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Workers and Trade Unions

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“Water is Life”

This slogan is only true if water is accessible, safe and sufficient.

For agricultural workers who work and live with their families on the farms, water can destroy their lives. On the plantations, water is mixed with pesticides and sprayed for the control of pest and diseases, but pesticide spray drift and run-offs contaminate the surface water as well as the ground water that the workers and their use for drinking and other domestic use. Proper disposal of pesticides empty containers is another problem, Used pesticides containers are given out as incentives to the workers who use then for storing water and food exposing them to pesticides poisoning.

Each year 3million agricultural workers killed by pesticides and 40 million are seriously poisoned.

Stagnant water, a common feature in industrial agriculture is a source of waterborne diseases, breeding places for mosquitoes that spread malaria among the workers. Illness contributes to loss of income, cost of treatment and death. This problem is compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.HIV AIDS patients need adequate safe water, but is never available.

Plantation work is done in the open. In the extreme heat, cases of dehydration are very common because drinking water is not readily available on site and not sufficient. Sanitation facilities are never provided in the fields and are minimally available on the living camps. Where there is pipe water facilities, supply of clean water are erratic forcing women to travel and collect water from the contaminated sources

Therefore the Workers and trade unions call for policy coherence between the Government Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Health and Labour to address the short comings of water and sanitation at workplaces. Labour inspection (agriculture) has been ignored by many governments and some farms use the Trespass Act to bar Inspectors to access their farms.

Workers and trade unions are ready to work with employers to improve sanitation on the farms. The IUF, the Global Trade unions that represent waged agricultural workers had for example jointly with Croplife International an Association of Pesticides manufactures conducted training for workers and farm managers in Uganda and Tanzania in Pesticides risk reduction, an initiative the aimed at improving health and safety on condition in the plantation.

The trade unions are calling on the pesticides industry to heed the call of some governments, NGOs and other organization identify the toxic pesticides such as Paraquat (gramoxone) and ensure that such pesticides are removed from the production list and substitute them with less toxic or shift to alternative pest control methods to avoid contamination of water sources with pesticides.

Furthermore the participation of the workers and trade unions in water management and sanitation on the plantations and other industrialized agriculture can be enhanced by promoting rights at work, safe and secure work, social protection and social dialogue.

Workers should be recognized as partners in the business.