains fully committed to ensuring that the voices of all actors are heard" and welcomed continued open exchange of ideas with us. The co-sponsors and co-signers represent civil society organizations of farmers, fisherfolk, agricultural workers and other communities, Indigenous Peoples, as well as human rights, faith-based, environmental and economic justice institutions. Our request for a meeting with you as rights holders is a direct opportunity for you to follow through on these commitments.

We understand that FAO positions CropLife International as a stakeholder of the private sector regarding plant protection, pesticide risk reduction, and sustainable agriculture. However, we disagree that the Letter of Intent does not create a formal relationship, as you have outlined three areas of work in which to formally enter into collaboration. Furthermore, you described the

relationship as formal in your response: “The intent for this type of formal cooperation is to ensure industries exercise more responsibility and contribute to pesticide risk reduction and sustainable pest management, as stipulated by the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management.” Our request to meet with you is to discuss the issues outlined in our earlier letter, including that this collaboration with CropLife undermines the principles set out in the FAO’s Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, and ties the agency with producers of harmful, unsustainable chemical technologies. Furthermore, this partnership agreement is incompatible with FAO’s mandate as a UN institution and the international Human Rights framework.

As we pointed out in our November letter, [more than one-third \(35%\) of sales of CropLife members](#) (BASF, Bayer Crop Science, Corteva Agriscience, FMC and Syngenta) are HHPs that pose the highest levels of risk to health or the environment, especially in developing countries where regulation is weaker. We believe that an even deeper collaboration with CropLife—beyond their already robust participation in various multi-stakeholder processes led by the FAO—would most certainly undermine the promising direction of the [FAO/WHO/UNEP Draft Global Action Plan on HHPs](#), whose goal is to “eliminate all risks from HHPs by 2030,” most effectively through a progressive ban of HHPs as recommended for consideration by the FAO Council as early as 2006. As we named in our previous letter, this alliance with CropLife also undercuts the FAO’s support for agroecology, an approach that offers viable and sustainable proposals for generating ecologically-based food and farming systems without the use of HHPs, which the [FAO itself describes](#) as a response to the challenges of climate change and the need for a transition to a resilient food system.

A [recent study](#) estimates that there are 385 million cases of acute pesticide poisonings each year, up from an estimated 25 million cases in 1990. This means that about 44% of the global population working on farms — 860 million farmers and agricultural workers – are poisoned each year by an industry dominated by CropLife members. Thus, it is hard for us to imagine how FAO’s “objectives of supporting sustainable agriculture production, preserving biodiversity and human health” can be served by an alliance with Crop Life International, especially in the absence of effective safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest.

Formalizing a partnership with CropLife is likely to pose precisely the kinds of threats to FAO’s integrity, credibility, impartiality, independence and neutrality, that many member states warned FAO about, at the December 2020 165th Council discussion of the revised Private Sector Engagement Strategy.

Finally, we would like to note that farmers, food producers and workers in food systems across the world are paying attention to the development of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, and are [raising concerns](#) about the apparent emphasis on corporate “solutions.” We believe severing this proposed alliance with CropLife and developing an integrated FAO policy to prevent conflicts of interest before the Summit will help gain civil society’s trust which has been eroded by corporate and industry-driven priorities in UN food agency initiatives.

We hope to hear from you by March 10, 2021 regarding an opportunity to meet with you and discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,

Million Belay, Coordinator
Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

David Azoulay, Environmental Health Program Director
Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Sofía Monsalve, Secretary General
FIAN International

Kirtana Chandrasekaran and Martín Drago, Food Sovereignty Program Coordinators
Friends of the Earth International

Sophia Murphy, Executive Director
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)

Andrea Carmen, Executive Director
International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)

Pam Miller and Tadesse Amera, Co-Chairs
International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN)

Sue Longley, General Secretary
International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied
Workers' Associations (IUF)

Javier Souza, Coordinator
Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International

Laurent Gaberell, Agriculture and Food Expert
Public Eye

Chee Yoke Ling, Executive Director
Third World Network