



ETC Group
News Release
www.etcgroup.org
March 10, 2009

Shock and Thaw?

Civil Society says “No” as geo-engineers mount shock bid to hack the planet. Railroading governments into geo-engineering will pit North against South, warn critics

OTTAWA, Canada –More than 80 civil society organizations (CSOs) from 20 countries are sending a sharp message to scientists meeting in Copenhagen today, by releasing a joint statement initiated at the World Social Forum in Belém, Brazil: [“The Better World we seek is not Geo-engineered.”](#) The statement is being released as a small group of scientists, using a high-profile platform at a climate-science meeting in Copenhagen¹, are ratcheting up pressure on governments to support and fund real world geo-engineering experiments. ETC Group, a Canadian-based international CSO, is releasing the statement, which focuses on ocean fertilization, one of the most controversial geo-engineering technologies. The groups assert that “Ocean fertilization and other unjust and high risk geo-engineering schemes are the wrong answer to the challenge of global climate change.”

“At the Social Forum,” says Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group in Mexico, “everyone was concerned about two ocean fertilization experiments that were about to violate the UN Convention on Biological Diversity’s *de facto* moratorium. One was a joint German/Indian iron dump in the Scotia Sea [codenamed LOHAFEX] and the other is a proposal to spread urea in the Tasman Sea [spearheaded by Ian S.F. Jones, who is participating on the geo-engineering panel in Copenhagen Wednesday morning]. The LOHAFEX initiative was opposed by Germany’s Minister of the Environment but went ahead anyway. The renegade ship [RV Polarstern] is expected to dock in Punta Arena, Chile, on March 17 and the joint statement is open for signatures until that date.”

“The Copenhagen meeting represents a major bid by geo-engineers to move from the fringes of scientific enquiry into the mainstream and thereby to pressure governments to fund their experiments,” adds Diana Bronson from ETC Group’s Montreal office. “The scientists are trying to sound reasonable,” Bronson continues, “by saying that governments must still cut back on GHG emissions and geo-engineering should only be a ‘Plan B.’ However, in Copenhagen, they will insist that the climate is already at the ‘tipping point’ and that governments would be foolhardy not to explore other technological solutions.”

ETC Group, which led the campaign for a moratorium on ocean fertilization at the Biodiversity

¹ Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions at <http://climatecongress.ku.dk/>

Convention in Bonn last May, wants that limited geo-engineering moratorium expanded to include any experimentation in the stratosphere, in the ocean, and large-scale biochar experiments as well. Until a couple of years ago, scientists were almost unanimous that such experiments were too dangerous to contemplate. Now, faced with the shock of melting glaciers in Greenland and the Arctic, some argue that governments cannot respond quickly enough to avert disaster.

“We agree that the climate crisis has reached an extraordinarily dangerous moment,” says Maria José Guazzelli of Centro Ecológico, one of the groups that signed the statement in Belém, “but we have seen that governments lack the political will to cut emissions, stop deforestation or to promote the necessary life-style changes when this affects the interests of corporations. Can we really expect the governments that lacked the foresight and courage to address global warming for three decades to collaborate fairly on massively restructuring the planet today?”

“The geo-engineers at the Copenhagen meeting are trying shock therapy,” says Diana Bronson. “Everything is melting, no one's acting, so, they say, scientists must save the day – thaw and shock – the new shock and awe. You could say we've just had a very interesting scientific experiment: Scientists presented evidence to the world's governments to see if they were capable of keeping their Kyoto promises to reduce greenhouse gases. The experiment proved that many governments will renege on treaty commitments; will fail to meet their nationally set goals; and will abuse scientific data to fool their citizens. Now, these geo-engineers propose a second experiment: to see if the same governments can safely manage engineering our planet's climate. We already know the answer.”

According to Pat Mooney, Executive Director of ETC Group, the most frightening aspect of geo-engineering is that – unlike global agreements to reduce emissions that require international cooperation – geo-engineers can go it alone. “The dirty little secret in geo-engineering proposals is that a single superpower, a few rogue actors or even a small coalition of the willing can rejig the planet without everybody else's approval. Geo-engineering means that the North – which caused global warming – will be the ones with their finger on the thermostat able to protect themselves. The South – which is already experiencing the worst effects of global warming – will have no control over the thermostat and will be left to fend for themselves.”

Geo-engineering's promise of “quick fix” is an illusion, ETC Group insists. The major geo-engineering proposals being discussed would divert time and money from real solutions that would be more effective and less dangerous. There is no short-cut to cutting back our emissions, protecting our forests and soils and making the lifestyle changes that will be required. There is an urgent need to conserve and utilize – in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way – the world's biological diversity so that we can adapt to changing climatic conditions. Rather than focus attention on scientific gambles, governments should encourage a diversity of strategies geared to local ecosystems and cultures. “We already have a crisis of poverty and injustice,” Silvia Ribeiro concludes, “and governments must address that problem before we do things that exacerbate the gap between the rich and the already marginalized, while doing further damage to the health of the planet.”

ETC Group is also sponsoring a Pie-in-the-Sky Contest for Budding Geo-engineers. The contest is seeking proposals that highlight the perverse nature of geo-engineering and provoke

discussions about the attempts underway to intentionally manipulate the earth, oceans and atmosphere to combat the effects of climate change. Check them out at www.pieintheskycontest.org.

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