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Gambling with Gaia

On the Eve of the Release of UN Climate Change Report ETC Group Warns that US Government's Push for Geoengineering is Unacceptable

On the day before the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sounds its loudest alarm yet, ETC Group warns that some OECD states, led by the United States, are betting on a pie-in-the-sky techno-fix to address climate change. "Geoengineering" refers to the intentional, large-scale manipulation of the environment to bring about environmental change. With no hope for Kyoto, little political will to ask industry or voters to change lifestyles and a growing recognition that carbon trading is a farce, some governments are concluding that massive earth restructuring is the only way out. *The Guardian* reported earlier this week that the US government is lobbying the IPCC to promote geoengineering activities, such as deliberately polluting the stratosphere to deflect sunlight and lower temperatures.¹

The full text of ETC Group's report is available here:
<http://www.etcgroup.org/upload/publication/606/01/geoengineeringcomfeb0107.pdf>

"We already know that humans can geoengineer planet earth – that's why we have climate change," said Pat Mooney, Executive Director of ETC Group. "The notion that we can successfully correct our unintentional destructiveness with intentional geoengineering is ludicrous. For the governments who caused the problem to experiment together on geoengineering solutions – outside the UN and without the participation of the South who bear the brunt of global warming and would likely bear the risks of geoengineering – is a grave miscalculation," said Mooney.

According to ETC Group's 18-page report, "Gambling with Gaia," at least 9 national governments and the European Union have supported experiments to spread iron filings on the ocean surface to nurture plankton and sequester carbon dioxide. At least a dozen additional countries are involved in stratospheric weather/climate modification. Commercial carbon traders are engaging in ocean fertilization as well. The scientific debate and the government/commercial experimentation are taking place in the absence of public participation.

ETC Group concludes that geoengineering is the wrong response to climate change. Any experimentation to alter the structure of the oceans or the stratosphere should not proceed without thorough and informed public debate on its consequences, and UN authorization. Geoengineering must not be undertaken unilaterally by any nation. The United Nations must reaffirm (and, if necessary, expand) the Environmental Modification Convention (ENMOD) recognizing that any unilateral modification of weather or climate is a threat to neighboring countries and, very likely, the entire international community.

Other UN agencies dealing with the impact of climate change must also address this issue. This includes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“Most importantly, the IPCC should revisit the concept and practice of carbon trading and replace this market-based, so-called ‘solution’ with direct measurable standards for CO₂ emission reduction at source,” said Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group. “Instead of coming up with new technological fixes that will cause potentially catastrophic problems, particularly for the South, OECD states must take seriously efforts to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels and to curtail other wasteful practices that contribute to global warming,” added Ribeiro.

The issue of geoengineering and its far-reaching social, environmental, ethical and political implications should be on the agenda of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 3-14 December 2007 in Bali, and the World Meteorological Organization’s 15th Congress in May 2007.

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ⁱ David Adam, “US Government answer to global warming: Smoke and giant mirrors,” *The Guardian*, 27 January 2007.