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## Countries Call for Global Moratorium Against Genetically Engineered Trees

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 23 March 2006**

### Countries Call for Global Moratorium Against Genetically Engineered Trees

On Wednesday, 22 March, delegates from countries around the world raised the call for a moratorium on the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Eighth Conference of the Parties in Curitiba, Brazil. Additional delegates also insisted that the CBD launch a thorough global examination of the risks and impacts of genetically engineered trees-risks which have not, at this point, been adequately examined.

"Yesterday was truly an historic day," stated Orin Langelle, Co-Director of the Global Justice Ecology Project and Coordinator of the STOP GE Trees Campaign. "The alarm bells we have been sounding about the genetic engineering of trees have finally been heard," he continued.

"Promoters of this irresponsible and dangerous technology have now officially been put on notice that people and countries around the world stand firmly opposed to genetically engineered trees-just as GM crops and terminator technology are already opposed," stated Lambert Okrah, of the Ghana chapter of the Global Forest Coalition. "We further applaud the courageous and far-sighted positions of countries such as Ghana, Iran, Norway, Madagascar, Egypt, Philippines, Senegal, Malawi and others in raising the call for a moratorium on genetically engineered trees," he continued.

Interventions in support of the call for a moratorium were presented by Global Justice Ecology Project for the Women's Caucus, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, Global Forest Coalition, Greenpeace, and the Federation of German Scientists.

"Because there is insufficient scientific data regarding the biological impacts of transgenic trees, as well as an absence of socio-economic and cultural impact assessments, it is good scientific practice to invoke the Precautionary Principle, which is enshrined in the CBD," stated Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher of the Federation of German Scientists. "This means no release of transgenic trees into the environment whilst this research is on-going," she added.

The release of transgenic trees will inevitably and irreversibly contaminate native forests, which will themselves become contaminants in

an endless cycle. The potential effects include destruction of biodiversity and wildlife, loss of fresh water, desertification of soils, collapse of native forest ecosystems, cultural destruction of forest based traditional communities and severe human health impacts. The negative effects of transgenic trees will impact many generations to come.

Following this release is the intervention presented by Anne Petermann, co-Director of Global Justice Ecology Project, on behalf of the Women's Caucus.

Press release issued by Global Justice Ecology Project, Global Forest Coalition, World Rainforest Movement, Friends of the Earth International, EcoNexus and the STOP GE Trees Campaign.

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Addendum to Press Release

Intervention from the Women's Caucus Regarding Transgenic Trees, 22  
March,  
2006

My name is Anne Petermann and I am the co-Director of Global Justice Ecology Project. I am speaking today on behalf of the Women's Caucus on the issue of transgenic trees, SBSSTA recommendation X1/11 para. 9.

People all over the world are rising up to oppose transgenic trees, including 2,000 organizations that have signed onto a ban. Transgenic trees are a unique case. Trees live for centuries if not millennia. Pollen models created in 2004 by Duke University researchers demonstrated pollen from native forests in the Southeast U.S. traveling in air currents for more than 1,200km north into eastern Canada. This means that transgenic trees cannot be regulated only at the national level. Transboundary contamination of native forests with transgenic traits is virtually assured. The Biosafety Protocol, which is based on national borders, is not adequate.

The release of transgenic trees will inevitably and irreversibly contaminate native forests, which will themselves become contaminants in an endless cycle. The potential effects include destruction of biodiversity and wildlife, loss of fresh water, desertification of soils, collapse of native forest ecosystems, cultural destruction of forest based traditional communities and severe human health impacts. The negative effects of transgenic trees will impact many generations to come.

Women are the ones who think in terms of generations. It is women in

rural and indigenous communities who will bear the greatest burden of the impacts of GM tree plantations, just as they currently bear the brunt of the impacts from conventional monoculture tree plantations.

The potential human health impacts of transgenic trees, especially Bt trees, have not been adequately researched.

Numerous studies have raised serious questions about the potential health impacts of Bt toxin. A series of published studies found that Bt provokes a potent systemic immune reaction. Because the risk is greater with inhalation than ingestion, engineering trees to produce Bt toxin could be very dangerous. Plantations of Bt trees could potentially lead to widespread outbreaks of sickness. Women and children will bear the brunt of this.

In July, 2005 the FAO [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization] published a report entitled "Preliminary Review of Biotechnology in Forestry Including Genetic Modification." In it, over half of researchers surveyed reported the environmental threat of escape of transgenic pollen or plants into native ecosystems and forests and their impacts on non-target species as a major concern. The FAO report concludes, "New biotechnologies, in particular genetic modification, raise concerns. Admittedly, many questions remain unanswered for both agricultural crops and trees. Given that genetic modification in trees is already entering the commercial phase with GM populus in China, it is very important that environmental risk assessment studies are conducted with protocols and methodologies agreed upon at a national level and an international level and that the results of such studies are made widely available."

In conclusion, the genetic engineering of trees is being driven by corporate profit. There is no need for GE trees. Just as women and indigenous peoples have been the traditional caretakers of biodiversity, so must this body take action to prevent the ecological, social, cultural and health disasters that will be unleashed by genetically engineered trees.

The speed with which the technology is progressing is outpacing regulation and risk assessment. There has been a severe lack of study of the risks of GM trees, especially on a global scale. This lack of risk assessment makes it common sense that there not be any further forward motion in the release of transgenic trees. The CBD must impose a moratorium on the technology and launch a thorough and global examination of its risks. In addition, we ask those countries with outdoor releases of GM trees to take immediate steps to halt the further release of GM trees and to address those releases that have already occurred.

For more details we have a briefing paper on the issue.

Thank you.

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