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Dr Gerd Leipold
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18 August 2006

Dear Dr Leipold,

DDT and Malaria Control

Malaria continues to be a serious and persistent public health problem, particularly in Africa. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 1 million people, mostly children, die from malaria every year, and the parasites cause approximately 500 million cases annually. A highly effective method of malaria control is to spray small amounts of insecticide on the inside walls of houses – a process known as Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS). As you are no doubt aware, DDT is one of the most effective public health insecticides for IRS programs. When used in this manner, DDT acts as a spatial repellent, irritant and toxic agent. Decades of research and field experience have consistently demonstrated that DDT is highly effective at creating a chemical barrier between humans and the deadly malarial mosquito.

Thousands of studies into the possible human health effects of DDT have failed to definitively demonstrate any actual human harm attributable to DDT. Given the colossal burden caused by malaria, any rational risk-benefit assessment would conclude that DDT should be used.

Due to its ongoing efficacy and its long record of safe use in malaria control, many countries continue to use DDT. Others, such as Uganda and Tanzania, are attempting to revitalize their IRS programs and use DDT, other insecticides and other interventions. The use of DDT in this way is specifically authorized by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

On 2 August, 2006, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) ran a story on the World Health Organization's (WHO) endorsement of the public health insecticide DDT for

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malaria control.¹ The report quoted Greenpeace scientist Dr David Santillo's reaction to the endorsement:

“That certainly raises some quite substantial concerns and, if there's substantial funding coming from the US to support that, then that does sound very much like a step in the wrong direction”

The report further quotes Dr. Santillo as stating:

“I think where that funding is better placed is in developing the availability of alternative strategies.”

These statements raise a number of questions regarding Greenpeace's position on the use of DDT in malaria control, as well as Greenpeace's understanding of and concern about public health problems in poor countries.

On 17 October 2004, I received correspondence from Manfred Krautter of Greenpeace Germany. Mr. Krautter was responding to a media report in which I was quoted as saying that environmentalist groups pressured aid agencies not to use insecticides such as DDT. In his letter, attached, Mr. Krautter reminded me that:

“ ... DDT is in justified cases allowed to be used to combat mosquitoes carrying malaria. Greenpeace has no objections to these regulations on exceptions and supports this part of the Convention too.”

In his letter, Mr. Krautter explains that “It is therefore false to presume Greenpeace had expressed itself opposed to such emergency uses allowed in the POPs Convention.” He goes on to state that “It is false to say that Greenpeace has put pressure on other organizations not to use DDT to combat malaria in such cases.”

These sentiments seem at odds with the opening sentence of a Greenpeace Statement on the Stockholm Convention and DDT, which Mr. Krautter included in his correspondence. The Statement reads:

“Any attempt to hinder or undermine world agreement to eliminate DDT under the Stockholm Convention would obstruct attempts to break the current cycle of misery related to the use of DDT for malarial vector control.”

It is not clear what particular misery Greenpeace refers to with regard to the use of DDT for malaria control. As I have already explained, malaria causes over 1 million deaths every year, equating to a death almost every 30 seconds. Those children that survive malaria often suffer cognitive impairment and face a blighted future. The disease leaves people enervated and unable to work and is a constant drain on a country's economy, costing Africa an estimated \$12 billion every year. All the while, no demonstrable or significant human harm from DDT has ever been proven.

When used in IRS, DDT is remarkably effective in preventing disease and saving lives. To characterize the use of DDT to control this disease as “a cycle of misery” is entirely outrageous and seems to show that Greenpeace is at best out of touch with the risks and

¹ ABC Online “WHO to endorse DDT use: report”, Wednesday 2 August, 2006. Available from: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/items/200608/1703488.htm>

realities of life in Africa. At worst it demonstrates a callous disregard for human life in malarial areas.

The Greenpeace Statement goes on to call for more money to be invested in alternative solutions to DDT. Mr. Krautter's letter specifically states that:

“Greenpeace is thus committed to seeing that more effective methods for combating malaria which are more environmentally-friendly and sound with regard to health become devised and made available in the countries affected.”

The various inconsistent and contradictory statements beg several questions:

First, if, as Mr. Krautter asserts, Greenpeace should not be characterized as opposed to the use of DDT in malaria control, why should the organization describe its use in malaria control as a “cycle of misery?” Furthermore, why does Dr Santillo consider that the restricted and careful use of DDT for malaria control is “a step in the wrong direction?”

Second, please, could you detail the financial commitment that Greenpeace itself has made to developing new malaria control technologies, and include any details of the success achieved? Given that Greenpeace informs us that it is “committed to seeing more effective methods for combating malaria,” we assume that it has followed that up with actual investment.

Third, please, could you detail the lobbying and advocacy efforts that Greenpeace has undertaken to ensure that public and private funds are invested in the search for chemical alternatives to DDT?

I would draw your attention to the actions of other environmentalist groups engaged in the debate around DDT in malaria control.

Environmental Defense (an organization established specifically to campaign against DDT) wrote to the US Agency for International Development on May 11, 2004 (letter attached) urging it to use DDT in malaria control. Dr John Balbus, Director of Environmental Defenses's Health Program writes:

“...we believe that indoor spraying of small quantities of DDT in developing countries areas (sic) where malaria is spread by indoor-dwelling mosquitoes is an important tool given the limited resources available.”

Recently the Sierra Club announced its support for DDT use in malaria control. Ed Hopkins of the Sierra Club Environmental Quality Program recently stated:

“We think that it is important to protect the health of people in the developing world. So if there are no better alternatives than DDT, we support the controlled use of that chemical.²”

² Voice of America, “WHO to Recommend DDT to Combat Malaria” NewsVOAcom, 11 August 2006, <http://www.voanews.com/english/AmericanLife/2006-08-11-voa46.cfm?renderforprint=1&textonly=1&&TEXTMODE=1&CFID=26445350&CFTOKEN=17078966>

In Southern Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust has worked with malaria control programs to ensure that DDT is used responsibly and effectively. An EWT report states:³

“This networking and collaboration between stakeholders has enabled the EWT-PWG to assist in training programmes and to make spray teams aware of the environmental risks associated not only with the use of DDT, but with all the chemicals used for malaria vector control.”

They go on to explain that:

“This case clearly illustrates the pro-active way in which conservation NGOs can form positive partnerships to assist State Departments and ultimately better serve our environment and the species, and humans, who all depend on it.”

Africa Fighting Malaria applauds the constructive and positive role that these organizations have taken with regard to DDT for malaria control. The criticism that Greenpeace has leveled at the WHO, and by implication, some of the world’s leading malaria experts and scientists is damaging to malaria control programs and ultimately will cost lives in Africa.

Should Greenpeace choose to play constructive and positive role in this debate, along with the environmentalist groups mentioned above, and to use its resources to ensure that DDT is used properly and in an effective way, we will gladly assist in any way that we can.

In the interim we look forward to receiving responses to the questions raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Tren
Director, Africa Fighting Malaria

cc:
Manfred Krautter, Greenpeace, Germany
Dr David Santillo, Greenpeace, UK
John Passacantando, Greenpeace, USA
Dr Arata Kochi, Global Malaria Program, WHO, Geneva

Encl. Correspondence from Manfred Krautter to Richard Tren, October 17, 2004

³ Report available from Endangered Wildlife Trust -
http://www.ewt.org.za/news_fullstory.aspx?status=1&newsID=200