

HRW urges Brazilian lawmakers to reject new pesticide law

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Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Friday called on Brazilian lawmakers to reject a proposed law to relax regulations on the use of pesticides as it published a report blaming powerful landowners for the poisoning of rural residents.

"Rather than weakening its law further, Brazil urgently needs a plan to reduce its use of highly hazardous pesticides," Richard Pearhouse, the report's author, told AFP.

HRW's investigation examined cases of acute [poisoning](#) from [pesticide drift](#) in seven sites across Brazil.

It found that people in many exposed communities fear reprisals from wealthy and politically powerful landowners who operate in relative impunity.

"Across rural Brazil, pesticides sprayed on large plantations are poisoning villagers in their backyards and children in their classrooms," said Pearhouse, adding "people who denounce pesticide poisonings fear threats and retaliations if they speak up."

"The authorities need to stop this toxic exposure and ensure people who denounce pesticide policies are kept safe," he said.

Dubbed the "poison law" by its detractors, the bill was drafted by current Agriculture Minister Blairo Maggi, who is also an agri-food magnate,

when he was a senator.

The text was adopted at the end of June by a special parliamentary committee, and must now go before the legislature's lower house.

It calls for shifting the task of certifying pesticides from the health and environment ministries to the agriculture ministry. It also replaces the word "pesticide" with "phytosanitary product."

A leading agricultural power, Brazil has been the world's biggest user of pesticides since 2008, according to the Brazilian Association of Collective Health.

According to Pearhouse, four of the 10 most used pesticides in Brazil are banned in Europe. HRW's report also criticized the lack of reliable official data on poisonings.

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