

Press release from The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC)

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Disclosure of industry campaign to promote paraquat in Malaysia Syngenta threatens health and environment in Malaysia

About a month ago, the European Union decided to approve the toxic herbicide paraquat. We can now reveal that the chemical giant Syngenta wilfully misinterprets the decision, and uses it for a dirty campaign to pressure Malaysia to lift the decision to phase out paraquat, says Mikael Karlsson, President of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

Today, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Pesticide Action Network Europe and Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific can disclose that giant chemical corporation Syngenta uses the EU approval of paraquat in a push for selling the toxic herbicide in developing countries. In Malaysia, Syngenta tries to persuade the government to lift the phase out and ban on paraquat with the EU approval as argument.

Syngenta's campaign is based on a flawed interpretation of the EU decision. In Malaysian press, Syngenta has recently urged the Malaysian government to lift the decision to phase out and ban paraquat "based on the European Union's findings that the pesticide no longer posed a danger to health" The company's general manager John McGillivray is quoted as saying: "The EU has one of the highest standards and having it approved there is a clear indication that the product is safe".

In a letter to the European Commission SSNC, PAN Europe and PAN Asia Pacific demand that the decision to approve paraquat in EU should be reviewed. Secondly, the Commission should put strong pressure on Syngenta to take all measures possible, to prevent that the EU approval of paraquat will cause adverse effects on people and environment in developing countries, says Mikael Karlsson.

Syngenta is one of the world's largest producers of pesticides, and paraquat is one of the company's largest products. The herbicide is acutely toxic for people and animals. It is used as a weed-killer in a wide range of crops worldwide, in particular in plantation crops in tropical countries, where workers often lack necessary protection equipment. The farmers and workers exposed to paraquat under such circumstances experience serious health problems. In Malaysia, paraquat is widely used in oil palm plantations, where people, mostly women, that works in the plantations regularly are exposed to the toxic herbicide. This is why Malaysia as the first developing country decided to ban and phase out paraquat.

Today, the European Commissions Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health is discussing the letter from the organisations.

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