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To,

Dr Manmohan Singh,
Prime Minister,
Government of India, New Delhi.

Respected Prime Minister,

I write this detailed letter to bring to your kind attention a serious development in Kerala. This is regarding the use of Endosulfan, a highly hazardous pesticide, in the plantations in Kasaragod, a northern district. It had caused very serious damage to the health of the people, especially to women and children, in the villages surrounding the plantations, where this was aerielly sprayed. Following wide spread public protest and legal battles, it was the UDF Government under the Chief Ministership of Sri A K Antony that first took the decision to temporarily ban this chemical in 2001. But as per the Insecticides Act 1968, as State Governments are not empowered to ban a pesticide, the ban had to be lifted consequently. Later, the chemical was withheld from sale and use in Kerala by a High Court verdict in 2002. In 2006, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation also issued Gazette Notification withholding sale and use in Kerala.

Endosulfan, as you are aware, is now being considered for a global ban by a treaty called the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). Since 2008, when this chemical came for consideration of a global ban, I understand India is one among a few countries that has taken a position against the ban. This is a matter of serious concern, that warrants your immediate intervention.

Endosulfan was used in the plantations of cashew in Kerala, and it caused unprecedented and heart wrenching scenes of disaster in the rural families in the villages of this district. Even today hundreds of people are suffering from its damages, and many a survey by health experts and health department of the State has established the cause and intesity of its damage. Since 1998, the people of these villages were struggling against the use of this chemical and in 2002, various committees including one by the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) and the Department of Health Services of the Government of Kerala, established the cause of the health problems as Endosulfan. Nevertheless, all these reports were ignored by the committees setup by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation, which seemed to have taken undue haste in establishing the innocense of the pesticide.

Now, the issue has come back into public debate, after it was revealed that the Indian delegation, led by officers of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation had taken up a non-scientific and unrealistic position in the Stockholm Convention's Perisistent Organic Pollutant Review Committee (POPRC) in Geneva in the last month. While Endosulfan is banned or being phased out in 73 countries and globally there is a consensus on its high toxicity and impact to health and environment, the Indian delegation refused to acknowledge

it. Moreover, I was told by the independent NGO observer who had gone to the convention, that the Indian delegation was being unduly influenced by the chemical pesticide industry representatives. Infact, they shared with me that in many occasions, the Indian Government delegation was allowing the chemical industry representative to speak on their behalf and also introduce notes into the convention that were prepared by them. This I believe is a matter of very serious concern and has done immense damage to India's reputation in global conventions. It also starkly reveals the state of affairs of our bureaucracy who do not represent the real and full facts of the issue and thus misleads the Government while taking positions that are warranted in the name of public good.

I request that as a Statesman, with great concern for such public causes as well as a deep understanding of global environmental concerns, you make an indepth inquiry into the matter and ensure that India correct its position in tune with the reality on the ground as well as its obligations as a leader in the global environmental governance. Here, I wish to remind that I am in possession of documents that show that way back in 1991 itself, the Dr Banerjee Committee, setup by the Central Insecticides Board (CIB), had recommended that "endosulfan should not be used near water bodies" owing to its high aquatic toxicity. This recommendation I understand was repeated by the Dr R B Singh committee in 1999. Later this was also recommended for implemenatation by the Registration Committee of the CIB. Still none of these recommendations have been implemented till date, which shows that there is a concerted effort within these departments to sabotage any restriction brought on endosulfan.

Inspite of India's lone and unjustifiable objection, the "POPRC" accepted the scientific and well balanced "Risk Management Evaluation of Endosulfan" and recommended Endosulfan for a global ban. The Conference of Parties 5 (COP5) of the Stockholm Convention will consider the recommendation for a final decision in April 2011, and this is the crucial meeting where India's position will matter much in deciding not only the fate of such extremely dangerous chemicals, but the fate of India's global reputation on environmental matters, that was so meticulously built up by your predecessors, Indiraji and Rajivji.

Meanwhile, the State Government of Kerala has on its own started a relief and remediation programme for the victims. But there are limitations to what can be done by them and full remedial efforts are yet to be taken up in a proper scale. Adequate resources and expertise to deal with such a health situation is not yet available and this is slowing relief measures, much of which amounts to long-term care to be taken at the family level. (please refer website www.endosulphanvictms.org) The effort of the State and Central Governments must be to bring in as much a solace to the suffering population, where hundreds of affected children with congenital anomalies are growing up. There is a need to set up a full fledged relief, remediation and rehabilitation programme and provide releief to all those who badly need them. The State had also paid some amount to some of the families of the deceased as a solatium. But this is also grossly inadequate, and is yet to cover all the families who have lost their nearest.

While this must be the priority, it was very unfortunate that the Minister of State for Agriculture and Cooperation has stated that the official position of the Central Government is that they do not have any evidence as to the impact of Endosulfan on the health of the people. I have taken efforts to study the issue and one serious omission in this matter is that the Ministry of Agriculutre is not mindful that health issues need to be looked at not from agriculture perspective but from the health perspective. In 2002, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) under orders from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had authorised the National Institute of Occupation Health (NIOH) to study the poisoning in Kasaragod and they released a report about the impact

Endosulfan had in the population in affected areas. This report was also submitted, peer reviewed and published in a globally respected journal called the Environmental Health Perspectives. (Article-Effect of Endosulfan on Male Reproductive Development, Environmental Health Perspectives, December 2003, Vol 111, Number 16). It was primarily a health-based epidemiological study and the only one of its kind. Unfortunately, when this report was brought to the notice of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation, they setup a committee under Dr. O.P Dubey , then Additional Director General of ICAR, which concluded that “there is no link between endosulfan and the health problems in Kasaragod”. Later it was revealed in unchallenged exposes by the science and environment magazine, *Down to Earth*, that their recommendations were based on manipulated and fraudulent reports and that their assumptions were completely erroneous (*Down to Earth*, April 15, 2004). Later it was also revealed that three members of this committee, including the member secretary, had dissented and that its conclusion was arrived at almost solely by the Chairman himself. (*Down to Earth*, August 15, 2005). The irony is that this committee had also invited two members of the Endosulfan manufacturing companies to be in the panel and together they decided that Endosulfan be absolved of its crime. Subsequent to this the issue was again looked in by another committee under Dr C D Mayee, an agriculture scientist. Here also, health experts were missing and the impacted people were not heard and the committee concluded that there is no health issues linked with endosulfan. It seems that the officials of the Agriculture Ministry continues to rely on such unscientific reports, which I believe is the reason why even the Minister of State seems to have been misled.

I now also understand that the Ministry is setting up a fresh committee to study the issue. This comes as a shock to many of us in Kerala. Various reports including the NIOH report and the Dr Sivaraman Committee report setup by the Govt of Kerala had very clearly established the cause and the intensity of the health problems. Moreover, even a casual visit to the villages will reveal hundreds of suffering families, with various congenital and sometimes even incurable diseases, even today, a decade after the spraying was stopped. These families are living documents of the impact that this pesticide can cause. So at this juncture, the people of Kasaragod feel this is adding insult to injury, which they have been suffering for decades. Hence it is not advisable to setup one more committee to study the issue. What is needed now is to provide immediate solace to the suffering families.

And lastly, even while handling the issue that is a legacy of some of our wrong doings in the past, we have to amend the regulatory systems of Insecticides management so that such incidences do not repeat. Here I wish to point out that like Endosulfan there are atleast 36 more chemicals that have been banned in many countries but continue to be used in India. Similarly, some of these pesticides cannot be used in certain areas, where there is ecological fragility or where people are more vulnerable. The present Insecticides Act 1968 and the Insecticides Rules 1971, has no provisions to address such issues.

From what I understand there is a new Bill being placed in the Parliament – called the Pesticides Management Bill 2008. This Bill is supposed to address such issues. But I doubt it in all earnest, because as I understand from an initial reading of the Bill, it addresses the issue of spurious pesticides but does not help eliminating or phasing out those pesticides that have high toxicity and should be gradually phased out for the sake of larger public good and to make our people, food and environment safe.

This Bill also does not give any power to the States that need to regulate or stop the use of certain pesticides, such as endosulfan, due to possible issues that can affect their peculiar and local conditions. Since, Agriculture is a State subject, giving powers to States to regulate pesticide use is

also a matter of administrative logic and should be brought into the Bill. The Bill should also ensure that an independent, credible and scientifically sound mechanism consisting of experts in the field of Health, Environment, Biodiversity, Social Welfare and Agriculture be setup under the Act to review decisions of the Pesticide Board, if need be.

Hence, I wish to reiterate the following requests

1. That India should correct its position in the Stockholm Convention and support the decision for a global ban on Endosulfan.
2. That the Government of India should ban the manufacture, sale and use of endosulfan in the country.
3. To immediately provide a special package to be implemented jointly by the Central and State Governments to compensate, remediate and rehabilitate, including for livelihood of the victims as well as their dependents in the endosulfan tragedy in Kasaragod.
4. That adequate provisions should be provided in the Pesticide Management Bill 2008 for State Governments to be able to ban pesticides, unsuitable for use in local conditions.
5. That the Pesticide Management Bill 2008 should also setup a Permanent Tribunal with authority to decide on the claims of compensation, remediation and rehabilitation of victims of pesticide contamination and poisoning, including endosulfan

I hope in sincerity that that you would take up this matter. While it is a matter that affects not only our responsibility to the people of Kasaragod and to the larger safety of the people of India as well as to our environment, we must also act in the larger global interest. Here I would just want to point out to you that the growth of alternatives like Non-Pesticidal Management (NPM) as demonstrated in the Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA) programme in Andhra Pradesh and now taken up on a country wide scale by the Rural Development Ministry are gaining more and more popularity and we must use this opportunity to effectively reduce and eventually eliminate the toxic pesticides and make our food and environment the safest in the world.

I request you to kindly take urgent steps in this matter.

Thanking you

with respectful regards



V M Sudheeran