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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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New Initiative for Pesticide Risk Reduction

1. The Hundred and Thirty-first Session of the FAO Council considered document CL 131/17 on “New International Developments on Pesticide Management” in November 2006 and made various recommendations to the Organization regarding the implementation of the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management (SAICM) (see paragraphs 79-86 in the Report of the Hundred and Thirty-first Session of the FAO Council, Rome, 20-25 November 2006).
2. Of particular reference is paragraph 86, which states that “In view of the broad range of activities envisaged within SAICM, the Council suggested that the activities of FAO could include risk reduction, including the progressive ban on highly hazardous pesticides, ...” as there is currently the momentum to address the use of highly toxic pesticides (HTPs)¹, especially in developing countries.
3. Concern over the use of HTPs has been expressed for many years, in particular in countries with limited capacities in pesticide management. Poisoning cases remain high in developing countries and environmental damage continues to be observed.
4. A number of developing countries have recently banned the use of HTPs, e.g. China, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Thailand and Viet Nam. In industrialized countries in general, the use of HTPs is severely restricted or has been phased out.
5. Various industrialized countries have also stopped, or are currently discussing banning, the production of HTPs within their territories, and pesticide manufacturers have either announced the phase-out of the production of HTPs or have moved their production plants out of industrialized countries.
6. An international initiative to reduce risks associated with the use of pesticides focusing on HTPs is a direct contribution to various Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Efforts to

¹ “Highly hazardous” is considered synonymous with highly toxic pesticides (HTPs), the term used in this document since it is more commonly used.

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protect human health and the environment and to support the growth of healthy crops against the hazards of pesticides will enhance agricultural and environmental sustainability (MDG 7). Furthermore, information on alternative and/or new technologies to replace HTPs, developed in partnership between the public and private sector, is in support of a global partnership for development (MDG 8).

7. The importance of pesticides and their management is clearly reflected in the Global Plan of Action under SAICM, and Council emphasized the Organization's key role in this area. FAO is in a unique position as it provides guidance throughout the life-cycle of pesticides through the *International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides* (hereinafter referred as the "Code of Conduct") including standards for maximum residue levels as well as for the quality of pesticides, it addresses trade of certain HTPs through its Secretariat functions under the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (hereinafter referred as the "Rotterdam Convention"), it provides strategies to limit the use of HTPs in the field through its leading role on Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and through its know-how in the disposal of obsolete pesticides it deals with the last step of the life-cycle of every chemical.

8. The Organization employs various ways and mechanisms to address the reduction of risks associated with pesticides and their use. These mechanisms have the endorsement and support of all relevant stakeholders, in particular the pesticide industry and non-governmental organizations.

9. Various mechanisms and instruments exist to address HTPs, internationally, regionally and nationally:

- The Code of Conduct, with its focus on risk reduction, promotes the use of less toxic pesticide formulations (Article 5); recommends the avoidance of pesticides whose handling and application require the use of personal protective equipment that is uncomfortable, expensive or not readily available, especially for small-scale users in tropical climates (Article 3); and advises prohibition of the importation, sale and purchase of highly toxic and hazardous products, such as those included in World Health Organization (WHO) Classes Ia and Ib² (Article 7).
- The Rotterdam Convention provides an early warning system for countries on the potential danger of HTPs by sharing information on national bans or severe restrictions and information on human poisoning and environmental damage. Through the PIC procedure, it empowers countries to make their own informed decisions on the use and import of pesticides and prevents export of unwanted pesticides. The Convention assists countries to stop problems associated with HTPs before they emerge.
- SAICM, in its Global Plan of Action, defines various work areas on "HTP risk management and reduction" for which FAO is mainly named as the lead agency³. These work areas also reflect the necessary management input of other UN agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Stocks of obsolete pesticides pose an immediate as well as growing threat to human health and the environment. The regional Africa Stockpile Programme (ASP) functions currently as the world-wide model for disposal of such HTP stocks and links disposal with preventive measures.

² The WHO recommended classification of pesticides by hazard and guidelines to classification 2004. WHO, Geneva, 2005. [text at: <http://www.inchem.org/documents/pds/pdsother/class.pdf>]

³ SAICM Global Plan of Action, which sets out proposed "work areas and activities" for implementation of the Strategic Approach. Available at <http://www.chem.unep.ch/saicm/>

- National IPM programmes and policies in developing countries such as China, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have maintained increases in agricultural production in crops that are often thought to be dependent on high pesticide usage, such as cotton, rice and vegetables, after banning the use of HTPs.
- National Regulatory Authorities for pesticides, mainly in industrialized countries, use various mechanisms to apply precautionary measures for HTPs, e.g. through restricted use permits only, through shorter re-registration periods and through phase-out schemes.

10. The FAO Secretariat wishes to respond to the recommendations made by Council. FAO's future activities would draw upon existing tools and mechanisms in order to provide further clarity and validity to evidence of adverse health and environmental impacts caused by HTPs. Such validated evidence could be used to support countries in controlling HTPs or implementing progressive actions to ban HTPs. Currently available international instruments, such as the Code of Conduct, the Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and SAICM, provide a framework for this new initiative and a sound basis for partnerships with other organizations, including the pesticide industry and NGOs. The replacement of HTPs with less hazardous plant protection measures would be an essential part of this initiative. By these means, FAO would assist countries in reducing the risks of HTPs and provide guidance on other groups of chemicals.

11. Additional resources in order to implement a programme based on the Council's recommendations regarding the progressive ban on HTPs cannot be identified at present in the Regular Programme. As these activities will directly support technical assistance to member countries, donor countries may wish to consider making extra-budgetary resources available to the Organization for this purpose.