

Press Release
For immediate release
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Hundreds of NGOs and thousands of individuals call on the EU Leaders Summit to say NO to biofuel targets

On Thursday and Friday this week, the EU Summit will decide whether to endorse plans for high mandatory biofuel targets. Over 230 organisations and prominent individuals from across the world have asked European politicians to say no to biofuel targets [<http://tinyurl.com/2vgtke>]. Over the last ten days, more than 7,000 European citizens have emailed heads of states and ministers with the same message (see attached letter to Heads of State).

Almuth Ernsting of Biofuelwatch says: *“If the EU Summit says yes to mandatory biofuel targets, they will be giving the green light to plans to convert millions of hectares of rainforest, grasslands and traditional farmland across Latin America, Asia and Africa into biofuel monocultures. This will be a disaster for forests, for the climate, for local communities, and for food security. The greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation, peat drainage and from intensive agriculture will far outweigh any apparent carbon savings from using less fossil fuels. Far from slowing down global warming, biofuel targets are set to accelerate it.”*

NASA have just published evidence that 2006 saw the second worst fire season on record in Indonesia. The only worse season was 1997/98, when carbon emissions from those fires were as high as 40% of global emissions from fossil fuel burning that year. Peat drainage and land clearance by plantation owners are the main causes of those fires. Annual emissions from Indonesia’s peatlands far exceed all the emission savings which the Kyoto Protocol sets out to make globally from 1990 levels. The Indonesian government is now planning to convert another 20 million hectares to oil palm plantations, which will probably spell the end for most of South-east Asia’s remaining rainforests and peatlands [<http://tinyurl.com/33lb7r>]. Those plans are a direct response to Europe’s biofuel plans. This could double Indonesia’s carbon emissions – yet Europe classes palm oil biodiesel as carbon neutral, simply because the emissions are taking place outside Europe.

A recent study by Wetlands International, Delft Hydraulics and Alterra showed that producing one tonne of biodiesel from palm oil from South-east Asia’s peatlands is linked to the emission of 10-30 tonnes of CO₂ [<http://tinyurl.com/3cqjhr>]. Total emissions linked to a tonne of palm oil biodiesel from South-east Asia are estimated to be 2-8 times as much as from the equivalent of fossil fuel diesel [<http://tinyurl.com/2q2lwl>].

Biodiversity losses, human rights abuses and high food prices have all been linked to biofuel production. Stella Semino, member of the Grupo de Reflexion Rural in Argentina, says: *“The impact of soybean monocultures in the South America region has already been devastating. The expansion has been, and still is, at the expense of ancient*

forests and other biodiverse ecosystems. Rural communities are forced off their lands and into cities, either by violent means, or due to the loss of their traditional food production. Soybeans require large amounts of pesticides and fertilizers resulting in massive topsoil erosion, surface and groundwater pollution and harm to people's and animal's health. Europe's growing demand for biofuels will exacerbate the problem further, as soybean cultivation becomes more lucrative. Pressure to introduce other crops for ethanol production will push the agrarian borders even further into the forests. If the EU fuel obligations are imposed, the resulting expansion of intensive agriculture will create ecological and social havoc across Latin America".

Soya prices are expected to rise, not just because of greater demand for soya biodiesel, but also because other vegetable oils are increasingly used for biodiesel and because US farmers are increasingly switching from soya to corn for ethanol, thus pushing up the market price for soya.

The Open Letter is calling for strong measures which will reduce Europe's greenhouse gas emissions – not biofuel targets, but real cuts in energy and fuel use, and support for truly renewable forms of energy, like wind and solar power. As ethanol demand grows, higher world corn prices will also provide an incentive for countries like Brazil and Argentina to expand their corn production, thus putting further pressure on land and ecosystems.

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Joint Press Release from:

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GRR Argentina : <http://www.grr.org.ar>
Biofuelwatch : <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk>
Watch Indonesia : <http://home.snafu.de/watchin/Index-engl.htm>

Further Notes:

1. In November 2006, more than 100 groups from and individuals from across the world submitted a petition entitled 'Biofuels: A Disaster in the Making' to the United Nations
[http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/CCC/Nairobi/Disaster_Making.html] .

2. In January 2007, hundreds of Latin American groups which are part of five large networks wrote to the EU do demand ‘We Want Food Not Biofuels’ [<http://tinyurl.com/26ed49>].
 3. The Indonesian NGO Sawit Watch submitted their own declaration to the EU warning “Palm oil for biofuels increases social conflicts and undermines land reform in Indonesia’.
 4. For evidence that global oilseed demand is growing rapidly and pushing soya expansion in South America, see <http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/j8126e/j8126e05.htm>
 5. For evidence that the rate of deforestation in the Amazon correlates with the price of soya, see <http://news.mongabay.com/2006/0919-amazon.html>
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As sent by over 7000 people from <http://www.regenwald.org/>

Dear Head of State or Minister,

At the EU Summit on 8th/9th March, you will be asked to support proposals for mandatory biofuel targets of 10% by 2010. I urge you not to support these proposals, and use any veto that you can to prevent the proposals becoming mandatory across the EU. Reasons for not supporting a mandatory EU biofuel target are given below.

Large opposition from civil society in the global South

Well over 200 organisations from North and South have signed an Open Letter (available at web address: <http://tinyurl.com/2vgtke>) to call on the EU to abandon biofuel targets, because of the serious threats not just to the climate and rainforests, but also to food security, human and land rights and biodiversity. Recently the poor in Mexico have seen staple food prices rise steeply leading to civil unrest because of US ethanol production, and world grain reserves are now at their lowest level for over twenty years. Rising food prices and diverting land from food to ‘energy crop’ production undermine the EU’s commitments with regard to the UN Millennium Goals. Please read this Open Letter that represents million of people from the Southern nations.

Biofuels are not a proven technology for climate change mitigation

The energy and carbon saving balances of biofuels are disputed by experts. Most studies are flawed in not covered the full production life-cycle and produce over optimistic estimates of gains. An increasing number of reports, looking at the full lifecycle, show the savings for carbon emissions to be minimal or even negative. Biofuels are then diluted with conventional fossil fuels to create the final blend at the pump – any minimal savings are further diluted. For example with 5.75% of biofuel in the blend, a raw biofuel saving of 17% of carbon emissions will be reduced to less than 1% in the fuel sold/dispensed at the pump. A study done for the European Commission in 2002 found that converting all 5.6 million hectares of set-asides to the highest-yield energy crops

could reduce the EU's emissions by no more than 0.3%, whilst having a devastating impact on biodiversity.

EU imports of energy crops from tropical nations threatens the global climate

The EU doesn't have the capacity to grow sufficient crops to meet a 10% target within Europe, and proposes to import crops from tropical countries where production is known to damage rainforests, peatlands and other ecosystems. The proposals before the EU Summit will do nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but will instead threaten to further accelerate global warming by speeding up the destruction of tropical rainforests that are crucial in regulating the global climate.

Indonesia's biofuel plans, linked directly to Europe's policy, are set to expand Palm Oil production 43-fold (see report available at: <http://tinyurl.com/33lb7r>) and destroy 20million hectares of rainforest. If you allow this expansion to happen, most of that country's remaining rainforests and peatlands would be destroyed, releasing up to 50 billion tonnes of carbon. This is the equivalent of over six years of global fossil fuel burning and could well be enough to push us beyond the 2°C warming which the EU are officially committed to avoid.

A recent TV news item on the UK Channel 4 network explained how drained peatlands create these absolutely massive carbon emissions that add significantly to the global total of carbon in the atmosphere and hence contribute to climate change. The video clip uses simple graphics to explain these issues very clearly, and may be viewed at : <http://tinyurl.com/yv3bj7>. Please view this news clip that clearly shows the risks to the global climate from mass-scale biofuels production in the tropics.

Devastating for biodiversity

Within Europe, biofuel plans require the abolition of compulsory set-asides. The European Environment Agency has warned that this will seriously reduce biodiversity in Europe. Many bird and insect species now only survive because of set-asides. Many of the pollinators are already in steep decline, and a further increase in intensive agriculture across Europe could have a disastrous impacts on those species on which much of agriculture depends. Habitat loss and intensive agriculture are amongst the main drivers of biodiversity losses worldwide, and Europe's biofuel plans are likely to drastically reduce biodiversity not just here but across the global South. Those plans will make it impossible for the EU to achieve its goal of ending biodiversity losses by 2010.

Second generation biofuels will be too late and not acceptable to consumers

Second generation biofuels based on ligno-cellulosic technology are still at the research stage and do not yet offer a viable commercial route to meeting the EU Biofuels target for 2020 either. These fuels are likely to be based on genetic engineering technology, both in the crops and their processing. The biotech industry hopes that consumers will accept GE food and feed crops when and if they are used for biofuels. However, it is unlikely that European consumers will accept the wide risks associated with GM technology and the potential threat of contamination to European food crops and biodiversity.

Biofuels should not be used to trade for reduced car emission standards

The EU Energy strategy from the Commissioners in January called for car manufacturers to make innovative gains in fuel efficiency. This was a good policy - stringent emission standards are one of the key measures needed to tackle transport emissions! I was shocked to learn that the industry has been lobbying the EU for higher biofuel targets to avoid making these stringent, but perfectly realistic, gains in fuel efficiency that would save significant carbon emissions. For every additional gram of carbon dioxide that European cars are allowed to emit per kilometer, hundreds of thousands of hectares of energy crop monocultures and grasslands will displace virgin rainforest, peatlands and indigenous croplands in the tropics, releasing massive additional CO2 emissions.

Strong demand reduction measures are needed in the EU transport sector

Europe needs strong measures that will truly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions: targets to increase energy efficiency, including in the transport sector, and significant reductions in overall energy use, plus policies which promote clean, decentralised and renewable energies, such as wind and solar power.

Your support against the EU Biofuels targets is essential to protect the South and future climate stability

I strongly hope that you will stand up against lobbying from both the car industry and biotech companies, and speak against EU Biofuels targets. **This is the right decision for stabilising the climate, the global environment and the needs of those local communities the global South, whose livelihoods and food security are threatened by expanding biofuel monocultures.**

Your veto of the biofuel target at the EU Summit will be crucial not just for the future of South-east Asia's rainforests and peatlands, and for the future of forests throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also, critically, for the future stability of the climate.

Yours