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Statement on Targets and Sustainability Standards for Agrofuels

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The global use of renewable energy sources is an essential element of sustainable climate policy. Biomass energy forms an important component of renewable energy sources. In contrast to wind or solar power, however, it is particularly important to evaluate the diverse opportunities for use of biomass as an energy source in terms of social and environmental impacts and risk to human development. Evaluating the impacts of agrofuels is particularly important at the moment. In addition to the climate footprint and potential environmental impacts, development agencies look closely at how the use of biomass as energy impacts on developing and newly developed countries – these are crucial factors for us, especially with regard to food security and poverty reduction. Human rights form the normative evaluation framework, above all the right to adequate food and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food. In particular, it is essential to carry out an impact assessment for the 1.2 billion poor people who live on less than a dollar a day and, above all, for the most marginalised population groups, whose livelihoods today can no longer be guaranteed.

Impact assessments are all the more important since the renewable resources needed to reach the European mandatory agrofuel targets will mostly have to be imported from developing countries. This will result in the exacerbation of already hostile utilization conflicts surrounding scarce resources such as land and water. Scarcity and price increases for basic food, as well as over-exploitation of rural labourers, are already visible consequences in many places. In recent fact-finding missions this has proven to be the case even for those countries that already have strong social and environmental standards, such as Brazil. See the report from the international fact-finding mission in April 2008 carried out by Bread for the World, EED, FIAN, HEKS, ICCO and Misereor and experts from Africa and Latin America¹.

In addition, mandatory agrofuel targets send the wrong signals in Europe. Importing biomass from developing countries eases the pressure on us to achieve the urgently needed reduction in energy consumption in the transport sector through traffic prevention and relocation and through increased efficiency. Instead, the pressure will be transferred to the South and the land there. We strongly support Germany's and Europe's CO₂ reduction objectives. Abandoning mandatory biofuel targets should not lead to reduction objectives being lowered; instead, abandoning biofuel targets should be replaced by targets for increased energy efficiency, which are mandatory instead of the current optional targets.

Furthermore, there are increased doubts as to the positive climate footprint of diverse agroenergy sources. A current study published by Empa – Materials and Science Technology (2007) concludes that the current CO₂ energy saving potential of agrofuels is only 10-30 percent in comparison to petroleum depending on the method. A change in indirect land use of biomass production is an important issue, but is not taken into account in the study due to lack of assessment methods.

¹ FIAN, Brot für die Welt, EED, HEKS, ICCO, Misereor: Fact-finding mission report on the impacts of public incentive policies for agrofuels on the enjoyment of the human right to food, on employment and on the environment, peasant and indigenous communities and rural workers in Brazil, May 2008; please see English summary at <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/right-to-food-in-brazil-summary>.



Basic demands for the policy framework of biomass energy use

All decisions should take into consideration that most countries do not have, and will not have in the near future, effective, controllable and enforceable land-use policies that would guarantee the adherence to social and environmental standards. Land management should be further developed, but this is a long term task. *Unless sustainable land management - including indirect land-use changes - will take account of and guarantee human rights standards, biofuel quantity targets should not be mandatory (unless this is independent of imports).*

In view of price developments on agricultural commodity markets and increasingly volatile food prices, as well as the dependency on food imports of many developing countries, national biomass energy programmes should take account of effects of price changes and their impact for food security. *The level of biomass energy use must be flexible and adaptable in the case of a food crisis. National targets for expanding bioenergy should be adjusted to the available resources in Europe in view of the current global situation.*

Finally, the impacts of reduced grain reserves and the increasing agricultural prices for food aid require close attention. *Subsidies for biomass energy should be pegged to the financial safeguarding of international food aid.*

Concrete social and human rights demands for European biofuel targets:

- Effective and concrete environmental standards must be complemented by effective and concrete social standards, in order to guarantee adherence to international obligations. These include: the right to adequate food; right to water; International Labour Organization (ILO) core labour standards as well as ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169.
- The following groups of people must be the focus of the yet to be defined social standards: plantation workers; small-scale farmers; landless; indigenous communities; women; children and urban poor².
- The local population must be actively included in decisions regarding land use, and their traditional participation and land rights must be respected.

On mandatory targets:

The EU's mandatory 10 percent agrofuel target must be dropped on development grounds. *Instead, the existing target of 20% increased energy efficiency should be made mandatory.*

There are serious doubts as to whether such amounts as induced by the agrofuel targets can be produced in a sustainable manner. As a result, the credibility of certification systems for sustainable agroenergy is called into question. Setting high agrofuel quantitative targets is an expression of false political priorities that need to be corrected. Firstly, efforts should be focused on limiting energy use and making it more efficient. Secondly, sustainability criteria must be developed and their feasibility guaranteed before policy makers encourage imports of agrofuel. This would allow for the precautionary principle³, whereby the state avoids a priori potential damage caused by its policy (such as violations of the right to adequate food). At the same time, it must be guaranteed that abandoning agrofuel targets should not lead to a reduction in climate policy objectives. Instead, abandoning agrofuel targets must be compensated by CO₂ reduction in the transport sector – e.g. by development of more fuel efficient cars and increased use of other renewable energy in public and private transport.

² This prioritisation is defined by the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food, amongst others

³ The precautionary principle was incorporated into different declarations (1972 Stockholm UNEP / 1992 Rio Earth Summit) and has taken on normative character in international policy.