

International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Council must ditch biofuel plans and abandon the myth of 'carbon neutral' growth

From 11th to 29th June 2018, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Council will be meeting in Montreal. High up on the agenda are proposed rules for a Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSA). CORSA is based on the false assumption that carbon emissions from the fast-growing aviation industry can be mitigated through carbon offsetting and biofuels.

During the High-Level ICAO Conference on "Sustainable Alternative Aviation Fuels" in October 2017, member states rejected proposed biofuel targets for aviation. At that time, 96 civil society groups had warned that such targets would lead to significantly further expansion of monoculture plantations – most likely oil palm plantations, and thus to more land-grabbing and food price volatility, more deforestation, more biodiversity destruction, more agrochemical use, and pollution of freshwater, without reducing the climate impacts of aviation¹.

Yet even without explicit targets, proposed CORSA rules could open the door to large-scale use of biofuels in planes.

Proposed CORSA rules would allow airlines to use any biofuels to try and meet 'carbon neutral growth' commitments from 2020, as long as they meet two extremely weak criteria, with no credible mechanism for enforcing even those². ICAO's environment body had previously proposed 17 environmental and social criteria, which might at least have made it much more difficult for airlines to use palm oil. However, as a recent report by Changing Markets illustrates³, there are serious inherent problems with relying on sustainability certification. In relation to palm oil, the report concludes, "none of the schemes has been effective at slowing down deforestation, peatland draining or the loss of biodiversity".

The only type of biofuels suitable for aircraft that can be reliably produced at scale is based on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), and palm oil (including a fraction of palm oil falsely described as a residue or waste)⁴, is the favourite feedstock for HVO production because it is the cheapest vegetable oil on the world markets and the cheapest to refine⁵.

ICAO's biofuel plans therefore threaten to turn the aviation industry into a new driver of deforestation⁶ – as well as land-grabbing and land and human rights abuses. At the same time, they do nothing to address the ever-growing greenhouse gas emissions from aviation, linked to the industry's unending growth.

It is even more worrying that – besides biofuels – ICAO's CORSA will allow airlines to achieve so-called "neutrality" through the use of carbon offsets. ICAO's carbon offset plans were denounced by 80 civil society organisations in 2016⁷. In January 2018, Virgin Atlantic pulled out of a forest carbon offset project in Cambodia after high levels of deforestation as well as serious human rights abuses were revealed in the project area - meaning the aviation emissions were not being offset at all⁸. Unfortunately, this is far from an isolated incident, and airlines can expect more and more of these cases to be exposed as the industry's use of offsets expands.

The future of offsetting is even further in doubt because achieving the goal of the Paris Agreement requires all states and all sectors to cut their emissions to zero. There is therefore no role for a mechanism where one sector avoids emission cuts by paying other sectors to cut theirs.

Finally, there are even proposals to allow fossil-fuels to be classified as 'sustainable aviation fuels' and to be credited under CORSIA. This could mean kerosene from oil refineries where heat and power come from burning wood, which is falsely classified as carbon neutral (which would put yet more pressures on forests) – or kerosene sourced from oil wells that require less energy to drill than others, would be classed as sustainable.

We urge the members of the ICAO Council to reject CORSIA mechanism, which is based on the false solutions of biofuels and offsetting plan – and which may even reward fossil fuel companies directly - and to take the aim of the Paris Climate Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C seriously, which cannot be achieved unless aviation growth is ended and reversed.

Signatories

International:

- ETC Group
- Friends of the Earth International
- GAAM (Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement)
- Global Forest Coalition
- IFOAM - Organics International
- Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad
- Third World Network
- World Rainforest Movement

Regional:

- Biofuelwatch, UK/US
- Corporate Europe Observatory, Europe
- EKOEnergy, Europe
- Fern, Europe

National:

- Abibiman Foundation, Ghana
- Accion Ecologica, Ecuador
- ActionAid USA
- Amis de la Terre (Friends of the Earth), France
- AFRICANDO, Spain
- All India Movement of Forests, India
- AMAF-Benin, Benin
- Animals Tasmania, Australia
- Arbeitskreis Regenwald und Artenschutz (ARA), Germany
- Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad, Colombia
- Asociación Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad, Costa Rica
- Balkani Wildlife Society, Bulgaria

- Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), Germany
- CAGNE (Communities Against Gatwick Noise and Emissions), UK
- Campaign Against Climate Change, UK
- Campaign for Climate Justice Network (CCJN), Nepal
- Carbone Guinée, Guinea
- CESTA (Friends of the Earth), El Salvador
- CNCD-11.11.11, Belgium
- Coalition for Rivers, Czech Republic
- Colectivo Voces Ecológicas (COVEC), Panama
- Comité Nacional para la Defensa y Conservación de los Chimalapas, Mexico
- Coordinadora de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Oriente del Estado de México en defensa de la Tierra, el Agua y su Cultura, Mexico
- Corner House, UK
- Denkhaus Bremen, Germany
- Dogwood Alliance, USA
- Ecologistas en Accion, Spain
- Econexus, UK
- Energie Hunger - Nein Danke!, Germany
- Estonian Forest Aid (MTÜ Eesti Metsa Abiks), Estonia
- FASE (Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional), Brazil
- FDCL (Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika e.V.), Germany
- Finance & Trade Watch, Austria
- Fórum da Amazônia Oriental (FAOR), Brazil
- Forum Ökologie & Papier, Germany
- Foro de Cambios Climáticos y Justicia Social (FMCJS), Brazil
- Frente Amplio no Partidista en contra del Nuevo Aeropuerto y otros Megaproyectos en la Cuenca del Valle de Mexico, Mexico
- Friends of the Earth Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Friends of the Earth Ghana
- Friends of the Earth Malaysia
- Friends of the Earth US
- Fundación del Río, Nicaragua
- Global Justice Ecology Project, USA
- Grupo Carta de Belém (GCB), Brazil
- Indigenous Perspectives, India
- KRUHA Indonesia (People's Coalition for the Right to Water), Indonesia
- Koordinierungsstelle der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz für internationale Entwicklung und Mission (KOO), Austria
- Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, AC, Oaxaca-Chiapas, Mexico
- Mangrove Action Project, US
- Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, USA
- Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth), Netherlands
- Movimento de los Pequeños Agricultores (MPA), Brazil
- NOAH (Friends of the Earth), Denmark
- Otros Mundos A.C./Amigos de la Tierra (Friends of the Earth), Mexico
- Oui au train de nuit, France
- Pro Natura (Friends of the Earth), Switzerland
- Pro Regenwald, Germany
- Pro Wildlife, Germany
- Proyecto Gran Simio (GAP/PGS), Spain

- Quercus, Portugal
- Oakland Institute, USA
- Partnership for Policy Integrity, USA
- Pivot Point, USA
- Pastoral de la Tierra del Vicariato Apostólico de Yurimaguas, Peru
- Rådet for bæredygtig trafik (Council for Sustainable Transport), Denmark
- Rainforest Foundation UK
- Regenwald-Institut e.V., Germany
- Restore: The North Woods, USA
- Rettet den Regenwald e.V., Germany
- Robin Wood, Germany
- Salva la Selva, Spain
- Save America's Forests, USA
- Sequoia ForestKeeper, USA
- Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity, Tanzania
- Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team, Thailand
- ZERO - Association for the Sustainability of the Earth System, Portugal

¹ biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/aviation-biofuels-open-letter/

² The only proposed criteria are that feedstock should not come from land deforested after 2009 and that biofuels should have 10% greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional jet fuels – based on a flawed methodology under which many of the climate impacts of biofuels are ignored. See transportenvironment.org/press/eu-commission-surrenders-united-nations%E2%80%99-icao-aviation-biofuels-changingmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/False-promise_full-report-ENG.pdf

³ changingmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/False-promise_full-report-ENG.pdf

⁴ Palm Fatty Acid Distillate (PFAD) is widely used by Neste and also by other HVO producers, who describe it as a 'residue or waste'. This is not a genuine residue but a fraction of Crude Palm Oil which is in high demand for other uses. At present, PFAD accounts of 4-5% of Crude Palm Oil, but the proportion could rise if demand and prices for PFAD go up further.

⁵ Palm oil is high in saturated fats, which makes it cheaper to refine to HVO than vegetable oils such as rapeseed oil that are low in such fats.

⁶ d5i6is0eze552.cloudfront.net/documents/Publikasjoner/Andre-rapporter/Cerulogy_Driving-deforestation_Jan2018.pdf?mtime=20180122234132

⁷ fern.org/icaodeclaration

⁸ fern.org/node/554