



ETC Group
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United Nations science body calls for halt on climate-hacking experiments Geoengineering moratorium proposal will go to UN Biodiversity Convention

<http://www.handsoffmotherearth.org/>

Nairobi, Kenya - A formal recommendation for a moratorium on all climate geoengineering activities is being sent to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for consideration by its 193 member governments when the CBD gathers in Nagoya Japan this October.

Governments attending the Nairobi meeting of the scientific subcommittee of the UN Convention (SBSTTA 14) agreed late last week to forward the groundbreaking recommendation after a high degree of consensus was reached. In a related move, the scientific subcommittee also reviewed and supported the ongoing global moratorium on one geoengineering technique, ocean fertilization, adopted by the Biodiversity Convention in Bonn in 2008.

The historic recommendation from SBSTTA 14 is the first time a UN body has addressed geoengineering governance since the adoption of the Environmental Modification Treaty in the 1970s. SBSTTA requests that "no climate-related geo-engineering activities take place until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities and appropriate consideration of the associated risks for the environment and biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural impacts". (1) The moratorium proposal received near-unanimous support with strong statements from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. However, the recommendation will be forwarded to COP 10 (Conference of the Parties) of the CBD in October in "square brackets" signalling that the consensus is not absolute. Earlier in the week it seemed there was unanimous agreement on the text after some delegations consulted with their capitals. But on the final day Canada apologetically announced that it could not support the text and asked that it be placed in brackets for consideration in Nagoya. Decisions in the CBD are customarily consensus-based.

"The motion on geoengineering arose as part of the agenda on climate change and biodiversity," Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group (an international civil society organization) reports from Nairobi. "Canada is the *bête noire* of climate change negotiations and nobody was surprised to see it stand out as the main objector to this proposal. The delegation itself was embarrassed."

"Geoengineering" refers to any large-scale human-made effort to intentionally adjust major planetary systems to climate change. It includes proposals to pump sulphates into the stratosphere to block sunlight or blow ocean salt spray into clouds to increase their reflectivity. Last week it emerged that at least one team of engineers and scientists, the Silver Lining Project of San Francisco, is looking to run a 10,000 square kilometre geoengineering test on cloud whitening.(2) ETC Group's request to Silver Lining for clarification on the experiment's details has not yet been answered.

Geoengineering also includes transforming major tracts of land or sea in order to sequester excess greenhouse gases. Confronted with imminent commercial ventures, the 2008 meeting of the Biodiversity Convention adopted what the German environment minister (who chaired the CBD) called a "de facto moratorium" on ocean fertilization. Shortly after its adoption, however, another German ministry violated the moratorium with an ocean fertilization experiment in the Southern Ocean. The move caused a rift within the German cabinet, debate in the Bundestag, an international outcry and led last week to a strong reaffirmation of the moratorium by government delegates in Nairobi.

"The moratorium on ocean fertilization is stronger than ever," says Neth Dano of ETC Group, also in Nairobi. "But we expect its promoters to strike back. Big industry and big science want to press ahead with geoengineering either as a 'plan B', or as a free pass to avoid reducing emissions. It's the big lie that lets them pretend that we can all carry on drilling and driving – business as usual!"

"The geoengineers are going to be furious with this moratorium," Silvia Ribeiro acknowledges. "The last thing they want is for the United Nations to step in. They argue that a handful of governments and corporations should be free to move ahead on geoengineering experimentation without independent, international oversight. (3) In March, geoengineers held a by invitation-only conference in Asilomar, California to discuss a 'voluntary code of conduct' that would let them self-regulate their experiments. (4) Governments here in Nairobi have just told them they have no right to control the planet's thermostat."

Recognising that geoengineers will be mounting a major lobbying offensive to prevent the moratorium from being firmly established in Nagoya later this year, ETC Group has joined with over 100 other civil society organisations to press the case for a halt to geoengineering experiments. The Hands Off Mother Earth (HOME) campaign is a global grassroots campaign of individuals and organisations visible at <http://www.handsoffmotherearth.org>. Its supporters include many grassroots organisations, international networks of farmers and indigenous peoples as well as renowned environmentalists and social justice campaigners such as Vandana Shiva, Bill McKibben, David Suzuki and Naomi Klein. (5)

"How dare they claim the right to block the sun? To colour the clouds? To change the chemistry of the ocean?" exclaims Canadian author Naomi Klein who is backing the HOME campaign. "Look at the oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico. If we learn one

lesson from this disaster, let it be that we cannot control the effects of our technology, nor is our technology capable of fixing the Earth-disruptions that we unleash. It's time for some collective humility in the face of awesome natural forces, not more eco-hubris."

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Notes:

1. The full text of the proposed moratorium in SBSTTA (Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technological and Technical Advice) UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/14/L9 is online at <http://www.cbd.int/sbstta14/meeting/in-session/?tab=2> . The relevant section reads :

(w) [Ensure, in line and consistent with decision IX/16 C, on ocean fertilization and biodiversity and climate change, and in accordance with the precautionary approach, that no climate-related geo-engineering activities take place until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities and appropriate consideration of the associated risks for the environment and biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural impacts;]

2. See ETC Group/H.O.M.E. News Release, "As huge cloud-whitening experiment goes public, global coalition urges an immediate halt to geoengineering" 20th May 2010. Online at <http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/5137>

3. See for example Lee Lane of the American Enterprise Institute, "Geoengineering Experiments should not require global agreement", the Enterprise Blog, March 30 2010, available at <http://blog.american.com/?p=11895> or the testimony of Canadian scientist David Keith before the UK Parliamentary Committee on Science and Technology hearings on the regulation of geoengineering available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmsctech/221/221.pdf>

4. See ETC Group news release, "Top-down Planet Hackers Call for Bottom-up Governance" 11th Feb 2010. Online at <http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/5073>. See also the letter from civil society groups opposing the Asilomar conference at: <http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/5080>

5. For more information about the Hands Off Mother Earth Campaign and to view a gallery of hundreds of individuals expressing their opposition to geoengineering experiments see <http://www.handsoffmotherearth.org> Images available for picture desks.

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