Guilty as charged

Dec 7, 2011 by Kathryn Gilje

Truth be told, there were tears in my eyes as I sat there, translating and tweeting amongst the bustling crowd of media and hundreds of people, most of them farmers. After an intensive public trial covering a range of human rights violations, on December 6, the jurors issued a scathing verdict to the six largest pesticide and biotechnology corporations, urging governments to take action to prevent further harm. The crowd erupted in a roar of applause, and later, congratulations were shared in at least seven languages.

The verdict was handed down to the six largest pesticide corporations — Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, BASF, Dow and Dupont — collectively known as the “Big 6,” for their human rights violations, including internationally recognized rights to life, livelihood and health. The agrichemical industry is valued at over $42 billion and operates with impunity while over 355,000 people die from pesticide poisoning every year, and hundreds of thousands more are made ill. In addition, pesticide corporations have put livelihoods and jobs in jeopardy, including those of farmers, beekeepers and indigenous peoples.

The preliminary findings, to be elaborated and finalized by the jury over the next two weeks, include these recommendations for governments:

- Prosecute corporations for criminal liability, rather than civil liability only;
- Fully commit to and legislate for the precautionary principle; and
- Prevent corporations from directly or indirectly harassing and intimidating scientists, farmers and human rights and environmental defenders, in any form.

The tribunal was only made possible through the incredible collaboration of many people — and the support of 400 organizations and more than 7,000 individual people, worldwide. The Center for Food Safety, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, and Farmworker Association of Florida were key contributors in United States.

As for my part, I'm elated and exhausted, both. But that's just tonight. Tomorrow, it's time for the planning meeting for what comes next, and I'm energized and honored to take part, and for PAN to be part of the growing momentum around the world that seeks an end to corporate abuse, putting fairness and dignity in its place.

Nearly 30 years after the the original "Dirty Dozen" campaign that launched PAN International, I feel

another global groundswell coming on.

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