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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In honor of International Human Rights Day, groups around the country call upon the U. S. State Department to address human rights violations of the “Big 6” Multi-National pesticide industry corporations

Groups urge immediate action to address human rights violations perpetrated by the six largest pesticide and agricultural biotechnology corporations at home and abroad

Washington, DC—In recognition of International Human Rights Day yesterday, a coalition of farmworker, food, public health, Indigenous Peoples, and environmental health and justice advocates delivered a unique [photo-petition](#) with over fifty “photo-statements” to top officials at the U.S. State Department and White House urging them to hold the world’s six largest pesticide multi-national corporations accountable for human rights abuses. During the first week in December — in remembrance of the worst pesticide disaster in world history at Bhopal, India on December 3, 1984 and culminating on December 10, International Human Rights Day — the groups collected widespread support and pictorial testimonies from people demanding an end to human rights violations by multi-national pesticide companies.

“The world’s six largest pesticide corporations have trampled on the rights of people across the world, including in the United States,” said Devika Ghai of **Pesticide Action**

Network. “U.S. officials have a responsibility to stand up to powerful corporations and defend the rights of all people to health, life, livelihood and a healthy environment.”

The petition — addressed to Jason Pielemeier of the Business and Human Rights Section at the U.S. Department of State, and Susan Rice, the President’s National Security Advisor — calls upon the US Government to fulfill its obligations to protect human rights from corporate abuse, particularly by the pesticide industry, under the provisions of ‘The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights’, an international framework that U.S. officials helped draft.

The world’s six largest pesticide and GE (genetically engineered) seed corporations — BASF, Bayer, Dow, DuPont, Monsanto and Syngenta — dominate the global marketplace. Together, the “Big 6” [control](#) 76% of the global pesticide market and 60% of the global seed market. And the harms caused by their pesticides and market domination are far-reaching.

“Farmworkers here in the Lake Apopka area of Florida were chronically — over decades! — exposed to the same pesticides that caused reproductive anomalies in the lake’s alligators and one of the largest bird mortality incidents in U.S. history on the contaminated Lake Apopka farm lands. Yet, to date, there has been no effort to address the chronic health problems of the people who worked daily in the farm fields while being regularly exposed to these same toxic pesticides. In an effort to garner attention to their concerns, community members created the [Lake Apopka Farmworker Memorial Quilt](#) to honor the farmworkers — friends and family members — who had worked the vegetable fields and who have since passed away. The lack of accountability for the health impacts to the farmworkers — and their second generation children - I call this a human rights violation,” said Jeannie Economos, of **Farmworker Association of Florida**. Many low-income farmworkers also ate fish caught out of Lake Apopka in order to supplement their diet, increasing their body burden of pesticides.

The impacts of the Big 6 pesticide corporations can also be felt in communities across the country. Facing exposure to many of the same pesticides (a very persistent class of pesticides known as organochlorines, the class to which DDT belongs), Indigenous families in Alaska also joined in the photo-petition. Because these persistent pesticides

travel northwards on wind and water currents, they accumulate in traditional food sources; these chemicals have harmed the bodies of Yupik and other Native peoples of Alaska and the Arctic, putting entire communities and ways of life at risk.

“When the simple, sacred act of eating our traditional foods puts us at higher risk of cancer, it’s a violation of our human rights. We have a human right to food and subsistence, health, clean air, clean water and toxic free food,” said Vi Waghiyi, Native Village of Savoonga tribal member and of **Alaska Community Action on Toxics**. “The governments and corporations of the world must protect the health and human rights of Indigenous Peoples. The U.S. signed the UN Declaration of the Rights Of Indigenous Peoples. We need to protect the health and well-being of our Indigenous Peoples, our children and future generations who deserve to gain the cultures and traditions passed on for generations from our ancestors.”

In 2011, the U.S. Government, as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, endorsed [‘The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights’](#), an agreement to implement the UN Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework. This framework lays out state and private sector obligations to protect and respect human rights, and to provide access to remedy when violations do take place.

In the petition delivered today, in recognition of International Human Rights Day, people across the U.S. are calling upon government officials develop a national action plan to implement the Guiding Principles — and to prioritize pesticide industry violations.

Two years ago, the Big 6 were put on trial in India by the [Permanent People’s Tribunal](#) for their gross violations of human rights. Over two dozen cases were heard from communities around the world who testified to a range of violations, from direct poisonings to forced child labor to harassment of farmers and facilitation of violent repression. After four days of testimony and deliberation, the jury [pronounced the Big 6 guilty](#) of “gross, widespread and systematic violation of human rights.”

It is against this backdrop that the coalition, including Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Beyond Toxics, Center for Food Safety, Farmworker Association of Florida, and

Pesticide Action Network, along with other partner organizations, delivered the petition to top officials at the State Department and White House today.

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Additional Resources:

- The Business and Human Rights Resource Center: <http://www.business-humanrights.org/>
- International trial of pesticide corporations for violating human rights: <http://agricorporateaccountability.net/>
- More details on the “Big 6”: <http://www.panna.org/current-campaigns/corporate-control>