

Press Release

13 May 2008

**Civil Society at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity:
Ten Urgent Matters for life and livelihoods on earth
May 12 – 30, 2008, Bonn, Germany**

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Alliance has launched a media advisory highlighting ten of civil society's most pressing concerns to be discussed at the upcoming Convention on Biological Diversity. Almost all of the world's governments will gather in Bonn, Germany to debate, negotiate, and hopefully take decisive action for life – both human and non-human – on earth.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the leading United Nations agreement for ecological governance, covering many areas of environmental, economic and social policy, involving thousands of participants and producing large amounts of policies, guidelines and international law.

The media advisory, which can be viewed and downloaded at <http://undercovercop.org/media/> intends to cut through the jargon of the official CBD process and to highlight what many civil society groups believe will be the key fights at the Bonn negotiations this month.

“The CBD process produces large amounts of written information that is not readily accessible to the average layperson and negotiations are often difficult to follow,” explains Jessica Dempsey, co-ordinator of the CBD Alliance. “*Civil society organizations – including nongovernmental organizations, Indigenous organizations, local communities, and social movements – play a crucial role at the CBD in highlighting the biggest threats and the most urgent issues that governments need to address,*” she continued.

Civil society brings *expertise* and *voices* of those who are not always represented at intergovernmental conferences, voices with stories to tell about ecological devastation, corporate theft, wrong-headed governmental policies, and the spiraling decline of both cultural and biological diversity. *Hundreds* of civil society groups from the Global South and the North will be present in Germany to ensure negotiators face up to some of the most pressing issues for the equitable and socially just survival of life on this planet.

The loss of biological diversity and climate change require strong, global, and collective action. Any solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss must be complementary, not undermine each other. Any solutions must put the knowledge and rights of those most impacted at its core: Indigenous peoples, local communities, including family farmers, fisherfolk, peasants, pastoralists and others.

Some of the major concerns of civil society identified by some members of the CBD alliance are: [1] Food, hunger and agricultural biodiversity, [2] Bad agrofuel energy, [3] Forest biological diversity, [4] Genetically engineered trees, [5] Damaging climate techno-fixes, [6] Ecosystem approach, [7] Ownership of life, [8] Protected Areas, [9] Compensation for victims of genetic contamination, and [10] Invasive species. For a short background on each of these areas see the notes below.

More detailed information on each of these issues, from the perspective of many civil society groups is found within the media advisory (posted at <http://undercovercop.org/media/>). These

media briefs have been assembled through contributions of 30 civil society organizations and networks worldwide in a process facilitated by the CBD Alliance (www.cbdalliance.org). These briefings are not representative of all civil society positions around the Convention on Biological Diversity. We encourage media to seek out particular individuals and actors for their own views as the negotiations advance. Those seeking an on-the-ground contact in Bonn can find contacts for each issue at the end of each briefing page.

Civil society groups will hold preparatory meetings on the 17th and 18th of May, and will announce the outcomes of these meetings and expectations for COP 9 on **19 May, at 09:30** in the morning. The conference will be held in the official **COP9/MOP4 Press Centre**.

Finally, civil society groups will use a variety of means to update the world on the progress (or lack of) at the negotiations. Many updates, including the daily newsletter published by the civil society community (the “*ECO*”), will be posted on www.undercoverCOP.org.

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Notes:

[1] **Food, hunger and agricultural biodiversity:** The capacity of the world to feed itself depends on sustaining agricultural biodiversity – diverse, and locally controlled seeds, crops, livestock, fisheries and productive ecosystems. The CBD should layout a new path for agriculture, livestock and fisheries in the 21st century, with food sovereignty at its core. Two thirds of current OECD agricultural subsidies are destroying biodiversity and must be cancelled.

[2] **Bad “agrofuel” energy:** The subsidies and runaway development of the agrofuels industry is fuelling speculation in commodity futures markets and land, so driving food prices, hunger and the destruction of ecosystems and communities. The CBD must act to halt the damage and call for the control of markets in agricultural commodities for food, feed and agrofuels.

[3] **Forest biological diversity:** Forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate and many legally binding CBD commitments are not implemented on the ground. The CBD must identify and quash perverse economic incentives that lead to deforestation, make real commitments to combating illegal and unsustainable logging, and reject socially and environmentally destructive tree monoculture (plantations). The CBD must promote a systemic approach to forest biological diversity that has, at its core, the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and ensure their full and effective participation in all negotiations concerning their lands and ecosystems, including the international climate negotiations.

[4] **Genetically engineered trees:** The release of genetically engineered (GE) trees poses an unprecedented threat to global forest ecosystems and forest biodiversity. Escape of GE trees and their traits into forests would be irreversible. The CBD must put an immediate global stop to the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment.

[5] **Damaging climate techno-fixes:** Profiteering companies are promoting extreme technological solutions to climate change such as seeding the oceans with iron – known as geo-

engineering. Ocean fertilization is not proven to reduce climate-changing gases in the atmosphere and may cause major changes to marine ecosystems – altering food webs, creating toxic tides or deoxygenated seas – changes that could, in some cases, be irreversible. The CBD must stop these before they worsen ecological destruction.

[6] **Ecosystem approach:** The Ecosystem Approach has the potential to transform our efforts to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity. The CBD must ensure Indigenous Peoples and local communities are central to the Ecosystem Approach, or else it will fail, taking with it one of the few opportunities to pull the world's ecosystems back from the brink.

[7] **Ownership of life:** The genes, seeds, organisms and knowledge that the world's poor depend on are being stolen, privatized and often patented. The new "access and benefit sharing" rules being decided at the CBD must prevent, not facilitate such theft, and be based upon the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

[8] **Protected Areas:** The global network of protected areas to be attained by 2010 on land and by 2012 on sea is one of the tools to reduce biodiversity loss. So far both terrestrial and marine ecosystem protection has not been realized. The broadening of protected areas governance types is critical to the expansion of protected areas systems, and Parties must fully recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in protected area policies, programmes and projects, and ensure their full and effective participation.

[9] **Compensation for victims of genetic contamination:** Not every country or community accepts the risks of genetically engineered organisms. Who should be liable and accountable for unwelcome contamination of genetically engineered organisms, or their health or socioeconomic impacts? The COP must develop a strong agreement that would leave no victim of contamination uncompensated.

[10] **Invasive species:** Invasive species are one of the biggest threats to biological diversity, often transported through international trade and travel. The CBD must take strong action to block the pathways for their movement and turn the tide of alien invasions.

***PLEASE NOTE: The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Alliance** is a loose network of civil society representatives. The CBD Alliance facilitated the development of these media briefings, to which some thirty organisations from North and global South contributed. The briefings should not be understood as the views of the CBD Alliance, nor of civil society in general, but as background information on some CBD issues from the views of some civil society representatives. For more information see www.cbdalliance.org*