



PRESS RELEASE

Groups ask authorities to dismiss frivolous charges lodged against prominent Philippines and international health expert and toxicologist

9 November 2015. Over 100 civil society groups from 47 countries urged Philippine authorities to dismiss what they deem as a malicious case filed against Filipino doctor, scientist and internationally recognized health expert, Dr. Romeo F. Quijano.

Leaders from IPEN (a global NGO network working for chemical safety) and the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PANAP) issued the appeal in response to charges of "unprofessionalism" lodged against the toxicologist, which could result in Dr. Quijano losing his license to practice medicine. The complaint against Dr. Quijano stems from his 2000 work "Poisoned Lives," which documents pesticide poisoning in the banana plantations of local agribusiness giant, Lapanday Agricultural Development Corp. (LADECO), in the province of Davao del Sur in the southernmost Philippine island of Mindanao.

These charges are simply the latest in a series of attempts to discredit Dr. Quijano and his groundbreaking work. In 2000, LADECO sued Dr. Quijano and his journalist daughter for libel and damage over the "Poisoned Lives" study that was eventually dismissed in 2007. A separate libel and falsification suit still based on the same study was filed in 2010 but again dismissed in 2013.

Dr. Quijano, a retired Pharmacology and Toxicology professor in the College of Medicine, University of Philippines (Manila), is an internationally recognized expert on chemical safety and health, and his work has been noted and recognized by numerous institutions. In 2005, Dr. Quijano received the prestigious Jennifer Altman Foundation Award, which honors the pursuit of science in the public interest. In 2009 the University of Philippines Medical Alumni Society awarded Dr. Quijano its Outstanding Community Service Award. Between 1998 and 2007, Dr. Quijano served as NGO representative to the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), receiving its Special Recognition Award in 2003 on behalf of IPEN, for which he served as co-chair.

In their letter to the Philippines' Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC), groups urged the PRC to "ensure that Dr. Quijano's exemplary work for chemical safety and public health is duly honored and protected against dubious complaints that seek to cast doubt on his professional integrity as a medical doctor, scientist and retired professor in Pharmacology and Toxicology at the College of Medicine of the University of Philippines (Manila)". The PRC, which will hear the case, regulates and supervises the practice of professionals in the Philippines, including doctors. It can strip Dr. Quijano of his medical license if declared guilty.

"In June 2015 Dr. Quijano spoke at a Congressional inquiry in favor of House Bill 3857, which seeks to ban aerial spraying as a method of applying highly hazardous pesticides on agricultural crops," said IPEN Co-Chair Olga Speranskaya. "Over three months after Dr. Quijano's speech, at the fourth session of the International

Conference on Chemicals Management held in Geneva, delegates recognized the harmful impact on human health and the environment of highly hazardous pesticides, in particular in developing countries," she said.

In the same letter, the IPEN and PANAP also urged the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR) to "use its legal and moral authority to halt the malicious harassment against Dr. Quijano and to support his efforts to ferret out the truth and obtain justice for the victims of pesticide poisoning". The groups reminded the CHR of its own "The People's Right to Chemical Safety: A Fifteen-Point Human Rights Agenda" that affirms the commission's support to the people's right to live in a toxic-free environment.

"If the questionable case raised against Dr. Quijano will be allowed to prosper, it would be a setback to the people's campaign and strides made against hazardous pesticides in the Philippines. It will send an alarming signal to groups and individuals – including experts and scientists – who are vigilantly monitoring and reporting on agrochemicals and their harmful impact on human health and the environment," said PANAP executive director Sarojeni V. Rengam.

The groups noted that while the six complainants before the PRC are ordinary residents of the village that was the subject of Dr. Quijano's study, there is reason to believe that banana and pesticide companies could be behind the latest case filed against Dr. Quijano.

"There is clearly a pattern of legal persecution to intimidate Dr. Quijano. Remember that this (PRC case) is just the latest in a series of lawsuits that he has faced for his work on pesticide poisoning in banana plantations. Who else has the motive and capacity to launch such systematic and sustained offensive but the big businesses being directly hit by Dr. Quijano's research and advocacy," Rengam said.

Dr. Quijano is a member of the Steering Committee of PANAP and president of PAN Philippines. He is also the former co-chairperson of IPEN.

IPEN is global civil society network of more than 700 public interest, non-governmental organizations in 116 countries that pursues safe chemicals policies and practices. It has been working on the elimination of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that are used as pesticides and other chemicals.

PANAP, meanwhile, is one of five regional centers of Pesticide Action Network (PAN), a global network dedicated to the elimination of harm upon humans and the environment by pesticide use. PANAP has 103 partner groups across the Asia Pacific region.

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