

# Social and Environmental Groups Urge No Further Agrofuel Expansion, as Brazil hosts promotional conference

The government of Brazil is organising a high profile International Biofuels Conference between 17-21 November 2008, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. With over 1000 participants from national governments, international organisations, academia, business and civil society, the event aims at overcoming the growing scepticism surrounding agrofuels and at encouraging the expansion of their world market.

The European Commission and several EU Member States have been very supportive so far of the international trade in agrofuels. As part of the Renewable Energy Directive, the EU as a whole is proposing targets that will enable agrofuels to contribute 10% of Europe's transport energy needs by 2020. Countries like Sweden and the Netherlands have also been lobbying hard within the EU to lower the Union's import tariffs on ethanol in order to favour the import of Brazilian agrofuels. Sweden itself is temporarily reducing its import tax on ethanol to allow more Brazilian imports to flow into the European market.

Despite having been promoted as a "green" energy sources, agrofuels will not help in the fight against climate change, nor will they free Europe from its oil addiction. Recent evidence of the negative socio-economic and environmental impacts of agrofuels also raises questions about the sustainability of the commodity itself and of its trade. New evidence based on full life-cycle assessments of agrofuels' production indicate that agrofuels not only will fail to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but will lead to an increase in emissions altogether.<sup>1</sup> In particular:

## **1. Agrofuels will not solve energy problems in Europe**

Agrofuels are mixed with fossil fuels, and as such provide a way of delaying the search for proper alternatives to fossil fuels in Europe - detracting political attention from more effective solutions to the climate change challenge.

## **2. Agrofuels undermine people's right to food in developing countries**

As European demand for agrofuels will not be met through domestic production, international investors (including many from Europe) are seeking land, raw materials and labour in developing countries to grow agrofuel crops for exports.

Countries like India and the Philippines have already received massive investment from European companies keen to develop agrofuels crops, whilst countries in Latin America and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region are being targeted for their preferential trade routes (lower import tariffs) to Europe.

The conversion of arable and forest land into agrofuel plantations is leading to cases of "land grabbing" in these countries, where rural communities are denied their right to food by being forced off the land they depend on for self-subsistence. Moreover, as rural farmers switch from food crops to crops for fuels, their food security is traded away in favour of volatile financial investment and foreign market demand. The switching of arable land into crops for fuel has also been deemed partly

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<sup>1</sup> Searchinger, T., et al. (2008) "Use of US Croplands for Biofuels Increases Greenhouse Gases Through Emissions from Land-Use Change" in *Science*. March.

responsible for driving up food prices internationally with a resulting food crisis affecting millions of people around the world.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Agrofuels promote deforestation, agrichemical use and Genetically Modified crops**

Agrofuels are also directly responsible for deforestation in many countries, as land is cleared to make space for agrofuels' crop development. In the case of Brazil, the expansion of agrofuels is also causing soy plantations to be pushed into the Amazon, illustrating the "indirect" role that agrofuels can also play on forest decimation.

In addition to this environmental impact there is the increased use of pesticides and fertilisers involved in the production of agrofuels to bare in mind, as well as the additional environmental pressure that will be exerted as a result of Genetically Modified crops currently being developed for agrofuel use.

### **4. Sustainability standards are a smokescreen**

The European Council of Ministers and the European Parliament have promoted the introduction of criteria as a way of ensuring the "sustainability" of agrofuel production. However, their ability to prevent the social and environmental impacts that result from the expansion of monoculture plantations for agrofuels is questionable. The lack of strict monitoring mechanisms, the weakness of the benchmarks suggested, and the preference given to an industry's self-regulatory approach, suggests that the criteria will legitimise, rather than prevent, any social and environmental impacts of agrofuels.

## **Civil society calls for action**

Farmer organisations and social movements in Brazil oppose the expansion of industrial monocultures of sugarcane, soy, and palm oil for agrofuel production, as well as agrofuel production for export in their countries, because of the negative impacts on small-scale farmers and the environment.

The international peasant movement (Via Campesina) has called governments to introduce a five-year moratorium on agrofuels. Similar calls have also been issued by organisations in Africa, Australia , Argentina and Paraguay and the US to their respective governments.

More than 200 organisations and hundreds of individuals are already calling on the EU to introduce a moratorium on incentives for agrofuels, large-scale monocultures (including tree plantations), and imports of agrofuels from outside the EU.

The undersigned are also calling on the European Commission and Member States not to support expansion of agrofuel development at the International Biofuel Conference in Brazil between 17-21 November but to use the occasion to announce a major redrafting of EU energy policy to drop the biofuel target and focus on reducing consumption and increasing energy efficiency.

In particular, the undersigned oppose:

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<sup>2</sup> Ivanic, M., and Martin, W., (2008); 'Implications of Higher Global Food Prices for Poverty in Low-Income Countries'; *Policy Research Working Paper 4594*, Washington DC: World Bank.

- The lowering of import tariffs for agrofuels internationally, as this will only increase the international flow of agrofuels and the resulting social and environmental impacts;
- The promotion of cooperation agreements between Brazil and partnering countries aimed at facilitating international investment for agrofuels development, particularly in developing countries already proven by the global food crisis;
- The assumption that currently proposed sustainability criteria are adequate to guarantee the sustainability of agrofuels from large-scale plantations.

The undersigned

ASEED Europe

Basler Appell gegen Gentechnologie

Biofuelwatch

CENSAT Friends of the Earth Colombia

Corporate Europe Observatory

Grupo de Trabajo Suiza - Colombia (Arbeitsgruppe Schweiz Kolumbien)

Munlochy Vigil

RAPAL Uruguay

Rettet den Regenwald e. V.

The Soya Alliance

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