

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release – 27th June 2007

Joint Press Release by EcoNexus, Biofuelwatch, Corporate Europe Observatory

Groups from around the world call for a moratorium on EU incentives for biofuels from large-scale monocultures

BRUSSELS 27 June 2007 – Today, more than 30 groups from around the world are calling for a Moratorium to stop the EU rush for biofuels (or agrofuels^{*}). They warn that agrofuel production for EU markets will accelerate climate change, destroy biodiversity and uproot local communities. The signatories are visiting Brussels on 26 and 27 June to inform the European Parliament about their concerns about the impact of agrofuels on local communities, biodiversity and climate. They are sceptical about the capacity of certification projects currently being drafted in the EU to prevent any of this damage.

In March 2007, EU Heads of States decided in favour of a 10% agrofuel target by 2020. The European Commission have made it clear that they expect a large proportion of those agrofuels to come from palm oil, soya and sugar cane from the global South. Producing the full amount in Europe would require up to 50% of EU farm land. The current EU target of 5.75% by 2010 has already stimulated large-scale monoculture expansion and caused damage to tropical and sub-tropical forests, grasslands, the peatlands of South-east Asia, and to large numbers of communities. The 10% target is creating a further impetus for big projects for infrastructure and production in the global South, where most of the crops to produce agrofuels would have to be planted. Indonesia alone is planning 20 million more hectares of oil palm plantations in order to meet future agrofuel demand (tinyurl.com/33lb7r). Much of this expansion is expected to happen at the expense of community lands, peatlands and forests.

Nina Holland from Corporate Europe Observatory states: “The Heads of States made it clear that sustainable sourcing of agrofuels should be a precondition for targets. There are no proposals at all which would guarantee sustainability. The European Commission have suggested ‘standards’ which would allow biofuels from plantations from which communities have been forcibly evicted to be classed as ‘sustainable’, and they will not address large-scale rainforest destruction from the displacement of other types of agriculture by monoculture plantations. In the absence of any guarantees of sustainable sourcing we need a moratorium on agrofuel support, incentives and imports”.

Almuth Ernsting from Biofuelwatch adds: “Far from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Europe’s biofuel policy threatens to accelerate global warming by destroying tropical and sub-tropical forests and peatlands, which are amongst the world’s most important carbon sinks. Even in Europe, large amounts of nitrous oxide is released as more fertilisers are being used to grow agrofuels, and our biodiversity suffers as set-asides are to be abolished. Europe’s car industry has used biofuels as a means of avoiding strict fuel efficiency standards which are essential for reducing carbon emissions. If we want to have any hope of avoiding the worst impacts of climate change then we need drastic cuts in fuel use in Europe – not grain and oil crops grown in vast monocultures for European cars”.

Contacts:

Almuth Ernsting, Biofuelwatch, 0044-1224-324797 (mornings and evenings) or 0044-1224-553195 (afternoons)

Deepak Rughani, Biofuelwatch, 0044-7931-636337 (any time)

Nina Holland, Corporate Europe Observatory, 0031-630285042 (any time)

* agrofuels: liquid fuels made from biomass which consists of crops and trees grown specifically for that purpose on a large scale.

Notes:

1. The moratorium document may be found at www.econexus.info. Signatories to date include key groups from around the world such as GRAIN, Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific and The Rural Reflection Group, Argentina, plus European Groups such as Corner House, FERN and Rettet den Regenwald, This document is now being released worldwide for more signatures.

2. Expansion of agrofuel monocultures is already causing forest destruction in many countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The fast growing demand for agrofuels is driving up world market prices for crops such as palm oil, soya, sugar cane, maize and jatropha and rising prices give companies an incentive to expand plantations. Further deforestation could bring the Amazon rainforest to the point of collapse, with grave implications for the region and for global climate stability and rainfall. As Peter Bunyard writes:

“In conclusion, it is becoming increasingly clear that we perturb climate, not simply because of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning, but also because ecosystems such as those of the Amazon Basin play a massive role in the transport of energy from the equator to the more temperate regions of the planet. Our climate system, with its particular prevailing weather patterns, needs those energy transfers. Consequently, we must do all in our power to prevent agro-industrial enterprises ... from destroying anymore of the Amazonian tropical rainforests.”

Peter Bunyard. 2007. Climate and the Amazon. In: Surviving the Century: Facing Climate Chaos and Other Global Challenges edited by Herbie Girardet, Earthscan

3. Monoculture plantations, including for agrofuels, cause people to be driven off their land, as this declaration from Paraguay confirms:

“...the expansion of monocultural “green deserts”, such as large scale soy production, non-native grasses and exotic trees, promotes and increases a mechanized agriculture without small farmers; without people. All monocultures are damaging to the ecosystems they supplant; they cause poverty, unemployment and the eviction and exodus of communities in rural areas. They destroy biological and agricultural diversity, poison water sources and the soil and undermine the food security and sovereignty of the people and their countries.”

The Development Model for Soy in Paraguay- Irresponsible, Unsustainable and Anti-Democratic, Asuncion, August 2006, <http://www.wervel.be/content/view/663/310/>

4. The impact of oil palm monocultures on local communities is already serious:

“It’s as if we were ghosts on our own land. We have been so pierced through by the spines of the oil palm that we are almost dead, left haunting what was once our own land. We don’t usually say this, but this is how it is really. We need to make our case ourselves and explain how the oil palm is hurting us.”

Workshop participant RSPO Smallholder Taskforce, Bodok, Sanggau, West Kalimantan, 7 June 2006 “Ghosts on Our Own Land” by Forest Peoples Programme and Sawit Watch, http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/prv_sector/oil_palm/oil_palm_press_rel_indonesia_nov06_eng.shtml

5. Twenty-nine South African organisations responded to their government’s Draft Biofuels Industrial Strategy by saying:

“...deals have already been struck for large- scale plants to export Biofuels to the European Union. In the process rural farming communities are coerced into signing over their land for a pittance for industrial plantations of canola, maize and soya.”

Rural communities express dismay – “land grabs” fuelled by Biofuels Strategy, March 2007, signed by 29 South African organizations, see <http://www.stuffedandstarved.org/drupal/node/145>