



PFAS: UN experts call out the French government and two chemical companies for human rights violations against residents of the French Chemical Valley

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Press release from the association Notre Affaire à Tous

On Tuesday, May 12, 2026, the French government, along with the companies Arkema France and Daikin Chemicals, were officially alleged to have violated several human rights of residents of the French Chemical Valley, a PFAS contamination hot spot located south of Lyon. This marks the first time in France that United Nations representatives have condemned the management of PFAS, as well as the first time the government's role in this pollution has been officially called into question.

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and toxic substances, Dr. Marcos Orellana, appointed by the UN Human Rights Committee, was alerted by the association *Notre Affaire à Tous* in July 2025. In a 38-page letter, drafted with the assistance of the Sciences Po law clinic, the association had drawn attention to the numerous human rights violations suffered by residents of the French Chemical Valley due to the high levels of PFAS contamination in their area: the rights to life, health, a healthy environment, respect for privacy, family, and the home, to water and food, to information, to participation, as well as the precautionary principle. Several testimonies from affected residents, appended to the referral, illustrate these violations.

Notre Affaire à Tous also highlighted the legal obligations incumbent upon these two PFAS-producing companies as well as the State, and the breaches of these obligations for which these three parties are respectively responsible. The association made various prioritized requests to the companies as well as to the State.

“By failing to monitor and limit their emissions of PFAS molecules into the environment, the two industrial companies participated in the widespread contamination of the Chemical Valley’s inhabitants, increasing their likelihood to develop PFAS-related diseases. [...] [Furthermore,] French public authorities have been aware for approximately, and at least, fifteen years of the presence of PFAS in the environment and of a high concentration of these substances in the vicinity of the industrial sites that synthesize or use them, including within the Chemical Valley. Moreover, although the toxicity of PFAS is a complex issue that has taken scientists a long time to confirm, the public authorities were informed as early as 2008 of the possible effects of these substances on human health, which should have prompted them to apply the precautionary principle. Yet they waited until 2022 to take concrete measures to attenuate PFAS pollution and lower the limits, and these measures are still insufficient today. [...] This delay in taking appropriate measures [...] resulted in dangerous PFAS emissions into the ecosystems, incoherent with the state of scientific knowledge, and prevented the population from being aware of this contamination.” - Letter from Notre Affaire à Tous, July 30, 2025.

On Tuesday, May 12, **four United Nations Special Rapporteurs** - on toxic substances (Dr. Marcos Orellana), on the environment (Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño), on water and sanitation (Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo), and on food (Mr. Michael Fakhri) - **as well as the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights** who, after reviewing the situation, sent “letters of allegation”

regarding human rights violations to Arkema France, Daikin Chemicals, and the French government, made public on May 12, 2026.

“We express our deepest concern regarding the adverse human rights impacts of the activities of Arkema France and Daikin Chemicals France on the affected populations in the Rhône, Loire, and Isère departments. [...]

It is particularly concerning that the high concentrations of PFAS detected near these companies’ industrial sites expose residents and workers to increased risks of developing certain serious illnesses, such as cardiovascular, endocrine, respiratory, and digestive disorders. The results of blood tests conducted on the affected population reinforce these concerns, highlighting the negative impact that the consumption of contaminated water and food can have on the rights of the region’s residents to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and to life, among others.

Furthermore, the widespread, severe, and persistent PFAS contamination in the Chemical Valley raises concerns regarding the government’s [...] implementation of its obligations under international human rights law, particularly those to protect against violations committed by companies on its territory and/or under its jurisdiction. It is concerning that French public authorities did not promptly apply the precautionary principle and take concrete and appropriate decisions in a timely manner to adequately regulate, prevent, and mitigate PFAS emissions, given the extensive scientific knowledge regarding their toxicity. [...]

It appears that no rigorous monitoring system was put in place in time to detect and report levels of contamination in water, soil, and air. This failure has contributed to the persistence and worsening of PFAS pollution in the Chemical Valley.”

According to Jérémie Suissa, Executive Director of Notre Affaire à Tous: “This statement by the United Nations on the PFAS scandal in France marks a historic milestone in our fight, and represents an essential institutional and symbolic recognition for the residents and workers who are victims of this pollution. PFAS represent a human rights crisis that calls for a genuine change in the governance of chemicals in order to stop the contamination of our territories and apply the polluter-pays principle. It is time for the government to take back its responsibilities and properly regulate the industries that have demonstrated their inability to self-regulate without threatening health and the environment.”

Moreover, the French Chemical Valley is not the only hot spot for PFAS contamination: France is said to have no fewer than 108 such sites, and Europe more than 2,300. These are all areas where the human rights of residents and workers are similarly endangered by these forever chemicals.

Finally, *Notre Affaire à Tous* points out that PFAS contamination is made possible by a broader ecosystem of actors than just the manufacturing companies and public authorities. **Starting tomorrow, the association will officially reach out to other actors involved in this contamination - companies that use these substances, industrial lobbies, financial institutions, and insurance companies - to inform them of the United Nations’ statement and urge them to take immediate action against PFAS.**

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