

## ***German Geo-engineers Show Iron Will to Defy Global UN Moratorium***

*A controversial climate-engineering expedition – flying the German flag – set sail from South Africa, in defiance of a United Nations agreement signed by 191 nations and brokered by Germany last May. In response, civil society groups are calling on governments and the UN to take action.*

The RV Polarstern, a German research vessel owned by the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research of Bremerhaven, Germany, left Cape Town on 7th January 2009 to begin a large scale geo-engineering experiment known as LOHAFEX. The LOHAFEX voyage, approved by the Indian and German governments according to Dr. Victor Smetacek, co-Chief Scientist of the expedition, proposes to dump iron sulphate particles over 300 square kilometres of open ocean in the Scotia Sea close to Antarctica.<sup>1</sup> The team aims to provoke a plankton bloom so massive it will be visible from space. The hope is that “fertilizing” the ocean with iron will result in carbon sequestration, and prove to be a quick fix for climate change. Earlier experiments with ocean fertilization have not shown this to be the case.

In 2008, both the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the London Convention of the International Maritime Organisation – the treaty that governs the dumping of wastes at sea – enacted a global moratorium on ocean fertilization activities because of the ecological risks to the oceans and climate.<sup>2</sup> Civil society groups are now calling on the German and Indian governments to respect the international moratorium on ocean fertilization and to recall LOHAFEX, the third Antarctic iron dumping expedition led by Germany's Alfred Wegener Institute since 2000.

“If the LOHAFEX iron dump goes ahead, it will be a clear defiance of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity,” warns Jim Thomas of ETC Group, an international advocacy organisation that played a key role in securing that moratorium. “It is particularly shocking that Germany, the current chair of that convention, should be the country breaking the agreement. The artificial plankton bloom may be visible from space, but it seems it's not visible from Berlin!”

In May 2008, German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel brokered the final text as chair of the global negotiations. Parties to the Convention – which includes South Africa, India and Germany –

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the LOHAFEX expedition see the webpages of India's National Institute of Oceanography: [http://www.nio.org/projects/narvekar/narvekar\\_NWAP2.jsp](http://www.nio.org/projects/narvekar/narvekar_NWAP2.jsp)

<sup>2</sup> See ETC News Release, Friday, May 30, 2008, “The World Torpedoes Ocean Fertilization: End of Round One on Geo-Engineering – 191 countries agree to a landmark moratorium on ocean CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration.” Available online at [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=694](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=694)

agreed that no ocean fertilization activities would proceed until there was “an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities, including assessing associated risks,” and until “a global, transparent and effective control and regulatory mechanism is in place for these activities.” There is so far no such mechanism. The German Minister has praised the decision taken at the CBD, adding: “It’s a very strange idea that technology can solve everything. It’s very risky and shows what humans are ready to do. I’m glad we came to a *de facto* moratorium.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the CBD moratorium did include a provision for “small scale experiments within coastal waters,” the proposed experiment is targeted for the high seas. Furthermore, the parties to the London Convention and Protocol recently strengthened the moratorium by adopting a resolution prohibiting all ocean fertilization activities, at whatever scale, until a strict set of rules is established. The first meeting towards establishing those rules is to be held in February 2009. Civil society groups are now contacting these national governments, as well as the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, asking them to respect the moratorium and prevent LOHAFEX from going forward.

“We do not believe our country should be aiding and abetting these controversial geo-engineers in breaking the global moratorium,” explains Mariam Mayet, an environmental lawyer with the South African Center for Biosafety. “We have formally asked our Environment Ministry to compel the ship to return to port and offload its cargo of iron.”

This is the third ocean fertilisation expedition ETC Group and its partners have opposed in the last two years. In 2007, two private companies, Ocean Nourishment Corporation of Australia and Planktos, Inc. of USA, were prevented from carrying out ocean fertilization activities in the Sulu Sea (Philippines) and near the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador). In the wake of the global moratoria established in 2008, LOHAFEX would be the first operation of this kind to openly defy agreements made by the international community. Ocean fertilization is just one of a suite of extreme climate-fix solutions, referred to generally as geo-engineering, now being proposed in response to climate change.

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ETC Group is an international civil society organization based in Ottawa, Canada. We conduct research, education and advocacy on issues related to the social and economic impacts of new technologies on marginalized peoples – especially in the global South. We look at issues from a human rights perspective but also address global governance and corporate concentration. All ETC Group publications are available free of charge on our website:

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<sup>3</sup>Madeline Chambers, “U.N. talks halt plans for oceans absorb CO<sub>2</sub>,” Fri. May 30, 2008. Available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSL2981194420080530>