

NEGOTIATORS warned to LOOK BEFORE LEAPING!

Civil Society Alarmed at Climate Technology Quick Fixes in Copenhagen

Copenhagen, December 10, 2009 – Over 160 civil society groups, including social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), today released a joint declaration on technology: “Let’s Look Before We Leap!”. The declaration alerts governments to the absence of any precautionary environmental and social assessment mechanisms in the draft Copenhagen agreement on technology, and claims that the current approach poses grave threats to human health, human rights, rural livelihoods, diverse ecosystems and climate stability.

The negotiating texts in Copenhagen refer repeatedly to the need to rapidly develop and deploy so-called “environmentally sound technologies”. However, the text is silent on evaluating controversial new technologies which claim to be climate-friendly but are in fact harmful. Civil society groups are increasingly concerned that many technologies that will be fast-tracked through this new system are risky and untested, potentially adding a new wave of environmental and social problems that will compound the climate crisis. The declaration released today points to technologies such as geoengineering, genetic engineering, agrofuels (biofuels) and biochar as examples of risky or hazardous technologies that may receive an unwarranted boost through agreements made in Copenhagen.

“On top of being the victims of the climate crisis, we don’t want to become guinea pigs for new unproven technologies or for old hazardous technologies such as nuclear power, with the excuse that more technology is needed to fix the climate,” said Ricardo Navarro from Friends of the Earth International. “It is totally irresponsible that negotiators are discussing the development and transfer of technologies without any mechanism to filter which ones can be useful and which ones will create more problems for people and the environment. We need the immediate inclusion and application of the precautionary principle”, added Navarro.

Among the climate change techno-fixes that could be promoted under the present text are proposals for large-scale climate manipulation, known as geoengineering. Geoengineering proponents include industry-friendly climate skeptics such as Bjorn Lomborg who claim that a large technical fix skirts the need for action on emissions reductions. “Fighting climate change with geoengineering is like fighting fire with gasoline,” explains Silvia Ribeiro from ETC Group’s Mexico office. “Proposals such as dumping tonnes of iron in our oceans or injecting sulphates in the stratosphere to reflect sunlight are extremely dangerous. They could worsen existing problems, like ozone depletion and drought in sub-Saharan Africa, and their impacts will be felt in countries and by people who won’t even have a chance to say what they think of these ideas. Geoengineering is geopyracy and this kind of gambling with Gaia needs to be excluded from any consideration in climate negotiations.”

Paul Nicholson from La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement

representing small farmers in 69 countries, reminded delegates that new technologies introduced over the past few decades, such as genetically modified crops and tree monocultures, have had extensive negative impacts on peasants and the environment. “We small-scale farmers and peasants of the world already have a diversity of proven technologies that are cooling the planet and feeding the majority of the people in the world. These need to be affirmed, not threatened by the introduction of new dangerous technologies that can displace or contaminate the diversity of crops and cultures that are a real solution for both the climate and the food crises.”

“Whatever technology agreement comes out of this meeting must not just become a funding mechanism for venture-capital-backed green-washing exercises”, said Chee Yoke Ling from Third World Network. “In the context of the carbon trade, ‘environmentally sound technologies’ are often more hype than heft. We need an agreement that will facilitate access to truly environmentally sound technologies and clean energy and that will not result in the global expansion of bad ideas. Governments already recognize the principle of prior assessment in the international Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. We need even stronger rules in an agreement on climate technology”, she added.

“At a time when the geoengineering lobby is jockeying for money, influence and power, a wide-open agreement facilitating the rapid expansion of technological fixes is suicidal”, reminded Silvia Ribeiro from ETC Group. “The geoengineers will argue that it is too late for mitigation, and that humanity is on an inevitable march to manipulate the climate by applying extreme technologies. The geopirates are standing in the wings, and increasingly on stage, waiting for this COP to fail so they can step into the breach with their own fast and cheap solution,” concluded Ribeiro.

The statement “Let’s Look Before We Leap” demands a clear and consistent international approach for all new technologies on climate change: States at COP 15 must ensure that strict precautionary mechanisms for technology assessment are enacted and are made legally binding, so that the risks and likely impacts, and appropriateness, of these new technologies, can be properly and democratically evaluated before they are rolled out. Any new body dealing with technology assessment and transfer must include equitable representation of communities most affected by climate change, as well as ensuring gender and regional balance, participation of peasants and indigenous peoples so that their views will be taken into account.

The “Let’s Look Before We Leap” statement and the list of organizations that have signed it to date can be downloaded in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Chinese at <http://www.etcgroup.org>

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