

# The Ecologist

Nov/Dec 1997

## Campaigns & News

### Kyoto: the Heat is On

The formal Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention takes place on 1st-10th December, 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. The 166 nations that have joined the Convention will review the draft agreement, make amendments, and decide whether or not to sign on. The meeting will be attended by environment and energy ministers, aiming to adopt a protocol to establish the first legally-binding commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Shell on Earth

In the 100 days leading up to the International Climate Change Conference in Kyoto, various groups have been conducting the 100 Days of Action Campaign against the oil industry. Shell's 100th birthday on October 18th fell within the 100 days, and TAPOL, the Indonesian human rights campaign, held a protest in conjunction with the Campaign outside the official Shell Birthday Party for investors. TAPOL accuses Shell of complicity in Indonesia's brutal and bloody suppression of basic rights and freedoms in East Timor, and has criticised the company's plans to prospect for oil for the Indonesian government in Timor's seas. Shell has also been accused of violating indigenous people's rights in Nigeria, and was ordered by the Nigerian Supreme Court to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages after being sued by a group of villages in the Niger Delta.

### Bloody Petroleum

Thousands of balloons released in an attempt to break the world record failed to grab the attention of onlookers and media at British Petroleum's open day at Saltend Chemical Works in Hull in September. Activists dressed as skeletons and corporate "fat cats" distracted security, while others clambered behind a huge structure on which thousands of BP branded balloons were set to be released. The balloons were launched as part of a publicity stunt in the north-east of

### Global Warming: The Vicious Circle

Scientists are predicting that human-induced global warming could produce numerous "feedback loops" which would accelerate climate change. A hotter Earth will result in tens of thousands more forest fires annually, releasing millions of additional tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere and destroying one of the planet's natural carbon "sinks". In addition, the melting of the ice caps due to longer arctic summers will reduce the percentage of the Earth covered by reflective white surfaces, increasing the area of the planet that is darker and which therefore absorbs more solar heat.

### Call to Clinton

In a letter to US president Bill Clinton, members of the Oil Alert Network have voiced their concerns over the increasing involvement of US companies in the exploration and export of Venezuelan oil. Expressing their horror over the pollution of Lake Maracaibo and the continuing destruction of unique mangroves and swamp in the Orinoco river delta, the letter laments US efforts to promote an 'oil boom' in Venezuela.

The Oil Action Network comments on the numerous indigenous groups clamouring for a halt to oil-led ecocide, and wonders how these peoples go utterly unheeded "in a country which is said to be

There is already speculation as to whether recent changes of the El Niño currents and the extended drought in Indonesia could be attributed to global warming. Kevin Trenberth, of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, has calculated that the El Niño current, which affects climatic patterns worldwide, changes naturally once every 2,000 years. The rapid rate of change in recent years suggests a break in that pattern which is believed to be linked to alterations in global climate conditions, triggered by increased greenhouse gas emissions.

democratic and respectful of the observance of human rights and signatory of international agreements on environmental protection", and that is "acting with the co-operation - if not the pressure - of another country which supposedly professes the same values".

Calling on him to uphold the principles of the Rio Climate Convention, the Network challenges the president to persuade US industries and citizens to "make their own contribution to the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> and other harmful hydrocarbon emissions, through a change in their consumption and production patterns..."

*Continued on page 2.*

## The Ecologist Campaigns & News

This section highlights current campaigns, reports activist news, and provides brief updates on topical issues. Send news items and/or campaigns to:

ISEC Campaigns,  
Apple Barn, Week, Dartington,  
Devon, TQ9 6JP, UK.  
E-mail [isecuk@gn.apc.org](mailto:isecuk@gn.apc.org);  
Fax. +44 (0)1803 868651

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Pointing to his duties as a "responsible statesman", the letter concludes with a plea to the president to "promote coherent policies which impede the threat" of climate change on the environment, and urges co-operation between the US and the Venezuelan people "in the context of the highest interests of our peoples and the world".

## Take Action!

In the UK: Join the 100 days to end oil campaign in the lead up to Kyoto. A coalition of groups and individuals is organising public events and non-violent direct action to raise awareness of the issues involved with oil and fossil fuels.

**Contact:** 100 Days, c/o Corporate Watch (UK), Box E, 11 Magdalen Road, Oxford, OX4 1RQ, UK

In the USA: The Clinton administration is listening to oil corporation lobbyists. The White House needs to know that people are demanding action and want the US to take the lead in halting global warming.

**Contact:** Todd Stern, Assistant to the White House, White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave, Washington DC, 20500, USA.  
Tel. +1 202 456 2702 Fax. +1 202 456 2215  
Or e-mail President Clinton!

In other countries: Demand that your government fulfils your country's commitments to stabilising emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> by the year 2000 at 1990 levels, and makes further efforts to reduce other greenhouse gas emissions.

### Websites:

<http://www.corpwatch.org/trac/gallery/chevron/war ming.html>  
<http://environment.miningco.com/msubgcc.html>

## Ecological villages: Building an Alternative Future

The Global Eco-village Network (GEN) is an evolving network of eco-village projects around the world aiming to build on-the-ground examples of sustainable living. The organisation consists of a number of diverse groups responding to the need to address the ecological, spiritual or social crises in mainstream society. The eco-villages all tend to work on a positive vision for the future, and represent both a strategy for global change and an ongoing movement to carry it out on a practical level. Everyone is welcome to join the GEN regional networks without conditions. This includes eco-village projects as well as individuals and organisations that have an interest in what is happening.

**To find out more contact:** Gaia Villages, Skyumvej 101, 7752 Snedsted, Denmark

Tel. +45 9 793 6655 Fax +45 9 793 6672.  
Or visit their site at: <http://www.gaia.org>

## Women of the Amazon Say "No" to Oil Companies

The indigenous women of the Amazon area who represent "Pacha Mama" ("our sacred Mother Earth") have walked from Puno, Patata, to Quito in Ecuador to present a proposal to the government to save their habitat from oil exploration. The new government of Ecuador has wasted no time in selling the last remaining old growth rainforests to national and transnational corporations. Oil wells, logging, and petroleum pipelines through earthquake-prone seismic zones are posing the most imminent threat. The proposal states, "After analysing the life-threatening situation that the indigenous communities and peasants of the province of Pastaza in Ecuador are encountering by the presence of the oil companies in their province, we have come to see that our last hope is to preserve and defend the few natural resources that have been left to us of our territory. The preservation of the jungle and its biodiversity represents the survival of our culture and future generations."

**For more information contact:**  
[amazonwomen@applicom.com](mailto:amazonwomen@applicom.com);  
or call +1 888 228 1320.

## Nicaraguan Rainforest Anti-Logging Action

The International Day of Action for the rainforest and indigenous peoples of Nicaragua's North Atlantic Autonomous region is being held on November 10th, 1997. This is in response to the government of Nicaragua's decision to grant logging concessions to SOLCARSA, a subsidiary of the Korean multinational corporation Kum Kyung. SOLCARSA has begun the process of cutting into Central America's largest rainforest. Roads are being built and it has been claimed that SOLCARSA has already forcibly evicted one indigenous community from its land. It appears that in their attempt to cut down the rainforest, SOLCARSA are destroying traditional cultures and denying the indigenous peoples a future in their homeland.

**Write to:** Nicaraguan President Aleman, Casa de la Presidencia, Managua, Nicaragua

**Contact:** Native Forest Network, Attn: Orin Langel, Phil Fitzpatrick, PPOB 57, Burlington, VT 05402  
Tel. +1 802 863-0571;  
Fax. +1 802 863-2532

E-mail: [nfena@igc.apc.org](mailto:nfena@igc.apc.org)

## Indonesian Fires Cause Unprecedented Environmental Damage

The Indonesian fires that have burned 1.85 million acres of bush and forest land are turning out to be one of the worst environmental disasters ever, causing more damage than other previous disasters such as Chernobyl or the massive EXXON Valdez offshore oil spill.

The devastating impact of the fires is vast and far-reaching:

- The health of more than 20 million workers and their families has been harmed
- 1.85 million acres of bush and forest land have been destroyed
- renewable crops and fisheries have been wiped out.

A report by the World Wide Fund for Nature states that 80% of the fires were set by big forestry and plantation firms systematically clearing land. The background to this appalling devastation was a grossly distorted policy of "sustainable development" carried out by forest companies and large plantation owners with the approval of the Indonesian Government. Forest land that was deemed "degraded" due to previous logging operations was then clear-cut under government law. This, combined with extended drought and unusually hot weather, has led to the massive destruc-

tion of the tropical forest base.

The Indonesian Government has finally acted and revoked the logging licences of 29 timber firms implicated in the fires. The official Antara news agency said the move followed an ultimatum to 176 companies to account for their actions after satellite data images showed some of the worst areas of devastation on land licensed to the firms.

Whether the Indonesian Government will enforce stricter controls remains in question. The export of logs is illegal so they are milled first. The plywood trade is a cartel controlled by Mohamad "Bob" Hasan, a billionaire who is President Suharto's golf partner. Powerful friends of the Suharto family involved in the logging industry have remarkably few legal problems when they clear forest land in order to set up plantations of oil palms, eucalyptus and acacia trees for paper and pulp.

In England, Friends of the Earth reports that some British importers continue to purchase thousands of cubic yards of wood from Indonesian companies that have ignored government bans on burning in plantations and timber estates during the dry seasons. Friends of the Earth is campaigning to stop all business with Indonesian logging firms.



# Growing Support for Organic Food

UK Agriculture Minister Dr Jack Cunningham voiced his strong personal support for organic produce at an international conference on The Future Agenda for Organic Trade held in Oxford in September. "I firmly intend to promote more rapid conversion to organic farming within the UK," Dr. Cunningham said. "The Common Agricultural Policy currently costs European Union taxpayers £28 billion a year. It must be a priority to reduce this cost and redirect some resources to organic farming and rural

enterprise."

At the same conference, HRH The Prince of Wales made a plea through a video message to keep genetically manufactured organisms (GMOs) out of organic agriculture. The Prince said that people who bought organic food were supporting farming systems which produced safer and more nutritious food.

Peter Segger, speaking for the group Organic Farm Foods, predicted a future explosion in organic trade based on the current level of global organic trade today.

He forecasted that early next century prices of organic food would become almost the same as those of conventional food, and called for global fair trade with good prices and contracts for producers and environmental responsibility.

**Write to:** UK Agriculture Minister, Dr Jack Cunningham, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HH, UK

**Contact:** Organic Farm Foods: Tel. +44 (0)1570 433099

## Curbs on Bio-Piracy in India

An independent Indian commission has recommended a comprehensive biodiversity law based on community ownership, with the government acting as a trustee for non-local and commercial trade in biodiversity and traditional knowledge. The People's Commission on Biodiversity, Indigenous Knowledge, and People's Rights, established in March of this year, was responsible for studying the loss of India's biological resources as well as the plundering of traditional knowledge by

multinational companies. The results of this study will be presented to the government as it makes changes to current patent laws. During hearings in Delhi, the Commission talked with farmers, representatives of the seed industry and tribal groups, as well as scientists, to learn about the impact "bio-piracy" would have on their livelihoods and on the nation as a whole. Hearings will also be held in other parts of India.

## Modifying Genes, Modifying Markets

Brazil has overturned its import ban on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) by authorizing the importation of 1.5 million tonnes of US soybeans, at least 15% of which contain Monsanto's transgenic Roundup Ready variety. The decision, made by the Brazilian National Technical Commission on Biosafety (CTNBio), was announced in an atmosphere of intense pressure from both the Brazilian processing industry and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Global demand for Brazil's own GMO-free soybeans soared this year, sending commodity prices through the roof. In the scramble to cash in, Brazil exported more than usual and was caught short in the process.

The Brazilian Association of Vegetable Oil Industries (ABIOVE) has been demanding the importation of mixed stocks containing GMOs from the US to replenish the industry during the scarce period. Representatives of the USDA met with their Brazilian counterparts early in October to reinforce ABIOVE's demands. Although reluctant to allow the genetically imported soya to be imported, the government eventually relented.

The US arm-twisting centred on two arguments. The first was that Brazil ought to acknowledge the principle of "mutual recognition" – essentially that

countries should accept that genetically modified foods already approved in the country of origin are safe. Secondly, the US suggested that it is not possible or economically feasible to segregate the transgenic beans from the conventional ones.

Both assertions appear dubious. The US is not even party to current negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity on developing a Biosafety protocol to regulate the international distribution of GMOs. Strong consumer opposition in Europe against being forced transgenic soya has created a high demand for certified non-transgenic sources. Cargill, ADM, and other grain cartels are already segregating or sourcing non-transgenic soya and maize and supplying it secretly to some of their major European consumers.

The genetic contamination of Brazil, one of the most biologically diverse countries on Earth, is the latest step in a concerted campaign by proponents of genetic engineering to push their dangerous technology onto farmers and consumers all over the world.

**For more information contact:** Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN)

Tel: +34 3 301 1381  
Fax: +34 3 301 1627  
E-mail: grain@bcn.servicom.es

## Mile-High Madness

On 5th and 6th December, environmental organizations in sixteen European countries will demonstrate at airports to draw attention to the environmental consequences of air transport. This action day is part of the joint European campaign, "The Right Price for Air Travel".

European governments keep the price of flying artificially low. Aeroplane tickets, fuel for aeroplanes and transport of goods by air are all VAT-free. Kerosene, unlike petrol, meets no environmental charges or excise duties. Furthermore, the European air transport industry is supported both by substantial investment in infrastructure near airports and through direct subsidization of airlines and smaller airports.

As a result, European air traffic is rapidly increasing, with an annual growth rate of 6% expected in the coming decade. This would have serious consequences for the environment. Aeroplanes emit nitrogen oxides, which not only contribute to acid rain, but act as ozone depleters when emitted at high altitudes. Scientists predict that in 2015 half the annual destruction of the ozone layer will be caused by air traffic.

This short-sighted attitude towards air traffic and its ecological impacts has prompted European environmental organisations to set up a joint campaign fighting to make the price of tickets and fuel reflect the environmental costs of air transport. The campaign includes actions directed against new and expanding European airports, both large and small.

**To learn more contact:** Friends of the Earth, Netherlands, P O Box 19199, 100 G D Amsterdam, Netherlands.  
Tel: +31 206 221 366 fax: +31 206 275 287

E-mail: paul@milieudefensie.nl

## Cuba's Organic Revolution

Organic agriculture has been adopted as the official government strategy for all new agriculture in Cuba, after its highly successful introduction just seven years

ago. In less than a decade the use of chemical pesticides has dropped by 80%. The island is self-sufficient in organic fruit and vegetables, and organic livestock is also reared successfully. Even cabbage, previously impossible to grow due to infestations of the diamond black moth, now has yields of 60 tonnes per hectare without the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

To meet the demand of a more labour-intensive system of agriculture, the Cuban government has increased rural wages and is providing favourable housing for farm workers – helping to relieve the problem of housing shortages and overcrowding in the cities. It is also making abandoned land in urban areas available for local communities to farm. In one co-operative, 40 members are providing food for their own families, with plenty of surplus for local community day-care centres.

Cuba was recently host to representatives from over 40 countries at the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) conference, at which participants challenged the view that pesticides are essential to agriculture.

Source: *Positive News*, *The Six Bells*, Church Street, Bishops Castle, SY9 5AA

Contact: The Pesticides Trust, Eurolink Centre, 49 Effra Road, London SW2 1BZ  
Tel: +44 (0)171 274 8895 Fax: +44 (0)171 274 9084

## Genetically Engineered Plants

Greenpeace International, the International Federation of Organic Farming Movements, the Sierra Club, the National Family Farm Coalition, RAFI and 20 more farmers and environmental organizations have filed a legal petition against the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requesting the cancellation of all approvals of transgenic B.t.-plants.

Interested co-petitioners, please E-mail to: Greenpeace International Genetic Engineering Department; barbara.kuepper@greenpeace.de

## Disney's Sweatshops

The World Development Movement (WDM) has unveiled the reality behind the fairytale in its latest report, *The True Face of Disney*. Despite the fact that Walt Disney is the world's largest entertainment company, ranking among the richest top 200 multinationals, the WDM has revealed that conditions in its Third World factories are often appalling, breaking the corporation's own 'Code of Conduct'.

Factories producing Disney clothing in Haiti are keeping wages down to the lowest salary legally allowed; forcing workers to work overtime with little additional pay; sacking workers who join a union; and

refusing sickness and maternity leave. A worker reports, "They see us like animals: we don't have the right to express a view."

In the face of growing consumer concern and pressure, many companies are adopting codes of conduct that aim to improve the conditions under which their products are made. The Disney Code recognises "the rights of employees to associate, organize and bargain collectively", and states, "Manufacturers will prominently post a copy of this Code of Conduct, in the local language and in a place accessible to employees at all times." WDM campaigner Aditi Sharma says, "Disney's Code of Conduct claims to recognise workers' rights, but the Haitian workers have never even heard of it. Unless Disney ensures that working conditions meet its own guidelines the code is little more than a public relations scam." The facts speak for themselves:

- Disney spent \$22 million marketing Hercules in the US – nine times as much as all of its 7,000 garment workers in Haiti earn in one year.
  - Haitian women sewing Disney T-shirts are paid just 17 pence an hour. It would take a Haitian worker 14½ years to earn the \$36,250 that Michael Eisner, Disney's chief executive, earns every hour.
  - Last month the general secretary and co-ordinator of the union in one factory were dismissed for requesting the management to negotiate on terms and conditions.
  - In the same factory only three toilets were provided for 250 workers, two of which were blocked. A dead toad was found in the water tank, forcing workers to bring drinking water from home.
- "Improving conditions in these factories is not a Herculean task," states the WDM report. "Disney can well afford to give its workers a fair deal."

For more information and copies of the full briefing contact: Aditi Sharma or Jamie Hartzell on +44 (0)171-274 7630 (day) or +44 (0)171-703 4051 (eve).

## Giant Potato Produced in Germany

Scientists in Germany have "invented" a potato large enough to feed a family of six. The largest of the genetically engineered potatoes, which on an average were two to three times as big as natural ones, weighed two kilograms. According to Mike Storey from the British Potato Council, however, the mutant potatoes are unlikely to be used by British chip manufacturers. The reason? Nothing to do with wary consumers or ethical concerns. Apparently the engineered potatoes contain more water than normal and thus soak up more fat, producing greasier chips.

## In Brief

### Environmental Meeting Dangerous to Health

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced the cancellation until further notice of the 4th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, which was scheduled to take place on 6th-10th October in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The meeting was scrapped to spare the health of the 200 international delegates and observers, who would have been exposed to the detrimental effects of the smoke from Indonesian fires.

### Mahogany Murder

At least eight Brazilian tribes have had people murdered at the hands of private mahogany loggers. Activists, protesting against the killing of indigenous peoples, delivered a black coffin to the headquarters of Lexington Furniture Industries, one of the world's largest users of mahogany. They held a banner which read "Buying Rainforest Wood Kills Native Peoples" and gave Lexington's president extensive documentation on rainforest logging. The company has refused to meet with the activist group, Earthculture. The Brazilian government has just admitted that 80% of all logging in the Amazon is illegal.

### Tour de Quebec

At the end of August 80 cyclists embarked on a 350 km journey from Montreal to Quebec City to promote the bicycle as a non-fossil fuel mode of transport. The cyclists, from Quebec and several foreign countries, took seven days to complete their journey, and participated in discussions on climate change held each night at rest stops along the route. At one stage, they stopped at the home of Canada's prime minister, Jean Chrétien, to urge him to uphold Canada's promise to meet targets for greenhouse gas emissions set at the Rio Conference in 1992. The culmination of the tour took place in front of the provincial parliament building, where a priest at the head of a choir laid a black shroud on a car to symbolize the end of the Age of the Automobile.

### Labour U-turn on Whales

During its election campaign, the Labour Party stated "on welfare and conservation grounds, we are completely against commercial whaling."

Elliot Morley, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Countryside, is now advocating whaling within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) – so exclusive that they comprise 25% of the world's oceans, an area equivalent in size to the Atlantic Ocean.