

Statement of the Director-General at the launch of project GCP/RER/040/EC, to improve capacities to eliminate and prevent recurrence of obsolete pesticides in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

(April 11, 2012)

Your Excellency Mr Vasile Bumacov, Minister for Agriculture and Food Industry of Moldova,

Your Excellency, Mr Makhaz Akishbaia, Deputy Minister for Agriculture of Georgia,

Mr Zhanybek Derbishaliev, Head of the Department of Chemicalization and Plant Protection of the Kyrgyz Republic,

Your Excellency Mrs Laurence Argimon Pistre, Permanent Representative of the European Union to FAO.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Sustainability has not always been a concern in our quest for development. This is true for many areas and, as we know, agriculture is no exception. In the past decades we were able to increase food production significantly, but at a huge toll on the environment. One of the consequences of this input-intensive agriculture we adopted are the barrels of obsolete pesticides lying abandoned around the world.

For nearly 20 years, FAO has worked globally to identify the scope of the obsolete pesticides problem, develop viable technical solutions and support countries in implementing projects to eliminate these toxic stockpiles and prevent their recurrence. FAO has assisted in the quantification and removal of obsolete pesticides from more than 90 countries.

Today we are collectively launching a partnership to collaborate in solving the extremely serious problem of obsolete pesticide stockpiles in 12 countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

FAO believes that there are an estimated 200 000 tonnes of toxic waste pesticides in the countries that participate in this project. This represents around 40 percent of the world's total: approximately half a million tonnes.

The countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia that participate in this initiative have economies built on significant contributions from agricultural production. And have inherited a legacy that threatens the health and well-being of farming communities, their land and water, and the health of the population at large.

FAO has the technical expertise needed to assist countries in eliminating existing obsolete pesticide stockpiles without creating new health and environmental problems as a result of mismanagement or poor practices.

This is a costly operation and I want to thank the generous contribution of six million Euros from the European Union.

This project has also received, in cash and in kind contributions from the Global Environment Facility, Greece, Turkey, the United States, the Green Cross International and FAO itself. This is a truly collaborative effort, in which FAO works together with other UN agencies such as WHO and UNEP, the Secretariats of the Rotterdam, Stockholm and Basel Conventions, international NGOs, such as the Green Cross and the International HCH and Pesticide Association and the private sector.

Eliminating obsolete pesticides is necessary for our collective well-being, but even more important is adopting better management practices from the very beginning so we avoid reaching this stage again. That is why agro ecological approaches such as Integrated Pest Management go hand in hand with this project.

Pesticides may be an important input for farming, but they need to be used responsibly to ensure effective protection of crops while protecting human health and the environment from their adverse effects.

The International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides is the framework that guides how pesticides should be managed throughout their life cycle.

This Code was developed by FAO and will be reviewed for the first time in a decade by the forthcoming meeting of FAO's Committee on Agriculture in May this year.

In our pursuit of sustainability and to meet the challenge of feeding a growing population while preserving our environment, we need to take a good look at the different options we have to protect crops and improve productivity. This includes using natural means to protect and improve crop yields through sustainable crop intensification, or 'save and grow' techniques, as we call it at FAO.

Let this project and the 500 000 tonnes of obsolete pesticides around the world be a reminder of the need to commit, firmly, to sustainability. We have the opportunity to do so in just over two months, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20. Thank you.