



News Release
ETC Group and the Coalition Against Biopiracy
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www.etcgroup.org
www.captainhookawards.org

And the Winners Are...

The winners of the Captain Hook Awards for Biopiracy announced in Curitiba today are an eclectic group that includes old favorites and new up-and-comers; Community-based biodiversity efforts win Cog Awards for defending food sovereignty

Google “Crashed” today at the Captain Hook Awards ceremony during the meeting of the Eighth Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). No, this doesn’t mean that Internet service was interrupted in Curitiba’s ExpoTrade Convention and Exhibition Centre where the CBD meeting is being held through March 31. It means that Google walked away with an unexpected big win – just as the movie “Crash” did a few weeks ago at Hollywood’s Academy Awards. In all, eleven Captain Hooks received prizes in ten categories related to biopiracy. There were seven Cog Award winners in six categories related to biopiracy resistance and community-based biodiversity strengthening.

Google took the prize for the “Biggest Threat to Genetic Privacy” for its collaboration with J. Craig Venter – another of today’s winners in a solo effort as “Greediest Biopirate” – to create a searchable online database of all the genes on the planet. The goal of “googling our genes” is expected to be reached within a decade. How Google will get our genes and who will have access to them are just two unanswered questions. In fact, Google has been mum on details since the project was revealed in the 2005 book by Mark Malseed and David A. Vise, *The Google Story*.

ETC Group’s Jim Thomas, who presided over today’s ceremony in the guise of Captain Hook himself, notes that the 2006 winners span biopiracy’s past, present and future. Thomas says, “Ahoy! – Oh, sorry about that – Google’s genomics foray points to the future of biopiracy where the push toward personalized medicine and so-called human enhancements is driving ubiquitous gene sequencing. The National Geographic Society’s Human Genographic Project is part of that trend as well.”

The Human Genographic Project won a Captain Hook Award today in the category of Worst Déjà-Vu as the third incarnation of a project that Thomas and others had hoped was part of biopiracy’s past. Thomas explains, “Argghh! Oh – sorry, let me start again: Two years ago, another project involving large-scale DNA-collection from indigenous groups called the HapMap project – itself a redux Human Genome Diversity Project, an earlier effort shut down amid controversy in the 1990s – won a Captain Hook award. The same ethical issues are at play with the current Genographic Project: the potential for genetic discrimination, the threat to privacy and to the rights of Indigenous People and uncertainties surrounding informed consent and intellectual property,” says Thomas.

Verónica Villa of ETC Group’s Mexico office ably assisted Thomas’s Captain Hook at today’s

*In the Middle Ages, cogs were small ships built with high sides that made them less vulnerable to pirate attacks.

ceremony. In her view, cogs stole the show, particularly those who have fought hard to conserve seed biodiversity. Villa says, “Farmers’ Rights and the threats to Farmers’ Rights have taken center stage at COP8. It was most appropriate, and satisfying, to recognize those who have made the greatest contribution to biodiversity through the conservation of seeds. All of us, from both the global South and North, are indebted to the Huichol People in Mexico, the Deccan Development Society in India, the peasant farmers of La Via Campesina and the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme (CBDC) for protecting the first link in the food chain.”

The complete list of winners unveiled at today’s ceremony follows:

CAPTAIN HOOK AWARDS:

- Worst Threat to Food Sovereignty: Syngenta
- Greediest Biopirate: J Craig Venter
- Biggest Threat to Genetic Privacy: Google Inc.
- Extreme Makeover Award: Delta & Pine Land
- Most Shameful Act of Biopiracy: US Government
- Worst Déjà Vu: Human Genographic Project
- Access of Evil Award: Canada, Australia, New Zealand
- Biggest Tiny Claim On Nature: Nanosys, Inc.
- Worst Betrayal: Genencor *et al.*
- Most Hypocritical: Joint Winners: University of California-Davis and The Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO)

COG AWARDS:

- Best People’s Defense: Joint winners: In Defense of Maize Network and the Huichol People (Mexico) and the Deccan Development Society (India)
- Best Defense of Food Sovereignty: La Via Campesina
- Best Advocate: The African Group at CBD
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme
- Best Exposé: Edmonds Institute and African Centre for Biosafety

- Most Satisfying Victory, Finally: Magda Aelvoet, former president of the Green Group in the European Parliament, Dr. Vandana Shiva, of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy and Linda Bullard, of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

A poster that presents all the Captain Hook and Cog Award winners, along with citations, is available for download on the CAB web site: www.captainhookawards.org.

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