



International Indian Treaty Council
Working for the Rights and Recognition of Indigenous Peoples
Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios
Trabajando por el reconocimiento y los derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas

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Toxic pesticide globally banned after unprecedented vote at UN meeting on chemicals: Alaska-based and international Indigenous organizations play key role in decision of Stockholm Convention in Geneva

(Anchorage, AK; and San Francisco, CA) – Delegates from more than 90 countries took the unprecedented step of voting for a global ban on pentachlorophenol – a proven toxic pesticide and contaminant found in wildlife and human biomonitoring studies worldwide, including the Arctic. The historic vote came on May 16 at the combined meetings of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions – which usually make decisions by consensus – after India repeatedly blocked action.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics and the International Indian Treaty Council played a key role in this decision of the Stockholm Convention Conference of the Parties (COP7), making the scientific and human rights case for a global ban on pentachlorophenol and two other industrial chemicals. The delegates of the Stockholm Convention also supported international bans on two other industrial chemicals that harm the global environment and human health: chlorinated naphthalenes and hexachlorobutadiene.

“We commend the global community for this important decision which will help ensure that the Indigenous Peoples and the traditional foods on which they depend are protected against toxic pentachlorophenol and the other industrial chemicals,” said Pamela Miller of Alaska Community Action on Toxics.

Pentachlorophenol is a toxic pesticide used in wood treatment of utility poles. Pentachlorophenol is a persistent and ubiquitous contaminant found in the breast milk, blood, amniotic fluid, adipose tissue, and seminal fluid of people throughout the world, including Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. This chemical is associated with adverse health effects including damage to the developing brain and nervous system, impairment of memory and learning, disruption to thyroid function, immune suppression, infertility, and increased risk of certain cancers such as non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

“This is a significant victory for our communities that are already experiencing health disparities associated with chemical exposures,” states Vi Waghiyi, a Yupik mother and grandmother from Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island and Environmental Health and Justice Program Director with Alaska Community Action on Toxics. “We feel an extreme urgency to prevent harmful exposures to toxic chemicals such as pentachlorophenol because we have a cancer crisis in our communities. It is so important for us to be present

and speak out where these decisions are being made and to inform delegates about the health and human rights implications of their decisions.”

The Global Indigenous Caucus included representatives from the Arctic, North American, Latin America and the Pacific regions. Rochelle Diver, who participated in the COPs representing the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and her own Nation, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa believes that Indigenous Peoples, Nations and organizations from the US and Canada played a pivotal role in achieving the global ban of pentachlorophenol and the other chemicals. Ms. Diver stated: “The resolutions and letters we received that called on the US and Canada to support the global ban of pentachlorophenol were key factors in achieving this victory. The US and Canada are the two largest users of pentachlorophenol, and they changed their original positions and did not oppose the listing of this toxic chemical for a global ban as a direct result of Indigenous Peoples’ active engagement leading up to and during the COPs.”

The Indigenous Caucus presented resolutions and letters to the delegates of the Stockholm Convention from the Assembly of First Nations, Treaty 6 First Nations, Curyung Tribal Council, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Native Village of Diomedede, Native Village of Elim, Native Village of Gambell, Native Village of Mekoryuk, Native Village of Wales, and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The meetings of the three international chemicals conventions, the Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Basel Conventions, convened in Geneva from May 4-16 with approximately 1,200 delegates from 171 countries. During the meeting, India surprisingly rejected the findings of the Stockholm Convention’s own scientific expert committee in which they participated. Switzerland triggered the voting procedure – the first in the history of the Convention. Ninety-four countries voted in favor of global prohibition of pentachlorophenol; two opposed; and eight countries abstained.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics and International Indian Treaty Council are participating organizations in IPEN, a global network of over 700 public interest organizations in 100 countries working to eliminate toxic substances.

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Additional resources:

Alaska Community Action on Toxics: www.akaction.org

International Indian Treaty Council: www.iitc.org

IPEN: www.ipen.org