

Open Letter:

The Committee on World Food Security must not allow itself to be captured by biofuels interest groups

The 40th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which will meet from 7th to 11th October, will be discussing recommendations on “Biofuels and Food Security”. This should be an important opportunity for the CFS to respond to the overwhelming evidence that the artificial demand for biofuels is undermining the right to food, causing significant increases in food insecurity, malnutrition¹, and land-grabbing. The fast-growing demand for biofuels is largely the result of direct and indirect subsidies, including mandatory blending quotas and targets, especially in the EU and the Americas.

We are deeply concerned that the recommendations in the current CFS draft Decision Box would not protect the right to food from existing biofuels policies and the growing demand for biofuels. Instead, the text proposal refers to the alleged benefits of biofuels, which have not been shown to exist at any significant scale.

As the 2011 HLPE Report on Food Price Volatility showed, biofuels are responsible for most of the growth in demand for vegetable oils and a significant proportion of the demand for grains since 2000². As a result, they have been an important driver behind food price rises and food price volatility in recent years. The recent HLPE Report on Biofuels and Food Security published June 2013 confirms what the 2011 report had concluded, i.e. that biofuels have played an important role in commodity food price increases since 2004.

The promotion of biofuels is undermining the right to food, and not just through rising food prices and greater food price volatility. According to ActionAid research, six million hectares of land in sub-Saharan Africa are now controlled by European companies producing or planning to produce biofuel feedstock³. Research by Grain shows that 293 land grabs have been reported worldwide between 2002 and 2012, covering more than 17 million hectares, with the stated intention to produce biofuel feedstock⁴. Although the precise number and scale of land-grabs is subject to debate, all of the research into land grabbing confirms a very substantial number and scale of landgrabbing for monoculture production of biofuels.

Loss of land and livelihoods and the ability to grow food resulting from such land-grabs is another significant cause of increased hunger and malnutrition. Additionally, large, albeit unknown numbers of small farmers have entered into contract farming agreements with companies for biofuel production and are thus no longer able to grow food on their land. Contract farmers commonly depend on loans and on purchasing seeds and other inputs from the company involved and may lose their land eventually if they cannot repay those loans. Furthermore, many contracts often put farmers at a disadvantage, for example by obliging them to grow biofuel feedstock only and sell it at a low price to one company⁵. And finally, by obliging farmers to adopt industrial monoculture

¹ See for example Could Biofuel Policies Increase Death and Disease in Developing Countries?, Indur M. Goklany, Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons, Spring 2011, <http://www.jpands.org/vol16no1/goklany.pdf>

² http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE-price-volatility-and-food-security-report-July-2011.pdf

³ http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/if_media_report.pdf

⁴ <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4653-land-grabbing-for-biofuels-must-stop>

⁵ See for example Friends of the Earth’s case study of jatropha in Swaziland: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/jatropha_wonder_crop.pdf

production methods, such contracts result in soil erosion, soil and water depletion and other negative long-term impacts.

Increased demand for water and outright water grabbing for biofuels pose a further serious threat to the right to food. Already, agriculture accounts for 70% of global freshwater consumption, 1.2 billion people are affected by physical water scarcity, 500 million people are approaching water scarcity, and another 1.6 billion people face economic water shortages according to UNDESA⁶. The fast growing demand for land for biofuel production is already aggravating this situation. Women are particularly affected by land-grabbing, water grabbing and water scarcity because they are less likely to have secure land rights and because they tend to be responsible for procuring water for households.

Those very real, existing impacts of biofuels must be acknowledged and addressed by the CFS. This means that the CFS must:

- + Call on governments to eliminate direct and indirect subsidies for biofuels, including targets, mandates and blending quotas, because the evidence shows that such subsidies and incentives are adding to food insecurity and malnutrition, contributing to food price rises and volatility, to land-grabbing, to the displacement of food production, to water grabbing and greater water scarcity;
- + Explicitly acknowledge the conflict between biofuels and food and ensure that the objective to eliminate hunger and food insecurity is paramount;
- + Drop the emphasis on balancing energy and food security: Biofuels are largely transport fuels used in cars and the right to food must not be set against a supposed 'right' to drive. Biofuel expansion is the direct result of government policies which can be changed/reversed;
- + Highlight the many direct and indirect impacts which biofuels have on land and water;
- + Highlight the negative impacts which biofuels have on communities, in particular on smallholders, on Indigenous Peoples, on pastoralists and on women;
- + Mandate country-level and regional multi-stakeholder human rights assessment of the impacts of biofuels policies, focussing on the objective to eliminate hunger and malnutrition;
- + Highlight existing problems with biofuel certification and standards which are largely voluntary, scarcely monitored and which cannot address the indirect impacts of the growing demand for land and crops for biofuels;
- + Acknowledge that biofuels policies are not achieving their key original aim, i.e. greenhouse gas emission reductions. To the contrary, they are contributing to greater greenhouse gas emissions through land use change and reliance on an energy-intensive industrial agricultural production model.

Signed by:

- + ActionAid
- + Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network
- + Alga (Rural Women's Association), Kyrgyzstan

⁶ <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml>

- + APVVU, India
- + Asian Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Thailand
- + Asian Rural Women's Coalition
- + Banteay Srei, Cambodia
- + Beyond Copenhagen Collective, India
- + Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (India People's Science Campaign), India
- + Biofuelwatch, UK/US
- + Biowatch, South Africa
- + Bread for the World, Germany
- + Budskab fra græsrodderne (Message from the Grassroots), Denmark
- + CCFD Terre Solidaire, France
- + CECOEDECON, India
- + Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia
- + Chintan International
- + CIDSE
- + Client Earth
- + Collation of Agricultural Workers International (CAWI), Sri Lanka
- + Comité français pour la solidarité internationale (CFSI), France
- + Community Awareness Centre, India
- + Consumers Korea, Gwangju Local Council
- + Corporate Europe Observatory
- + Dachverband Kulturpflanzen- und Nutztiervielfalt e.V., Germany
- + Dagsaw Panay Guimaras Indigenous Peoples Network, Inc., Philippines
- + Dharti Development Foundation, Sindh, Pakistan
- + Earth in Brackets, US
- + Ecoforum, Uzbekistan
- + Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
- + Econexus
- + Ecoropa
- + Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA)
- + Ene Nazary (Women's Rural NGO), Kyrgyzstan
- + Environment Conservation Trust, Sri Lanka
- + Fern
- + FIAN Austria
- + Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- + Friends of the Earth Europe
- + Friends of the Earth International
- + GABRIELA (National Alliance of Filipino Women), Philippines
- + Gaia Foundation, UK
- + Gita Pertiwi, Indonesia
- + Global Forest Coalition
- + Global Justice Ecology Project, US
- + Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction, Southeast Asia Region
- + GM Freeze, UK
- + Green Foundation, India
- + Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Nigeria
- + Initiative for Equality, East, South and Southeast Asia Region
- + Insec (Institute for Economic and Social Studies), Brazil
- + Inter-Environment Wallonie, Belgium
- + International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADA)
- + International Women's Alliance

- + La Via Campesina
- + Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (Melca), Ethiopia
- + NAFSO, Sri Lanka
- + National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, Sri Lanka
- + Nijera Kori, Bangladesh
- + NOAH (Friends of the Earth Denmark)
- + Oxfam
- + Pakistan Kisan Ittihad PKI, Pakistan
- + Pesticide Action Network Asia-Pacific
- + Rettet den Regenwald e.V. (Rainforest Rescue), Germany
- + Save Our Seeds
- + Save the Earth, Cambodia
- + Savisthri National Women's Movement, Sri Lanka
- + SERUNI, Indonesia
- + Shazet (Public Association), Kyrgyzstan
- + SIBAT (Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya), Philippines
- + SOBREVIVENCIA, Friends of the Earth Paraguay
- + Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED), India
- + SOL – People for Solidarity, Ecology and Lifestyle, Austria
- + Sri Lanka Nature Group
- + Sustainable Development Foundation, Thailand
- + Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, India
- + Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity, Tanzania
- + Tenaganita, Irene Fernandez, Malaysia
- + Timberwatch Coalition, South Africa
- + Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (Walhi) Jawa Barat, Indonesia
- + Welthaus Diözese Graz- Seckau, Austria
- + Welthaus Wien, Austria
- + WIDE – Network for Women's Rights and Feminist Perspectives in Development, Austria
- + Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal
- + Woodland League, Ireland
- + World Rainforest Movement