

Bali: Governments should say No to Biofuels

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MEDIA ADVISORY Friends of the Earth International

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GOVERNMENTS MUST SAY NO TO 'BIOFUELS'

BALI (INDONESIA) November 29, 2007 — Biofuels must not be promoted as a solution to climate change, Friends of the Earth International said today, just a few days before key United Nations climate change talks start in Bali, Indonesia.

The environmental group, speaking ahead of the 3-14 December Bali talks, warned that an increase in the use of biofuels – also widely known as agrofuels – would have disastrous social and environmental impacts. [1]

Agrofuels such as palm oil are set to be promoted as a major solution to climate change at the UN climate talks. The demand for agrofuels mainly

to fuel cars -mainly in over-consuming industrialised countries- is skyrocketing. Yet recent studies from around the world highlight that the agrofuels boom is having severe social and environmental impacts. [2]

Forests are being cut down and Indigenous Peoples and forest dwelling communities are being displaced, often violently, from their territories to make way for agrofuels plantations run by multinational corporations that expropriate land and water resources.

Large areas of forest lands traditionally used by Indigenous Peoples have already been expropriated for monoculture plantations, for example for palm oil in Indonesia where it is estimated that 100 million people, of which 40 million are indigenous peoples, depend mainly on forests and natural resource goods and services.

Paradoxically, while agrofuels are being promoted as a solution to climate change, the draining of peat lands and cutting down of tropical forests for their cultivation is releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, far more than would be saved by resorting to agrofuels. [3]

Friends of the Earth International Climate Coordinator Joseph Zacune said:

“Governments must heed warnings from major agencies including the UN and the OECD and immediately act on the demands from civil society worldwide by rejecting agrofuels. From all over the world we are getting reports of the irreversible social and environmental damage being caused by agrofuels. We

cannot sit by and watch this global disaster unfold - the production, development and trade of agrofuels must be stopped.”

Farah Sofa, deputy director of WALHI/ Friends of the Earth Indonesia said:

“Ninety percent of palm oil - which is used in thousands of everyday products, from margarine and bread to lipstick and soap - comes from Indonesia and Malaysia. The palm oil industry has accelerated deforestation, driving Indigenous Peoples off their land. The demand for palm oil for agrofuel use could sound the death knell for our forests. What we need is a reduction of palm oil consumption, an end to its export, and forest conservation that respects Indigenous Peoples’ land rights.”

Meena Raman, Friends of the Earth International chair and Secretary of Friends of the Earth Malaysia said: “Agrofuels is a disaster in the making. Their production, development and trade largely stem from unsustainable energy demand in industrialised countries. We are strongly urging our government to re-consider its decision of turning Malaysia into a major agrofuel producing country as it is leading to further destruction of our forests and violations of the customary rights of Indigenous Peoples. We need Northern countries to develop stringent policies to reduce their energy consumption and attempt to find solutions to their energy needs locally.”

The promotion of agrofuels is causing massive environmental and social damage on all continents, including in the Americas.

Hildebrando Velez from Censat Agua Viva / Friends of the Earth Colombia

said:

“Agrofuels are being promoted as a solution to climate change, but they are just a way to avoid policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions at their source. The establishment of plantations for agrofuels is displacing entire communities and Indigenous peoples - simply to fill the tanks of cars. The price of corn, sugar and cooking oil is rising because of agrofuel production - undermining the capacity of people to feed themselves and increasing hunger. So not only is a country like Colombia suffering the adverse impacts of climate change itself, but it also suffers the adverse impacts of this false solution to climate change.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] More information is available in the Friends of the Earth international agrofuels declaration online at <http://www.foei.org/en/campaigns/climate/energy/agrofuels-declaration>

[2] Among the most recent prominent studies:

OECD Round Table on Sustainable Development: "Biofuels: Is the cure worse than the disease." September 2007 www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/3/39411732.pdf

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, stated that it is a crime against humanity to divert arable land to the production of crops which are then burned for fuel. Ziegler demanded an international five-year ban on producing biofuels to combat soaring food prices. Grant Ferrett, Biofuels 'crime against humanity'. BBC Online, 27 October 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7065061.stm>

[3] In the developing world, greenhouse gases emissions are mainly originated from agriculture and land use changes such as deforestation. For example, a recent report titled "Indonesia and Climate Change" and published by the World Bank and the British government, shows that deforestation puts Indonesia as the world's third largest emitter after the US and China. World Bank news release, "Carbon dioxide emissions on the rise", May 2007 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDATA/64199955-1178226923002/21326741/FINAL_PressReleaseLGBD2007.pdf

A study by Wetlands International, Delft Hydraulics and Alterra estimates that one tonne of biodiesel made from palm oil from South-east Asia's peatlands is linked to the emission of 10-30 tonnes of carbon dioxide. "Peat CO₂, Assessment of CO₂ emissions from drained peatlands in SE Asia", Hooijer, Silvius, Wösten and Page, 2006 <http://www.wetlands.org/publication.aspx?ID=51a80e5f-4479-4200-9be0-66f1aa9f9ca9>

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