

BRUSSELS STATEMENT

Towards a Global Pesticides Framework to Eliminate Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)

1. Context

Hazardous pesticides are deeply entrenched in industrial agriculture, with devastating impacts on human health and the environment. However, there is a lack of effective global standards to mitigate their harmful effects. While nations in the Global North enforce strict bans at the regional level to address health and environmental concerns within their territories, the Global South disproportionately bears the burden of exposure to these toxic substances, perpetuating inequalities rooted in colonial practices.

The industrialization of agriculture under the "Green Revolution" failed to deliver on its promise to eradicate hunger. Instead, pesticide sales have surged, while global hunger remains a persistent issue, affecting approximately 10% of the population in 2020.

The pesticide industry, valued at \$60 billion in 2020, causes severe health and environmental damage. The UN estimates that pesticide exposure results in 200,000 acute poisoning deaths annually. Yet, current international frameworks—such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions—fail to adequately address the health and environmental impacts of pesticides. Exporting countries often evade responsibility by shifting risks to importing nations, which suffer the health consequences and pollution due to weaker regulations and enforcement capacities.

In response to this critical issue, a coalition of academic institutions, civil society organizations, and governments from the Global South convened in early 2022 to establish an international alliance aimed at creating global standards for pesticides. Among its goals is the elimination of substances highly toxic to human health and the environment, known as Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs). This coalition, named the International Pesticide Standard Alliance (IPSA), was officially launched during the UN Water Conference in March 2023 in New York City. At the conference, the "New York Statement," summarizing IPSA's proposals, was released.

In May 2024, at the World Water Forum in Indonesia, IPSA published a bilingual book titled *Impacts of Pesticides Use and International Regulation*, featuring contributions from experts, legal scholars, and scientists engaged in this critical issue. On June 27, 2024, during its first International Conference, IPSA gathered at the Brazilian National Congress, bringing together leading global figures from academia, law, and politics to discuss challenges, opportunities, and pathways for establishing an international standard for pesticides.

Building on this momentum, IPSA, in collaboration with the International Center on Water and Transdisciplinarity (CIRAT), the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Brazilian Federal Prosecutor's Office, the Brazilian Labor Prosecutor's Office, and the Green Party in the European Parliament, supported by more than 30 institutions from five continents, organized a second conference titled "**Towards an International Regulatory Framework for Pesticides**" on December 12–13, 2024. Held at the European Parliament and the European Anti-Poverty Network Office, this event advanced political commitments and frameworks for creating international pesticide standards.

This document, the **Brussels Statement**, synthesizes the proposals and recommendations discussed by keynote speakers at the Brussels Conference, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Dr. Marco Orellana; the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and Sanitation, Dr. Pedro Arrojo; as well as numerous parliamentarians, legal experts, and academics from around the world.

The primary outcome of the Brussels Conference was the recognition and alignment of global institutions and leaders on the urgent need for coordinated and integrated efforts. This involves creating synergies among ongoing initiatives and strengthening collaboration through a unified timeline.

2. Key Recommendations

An equitable, decolonial international framework is urgently needed. Recommendations include:

- a. A global elimination of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs);
- b. Uniform, science-based minimum residue standards for food and water;
- c. A global ban on aerial pesticide spraying;
- d. Reduction and planned phase-out of pesticides.

3. An International Treaty on Pesticides

Participants in the **II Conference Towards an International Framework for Pesticides**, held in Brussels, emphasized the urgent need for an enforceable treaty on pesticides, with the first step being the global elimination of HHPs. Many civil society organizations and scientists attending the conference have been actively working toward this goal.

3.1. Justification

The UN states that “chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders, and sterility. Farmers, agricultural workers, communities living near plantations, Indigenous populations, pregnant women, and children are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure and require special protections.” Furthermore, agricultural pesticides significantly pollute local environments and water resources. Eliminating HHPs is the first and most urgent step to protect public health, preserve the environment, and achieve global equity.

The concept of "chemical colonialism" highlights the exploitation of Global South nations, where banned pesticides deemed too toxic for local use are exported, perpetuating dependency and environmental injustice. This underscores the need to transition to sustainable agricultural practices that ensure food sovereignty, environmental health, and address systemic inequalities perpetuated by current models.

3.2. The Need for Global Action

An international treaty is necessary to harmonize high safety standards, support transitions to sustainable practices, and hold corporations accountable for the health and environmental impacts of their products. Advocacy by civil society and scientists, including efforts by the Pesticide Action

Network (PAN) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), emphasizes the need for coordinated action to phase out HHPs and reduce pesticide dependence. Regional frameworks, such as those within the EU, demonstrate that bans, restrictions, and other control measures can significantly reduce pesticide use.

4. Conclusion

Eliminating HHPs is essential to protecting fundamental human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. A global treaty represents a crucial step toward achieving environmental justice and decolonizing agriculture. This collective commitment would enable nations to pursue equitable and truly sustainable development, ensuring public health, ecological resilience, food security, and a sustainable future for the next generations.