

Over the last few years and especially since the December tsunami in South Asia, a number of individuals have written editorials and articles calling for the widespread reintroduction of DDT for malaria control. For on-the-ground insight into this issue, we bring you a letter from Dr. Romeo Quijano, founding Director of PAN Philippines, a medical doctor and public health advocate who has been working on pesticide issues in developing countries for many years.

For more information about DDT and malaria control, see PANNA's [DDT and Malaria Resource Center](#).

Letter from Dr. Quijano, January 20, 2005

Here in the Philippines, the use of DDT is no longer an issue. We have banned DDT completely since 1994 and there is no recurrence of malaria that can be attributed to the stopping of DDT. Except for the tsunami angle, the pro-DDT arguments have been rehashed many times, especially during negotiations for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs Treaty). These arguments come in various forms, but essentially repeat the same fallacious points that have been dismissed repeatedly by most experts and people on the ground, people free from manipulation of the chemical industry (particularly the producers of chlorinated compounds). The chlorine industry knows that it is not always possible to counter their malicious propaganda so they keep on repeating it.

Nevertheless, whenever possible, we need to respond to the misinformation that these articles are spreading. We need to clarify that malaria, as most other communicable diseases, is a multi-factorial disease and mainly a disease closely associated with poverty and underdevelopment or mal-development. The main factor that needs to be addressed is poverty. The mosquito is only secondary. People liberate themselves from poverty and reduction of mortality due to malaria ensues (as has been proven with most other infectious diseases).

The extremely reductionist and shortsighted industry propagandists see only the mosquito as the culprit and therefore, for them, killing the mosquito is the only answer. Worse, they see only one method of killing the mosquito as the effective way. This is not only contrary to science (true science, not corporate science) but also contrary to common sense. That is how they magnify to absurd numbers the number of people that will be "saved" by DDT and they keep on repeating this lie. They continue to claim that DDT is "safe", "no more a threat to birds than birdseed" despite the very strong scientific evidence of various forms of harm to humans and other living organisms that DDT causes. They cite dubious anecdotes, including those of well-known individuals who know very little about true science, to support their irrational claims. They dish out fallacious cause-and-effect declarations, like that of the increase of malaria cases following withdrawal of DDT in South Africa, to mislead people into wrong conclusions. They deliberately omit the fact that most countries that stopped using DDT have not experienced increases in malaria attributable to stopping the use of DDT (the WWF brief is very informative about this) (See [Eliminating DDT and Protecting Public Health](#), by the World Wildlife Fund.)

They also ignore the fact that in most countries afflicted with malaria, numerous increases in malaria cases occurred while DDT was in use. They refuse to consider the other more plausible reasons for increases in malaria cases, like development of mosquito resistance, weakening of people's immune system (a likely result of exposure to DDT itself), inadequate or faulty surveillance and treatment strategies, faulty statistics, lack of medical facilities, drugs, etc., deterioration of socio-economic conditions, environmental changes, inappropriate infrastructure development, etc. They see the stopping of DDT as the only cause of observed increase of malaria cases.

They pretend to take up the cause of poor countries by accusing the Western governments of "callousness" by banning DDT. Yet, they never take up real issues against Western countries, like corporate aggression in poor countries, unjust economic policies imposed by international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization), debilitating foreign debt, unequal trade, unjust farm subsidies, trans-national corporate monopolies, armed aggression against smaller and weaker countries, etc. They see only Western callousness in not supplying DDT to poorer countries. They also misrepresent the stance of environmental organizations such as WWF and Greenpeace. At the POPs Treaty negotiations, in fact, these two organizations, as well as many other groups participating in the International POPs Elimination Network, agreed to a compromise solution where poor countries are allowed to use DDT on an interim basis, if, after considering all the issues involved, they still believe they have no other choice except to use DDT to "protect public health". That position in no way indicates a reversal of their anti-DDT position. It only reflects recognition that it is the country itself that will have to finally decide on the issue, and that outside organizations must respect that decision even if they do not agree with it. At the same time, however, that country must fulfill its international obligation of eventually phasing out DDT and other POPs, determined by the international community to be harmful to health and the environment. It must be emphasized that there was a consensus agreement that all the POPs initially listed in the POPs Treaty, including DDT, are harmful to health and the environment.

There are many other issues to discuss but let me stop at this point. I hope I have given you an idea on how I respond to the pro-DDT "Persistently Obnoxious Propaganda" (POP) of the chemical industry and their cohorts.

Best regards,

Romy