



**International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering,  
Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)**

## **Pesticide Maker Syngenta Pressures Malaysia to Drop Paraquat Ban**

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On October 3, the European Union eased the way for greater global use of the acutely toxic herbicide paraquat when the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health voted to add it to the positive list of the 91/414 Pesticides Market Authorisation Directive. The IUF, environmental groups and EU member states which have banned or severely restricted paraquat use opposed approval for wider use of this highly toxic substance, but industry pressure and a last-minute change of position by France (under pressure from its agricultural lobby in the Antilles) ensured a vote in favour. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg and Sweden voted against.

In our letter to the EU authorities prior to the vote, the IUF wrote that "Adding paraquat to the positive list would encourage greater use of this toxic substance and force it onto the market in EU and other countries where it is currently banned. It would also encourage its further use in developing countries, despite the known dangers it poses to humans and the environment and the efforts underway in Malaysia and elsewhere to restrict and eliminate its use." This is exactly what is happening now.

Shortly after the EU decision, the Swiss-based chemical transnational Syngenta - which manufactures and sells paraquat under the brand name Gramoxone - held a press conference urging the government of Malaysia to lift its ban and phase out of the product. To pressure the Malaysian regulatory authorities, Syngenta took out full-page advertisements in the Malaysian press promoting the alleged safety of the product, citing the EU approval as evidence. The company neglects to mention that the results of the study on paraquat safety which formed the ostensible basis for EU approval have never been made public. The Malaysian Trades Union Congress has urged the government to continue with the ban, but Syngenta's resources are considerable, and it has considerable experience with and resources for lobbying. We can assume that the company is already at work in Nicaragua and other countries where efforts are underway to ban this toxic herbicide.

Paraquat accounts for a substantial number of the tens of thousands of pesticide-related deaths recorded annually by the WHO. Paraquat is highly toxic to humans and animals. Once absorbed through the skin or lungs or orally ingested, its effects are irreversible. There is no known antidote to paraquat poisoning. Agricultural workers are regularly exposed to this toxic substance during handling and mixing, spraying and working in freshly-sprayed fields.

Paraquat kills workers, and there are proven alternatives to its use. For this reason, the IUF, together with environmental and food safety groups, is preparing to fight back. We are exploring all possibilities for making effective use of EU and global mechanisms to reverse or limit the global impact of this shameful decision by the European Union and its pesticide lobby.