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International POPs Elimination Project

*Fostering Active and Efficient Civil Society Participation in
Preparation for Implementation of the Stockholm Convention*

Celebration of the Global Anti-POPs Day in Benin



**Organisation des Femmes pour la Gestion de l'Énergie,
de l'Environnement et la Promotion du Développement
intégré (OFEDI)**

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About the International POPs Elimination Project

On May 1, 2004, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN <http://www.ipen.org>) began a global NGO project called the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided core funding for the project.

IPEP has three principal objectives:

- Encourage and enable NGOs in 40 developing and transitional countries to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention;
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process;
- Help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all regions of the world in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

IPEP will support preparation of reports on country situation, hotspots, policy briefs, and regional activities. Three principal types of activities will be supported by IPEP: participation in the National Implementation Plan, training and awareness workshops, and public information and awareness campaigns.

For more information, please see <http://www.ipen.org>

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This report is available in the following languages: English and full report in French

I – Introduction

In the framework of the celebration of the Global Anti-POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) Day of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), a press conference was organised by the women's NGO, OFEDI (Women's Organisation for the Management of Energy, the Environment and the Promotion of Integrated Development). OFEDI is an NGO which has been investing in the protection of the environment and in particular in the fight against POPs since 2004. The goal of the press conference was to inform journalists (a very important link for the popularisation of information) and the public on the dangers linked to the manipulation of these dangerous products. Three objectives were sought by this press conference:

- to make aware journalists of the written press and the public of the Stockholm Convention which regulates POPs and its objectives
- to inform the public on the effects of POPs on human health and the environment
- and finally to make them aware of the alternative solutions to the use of POPs.

2 – The debates

Several press bodies were represented at this press conference. All of the questions which contributed to the animated debate came from these journalists. The questions are as follows:

- 1 - What strategy is foreseen to remove these dangerous products from our environment?
- 2 – Can we have an idea of the quantities of POPs in Benin?
- 3 – Does Benin have a crackdown legislation on POPs?
- 4 – Don't the alternative solutions proposed bring about extra costs which are difficult to meet for the people?
- 5 – Should we review the awareness-raising strategy since even in Cotonou very few people are aware of the existence of these dangerous products?

Some approaches for solutions were suggested in response to these questions by the contributors. It was clearly signalled that we are at the first global POPs day. Concerning the removal of POPs from our environment, it was clearly specified that the convention is relatively young and that at the present time we are trying our best so that the world be informed of the existence of such dangerous products. We must also point out that the removal of POP stocks will be carried out progressively.

At the present time we are not able to quantify the POPs. The inventories carried out are not exhaustive. They take into account the existence or not of POPs in different areas of Benin. Quantification is not easy and is even more difficult in the vast informal system. Moreover, the people are not always available to provide reliable information due to fear of sanctions. This is the case for women in Tchaourou who protect yam pods for 6 months with a product which we cannot identify up to present and which they hide. However, the quantification of POPs is a great worry for the Ministry of the Environment of the Habitat and Town Planning (MEHU).

The law forbidding the use of certain products in Benin has been in existence for a long time. Since 1993 for example, the plants protection service has forbidden the use of DDT. All the ministers are currently represented by a kind of committee in which there is a synergy in terms of legislation managing chemical products. The Stockholm Convention has just reinforced these existing laws.

The costs engendered by the alternative solutions are easily bearable for the farmers if they can assess the costs linked to the exposure to pesticides. They take into account all that they earn when for example the costs linked to illnesses caused by POPs are added up. You cannot put a price on health. We must therefore focus in particular on awareness-raising.

3 - Conclusion

In terms of this press conference, the journalists and heads of NGOs recognised that POPs are so dangerous that to not speak about them to everyone would be a crime against humanity. The present conference comes at a specific time. In the framework of the popularisation work, which is from now on their area, they have spontaneously claimed that the OFEDI gives them documents and other communication materials so that they can make aware the general public.