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EARTH SUMMIT: PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS

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The Earth Summit covers a vast range of environment and development issues. The following is a summary of progress on some key points, and information about the negotiating position of key countries and blocs. Issues covered include:

1. The United States
2. Energy
3. Trade and Globalization
4. Corporate Accountability
5. Forestry and Biodiversity
6. GMOs
7. Ecological Debt

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) experts are available for advice and comment on the Summit talks.

THE UNITED STATES

The US – often supported by Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (the JUSCANZ group) – continues to be the single biggest block on progress at the Earth Summit. The US:

1. Opposes any clear targets on sanitation. The existing UN goal is to cut the number of people who lack access to adequate sanitation by 2015, currently estimated at 2 billion.
2. Opposes any targets for increasing foreign aid as a proportion of developed countries' GNP. The current US level of aid is 0.2%, and the EU average is 0.34%, with a commitment from the Monterey UN Financing for Development conference to increase this to 0.39%. The existing UN target agreed already thirty years ago at the first Earth Summit in 1972 is 0.7%. The final text may simply “commend” Governments who increase their aid and “encourage” progress towards this target.
3. Opposes any language that implies binding agreements on corporate accountability or establishes any process under which such agreements could be reached.
4. Has dropped any commitment to strong environmental or social standards for Export Credit Agencies (as a negotiating concession to some G77 Governments who are concerned that these standards might be used to block access to developed country markets). This concession reverses previous US commitments in this area
5. Continues to oppose any reference to the Kyoto Protocol, and in particular to support for the entry in to force of the Protocol by the end of 2002.

ENERGY

The US opposes any target for renewable energy. Brazil has proposed a target of new renewable energy amounting to 10% of primary energy supply by 2010. More countries are thinking about adopting this

target and FoEI calls on them to do so. The EU has failed to support this real progress on renewable energy expansion, supporting instead a very weak target that could encourage the construction of socially and ecologically damaging large dams in developing countries. The Kyoto Protocol must be mentioned in the Plan of Action from the Summit, and a commitment to entry into force by the end of 2002 included. Japanese NGOs have written to Environment Minister Hiroshi Oki demanding that Japan support the inclusion in the text of a commitment to the entry into force of the Protocol.

TRADE AND GLOBALIZATION

There is still no text that will ensure that multilateral environmental agreements are not made subservient to WTO trade rules. More than 200 NGOs support a call initiated by FoEI that the autonomy and authority of the international agreements that protect people and the environment has to be affirmed loud and clear at Johannesburg. The EU in particular must show leadership on this issue, after EU Commissioner Pascal Lamy welcomed the NGO statement in the past. Eco-labeling (which has clear implications for GM food) is controversial, with the current text making such schemes voluntary and demanding strict WTO compliance. Given the continuing dispute of the European Union with the United States over GMO labeling, nothing less than the right for countries to put the interests of their consumers above those of the global trade system is at stake here.

Language related to the precautionary principle, a key principle agreed at Rio, is in danger of being weakened, and the current draft implies subordination to WTO rules. The EU is failing to defend it properly in the trade chapter. Australia and Canada, supported by the US are making it a priority to ensure WTO compatibility of the entire Earth Summit text.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

This is one of the key issues at this Summit. Yesterday morning the G77 reintroduced the call for an inter-governmental framework on this issue, which FoEI warmly welcomes. Norway during the negotiations last night amended the G77 proposal. However, the G77 have difficulties accepting some references to existing international agreements. The US has been one of the main stumbling blocks in achieving progress on this issue. It remains committed solely to voluntary approaches, which the UN Environment Programme recently criticized as insufficient. FoEI believes that agreement on a negotiation process for global rules for business is a critical test of the success or failure of the Earth Summit.

FORESTRY and BIODIVERSITY

The UN Forum on Forests and its predecessors agreed 350 action points – but while some support action on deforestation, others effectively promote timber trade. The UN Convention on Biodiversity is a much stronger instrument, but has not been ratified by the US. At the Hague ministerial meeting on the Convention this April, around 100 ministers signed an agreement committing states to introduce measures by 2010 to reverse loss of biodiversity. EU ministers have attempted to include this commitment in the Earth Summit text but it currently remains in brackets (i.e. not agreed). Rumor has it that this is a target that could be agreed here. This is a test case for whether the Johannesburg Plan of Action deserves its name.

The agreed text recognizes that small community initiatives to protect forests are the most effective. It also states that the UN Forum on Forests and Biodiversity Convention must be made consistent. Both these points are welcomed by FoEI, and should lead to more biologically diverse forests. However, the agreed text also promotes plantation forestry, which damages biodiversity and is therefore inconsistent with the remainder of the text.

GMOs

The 192 Type 2 public-private partnerships include one, which is clearly designed to promote GMOs as part of “sustainable agriculture.” Croplife, a plant-based science industry organization based in Brussels that includes Monsanto, Sygenta and others, will run an e-mail learning system for agriculture professionals, who will pass on the results to small farmers around the world. Other players in the partnership include APRDC, based in Bangkok.

ECOLOGICAL DEBT

The issue of ecological debt, that is the debt accrued by industrialized northern countries to Southern countries from the exploitation of their environment, resources and people, has been completely ignored in the negotiations. FoEI believes it is time for the North to recognize and pay the debt to the South.

Visit www.foe.org/earthsummit for daily updates on the negotiations and more information on why there is a concern about Partnerships (Type 2 outcomes), the Bush administration’s approach to the summit, President Bush’s rejection of a corporate accountability framework, background information and more.

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