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Open Letter to the Climate Response Fund and the Scientific Organizing
Committee

RE: Asilomar International Conference on Climate Intervention Technologies

March 22-26 2010

As civil society organizations and social movements working to find constructive solutions to climate change, we want to express our deep concerns with the upcoming privately organized meeting on geoengineering in Asilomar, California. Its stated aim, which is to «develop a set of voluntary guidelines, or best practices, for the least harmful and lowest risk conduct of research and testing of proposed climate intervention and geoengineering technologies,» is moving us down the wrong road too soon and without any speed limit.

Geoengineering refers to the large-scale technological manipulation of the climate and related systems through techniques such as putting sulphate aerosols in the stratosphere, fertilizing the ocean, and whitening the clouds. The priority at this time is not to sort out the conditions under which this experimentation might take place but, rather, whether or not the community of nations and peoples believes that geoengineering is technically, legally, socially, environmentally and economically acceptable.

Without any international consensus as to whether geoengineering is an acceptable intervention in natural systems, the Climate Response Fund and its Scientific Organizing Committee's discussion about «voluntary guidelines» is nonsensical. The Conference organizers -- almost exclusively white male scientists from industrialized countries -- are presuming that they have the experience, wisdom and legitimacy to determine who should or should not be invited into this conversation.

There are many scenarios where geoengineering experiments with cross-border impacts would violate existing treaties (the 1978 Environmental Modification Convention or ENMOD Treaty, amongst others). The establishment of «voluntary guidelines» by an informal group meeting in Asilomar could undermine local, national, or international laws, as well as

compromise strategies for mitigation and adaptation. Moreover, the history of voluntary guidelines is that companies simply do not follow them. Not only will the scientists involved in this enterprise be giving their blessing to dangerous geoengineering technologies, they have no authority to force corporations or governments to comply.

The issue of large-scale geoengineering experimentation and its impact is not about technical peer-review. It is about no less than rights, responsibilities and the future of the planet. This public debate must, at the very least, include the peoples and countries that are most vulnerable and likely to be affected by geoengineering, not only those who stand to gain. Such a discussion cannot happen without the participation of the full membership of the United Nations. Determining guidelines for geoengineering research and testing in the absence of that debate is premature and irresponsible.

Clearly, the lack of transparency and conflict of interest in the organization of the Conference leaves serious doubt about who is setting the agenda and whose interests are being served. In the few materials that have been published [1], it is stated that (unnamed) donors, the Climate Response Fund, and the Climate Institute have no «financial interest in the particulars of the technologies or the guidelines that are being developed.» Yet these organizations have publicly welcomed private sector input and money, including support from fossil fuel interests and car manufacturers. Finally, despite the fact that a list of the funders and details for the Conference was promised for 1 January 2010, the names have yet to be disclosed.

It is vital that the international debate about geoengineering not be left in the hands of those with a self-interest in its facilitation, pursuit and profit. It concerns us all and must be brought out into the open where all can participate.

That will not happen in March in Asilomar.

Signed by (as of February 25):

Accion ecologica, Ecuador
African Biodiversity Network, Kenya
Asia Pacific Research Network, Philippines
Biofuelwatch, UK-USA
Canadians for Action on Climate Change, Canada
Center for Food Safety, USA
Centro ecologico, Brazil
Centre for a World in Balance, International
CESTA- Friends of the Earth, El Salvador
Citizens Against Chemicals Pollution (CACP), Japan
Climate SOS, USA
Coastal Development Partnership, Bangladesh
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), International
Ecological Society of the Philippines, Philippines
ETC Group, International
Farmers Forum-South Cotabato, Philippines
Focus on the Global South, India, Philippines, Thailand
Friends of the Earth, Australia

Gaia Foundation, UK
Global Exchange, USA
Global Forest Coalition, International
Global Justice Ecology Project, USA
Green Delaware, USA
Grupo de Reflexiùn Rural, Argentina,
Indigenous Environmental Network, USA
Institute for Social Ecology, USA
International Center for Technology Assessment, USA
Island Sustainability Alliance, Cook Islands
ISIS International, International
Marinduque Council for Environmental Concerns, Philippines
Massachusetts Coalition for Healthy Communities, USA
Massachusetts Forest Watch, USA
Nadi Ghati Morcha, India
Oilwatch, International
Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition, Aotearoa/New Zealand
Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Philippines
Polaris Institute, Canada
People's Movement on Climate Change, Philippines
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Kenya
Public Interest Law Foundation, Sri Lanka
Red por una América Latina Libre de Transgénicos, Latin America
SEARICE, Philippines
Sewalanka Foundation, Sri Lanka
Sibuyan Island Sentinels League for Environment Inc. (Sibuyan ISLE), Philippines
Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, USA
SmartMeme, USA
Texas Climate Emergency Campaign, USA
Third World Network, International
Uganda Coalition on Sustainable Development, Uganda
Women's Action for Change (WAC), Fiji
Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka

[1] See Michael MacCracken's letter to the geoengineering Google group at http://groups.google.com/group/geoengineering/browse_thread/thread/a573142a46029eb8/56b306ddb7c3498?lnk=gst&q=Asilomar+conference#56b306ddb7c3498