

Biofuels: A Disaster in the Making *

The undersigned NGOs, Indigenous Peoples Organizations, farmer's movements and individuals call upon the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change to immediately suspend all subsidies and other forms of inequitable support for the import and export of biofuels.

We recognize that the local production and consumption of biomass plays an important role in sustainable livelihood strategies of, in particular, rural women in developing countries. Certain small-scale and strictly regulated sustainable forms of biofuel production can be beneficial at the national level. However, the modalities of biomass consumption and production must be carefully analyzed in conjunction with communities, to introduce adaptive measures that will maintain and enhance the patterns of sustainability, while avoiding negative impacts on health and the adverse effects inherent to increases in demand or changes in socioeconomic settings. Solar energy often offers a sustainable alternative to traditional biomass.

Meanwhile, international trade in biofuels is already causing a negative impact on food sovereignty, rural livelihoods, forests and other ecosystems, and these negative impacts are expected to accumulate rapidly. Large-scale, export-oriented production of biofuel requires large-scale monocultures of trees, sugarcane, corn, oilpalm, soy and other crops. These monocultures already form the number one cause of rural depopulation and deforestation worldwide. The rapidly increasing demand for these crops as a source of biofuel will lead to:

- increased land competition leading to further land concentration, the marginalization of small-scale agriculture and the widespread conversion of forests and other ecosystems;
- arable land that is currently used to grow food being used to grow fuel, leading to staggering food prices and causing hunger, malnutrition and impoverishment amongst the poorest sectors of society;
- rural unemployment and depopulation;
- the destruction of the traditions, cultures, languages and spiritual values of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities;
- the extensive use of agro-chemicals, which deteriorate human health and ecosystems
- the destruction of watersheds and the pollution of rivers, lakes and streams;
- droughts and other local and regional climatic extremes; and
- the extensive use of genetically modified organisms leading to unprecedented risks.

These effects will have particularly a negative impact on women and Indigenous Peoples, who are economically marginalized and more dependent on natural resources like water and forests.

Biofuels are a disaster in the making. Existing legally binding standards, regulations and enforcement mechanisms in the (potential) production countries are absolutely insufficient to prevent the above-mentioned impacts. International demand for biofuels is already surpassing supply in key countries like Malaysia and Brazil, giving an important push to the expansion of destructive crops like oil palm and sugar cane. Initiatives to produce these monocultures "responsibly" are rejected by many NGOs and social movements in the production countries themselves, who have emphasized that the above-mentioned negative social and environmental impacts are inherent to the large-scale production of monocultures.

There is nothing green or sustainable to imported or exported biofuel. Instead of destroying the lands and livelihoods of local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the South through yet another form of colonialism, we call upon Northern countries to recognize their responsibility for destroying the planet's climate system, to reduce their energy consumption to sustainable levels, to pay the climate debt they have created by failing to do so until now and to dramatically increase investment in solar energy and sustainable wind energy.

We also call upon all governments to develop and effectively enforce environmental and social standards and regulations that ensure that national biofuel production industries do not destroy the livelihoods and ecosystems of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Corporations should be held strictly liable for any social and environmental damage that has occurred and they should be effectively prosecuted if they do not uphold environmental and labor laws.

* The paper was prepared by the Global Forest Coalition

Signed (as of 1 Dec 2006):

Acción Ecológica, Ecuador
AG-Genfrei der Grünen Jugend Bayern, Germany
Agrarian group of ATTAC in Wuppertal, Germany
Amigo di Tera / FoE Curaçao
Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Aikya Vedika, India
Anthra, India
ASEED Europe
Asociación Indígena Ambiental, Panama
ATPNE/Friends of the Earth-Tunisia
Bezirksverband der Grünen Jugend Unterfranken, Germany
Bhartiya Kissan Union
Big Scrub Environment Centre, Australia
Biowatch, South Africa
Blue Planet Project
CELCOR-Friends of the Earth Papua New Guinea
CENSAT Agua Viva/Friends of the Earth-Colombia
Centinela, Venezuela
Centre International d'Etudes Forestières et Environnementales, Cameroon
CESTA/Friends of the Earth-El Salvador
Climate Change Action Network, Australia
Consejo Indígena Mesoamericano - CIMA
CORE, India
Corporate Europe Observatory
Costa Carrera, Chile
Ecological Society of the Philippines
Edmonton Friends of the North Environmental Society
Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Nigeria
Ethnic Minority and Indigenous Rights Organisation of Africa
FASE-ES, Brazil
Federación Amigos de la Tierra-Argentina
First Nations Environmental Network, Canada
FOAG/COICA-France
Forest Peoples Programme, UK
Friends of the Earth- Ghana
Friends of the Earth-Australia
Friends of the Earth-Finland
Friends of the Earth-Latin America and the Caribbean
Friends of the Earth-Nepal
Friends of the Earth-Slovakia
Friends of the Earth-Western Australia
Friends of the Oldman River, Canada
Fundacion Ambiente Total del Chaco, Argentina
Fundacion para la Promocion del Conocimiento Indigena, Panama
Galesa Environment Conservation Organisation, Kenya
Genethics Foundation
Global Forest Coalition
Global Justice Ecology Project
GM Watch
Greenpeace Jugend-Munchen
Groundwork/ Friends of the Earth-South Africa
Grupo de Reflexion Rural, Argentina
ICTI, Indonesia
Indigenous Nationalities International centre for development, Nepal
Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee - East Africa
Institute of Cultural Affairs, Ghana
Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo, Ecuador
Inter-Mountain Peoples'Education and Culture in Thaliand Association, Thailand

International alliance of Indigenous and Tribal People of the Tropical Forest
IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
KEPS/HKCA, Pakistan
Lewis District Green Party
LIFE e.V./genanet – Focal Point Gender, Environment, Sustainability, Germany
Lismore Climate Action Group, Australia
Maudesco/Friends of the Earth-Mauritius
Movimiento Madre Tierra/Amigos de la Tierra-Honduras
Munlochy Vigil, Scotland
Namanga Urban Community Environmental Group, Kenya
National Society for Conservationists/Friends of the Earth-Hungary
NOAH/Friends of the Earth-Denmark
Oilwatch
Onehemisphere, Sweden
Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition
Pacific Institute of Resource Management, New Zealand
Pembina Institute
PENGON/ Friends of the Earth-Palestine
Prakuyo Community, Tanzania
Progressio, UK
Rainforest Action Network
Rainforest Information Centre, Australia
RAP-AL Colombia
RAPALMIRA
Red America Latina Libre de Transgenicos
REDES/ Friends of the Earth-Uruguay
Robin Wood, Germany
Safe Food Coalition, South Africa
SAM/Friends of the Earth Malaysia.
Sarhad Conservation Network, Pakistan
Simba Maasai Outreach Organisation, Kenya
Sobrevivencia/Friends of the Earth-Paraguay
South African Climate Action Network
The Sierra Clun, Prairie Chapter, USA
Timberwatch, South Africa
Veterinarios sin Fronteras, España
WALHI/Friends of the Earth-Indonesia
World Rainforest Movement
Worldforests, Scotland
XminY Solidarityfund, Netherlands
Yakshi , India

Individuals:

Rob Law,
Tom Lines,
James Porteous,
Anurag Modi /Shamim ,
Mangal Singh ,
Shramik Adivasi Sanghathana,
Gurudev Parisar,
Harda ,
Toyoyuki Kawakami,
Hidetoshi Imaizumi, Japan,
Paul Harris, Australia,
Stephan Groetschel, Germany,
Iris Altmann, Germany,
Rick Tanaka, Katoomba, Australia,
Danny Harvey