



## **BIOMASS POWER GRAB HIGHLIGHTED AS BIOTECH INDUSTRY MEETS IN MONTREAL**

Montreal- July 21 2009 -- As hundreds of delegates gathered for the Sixth Annual Conference on Industrial Biotechnology and Bioprocessing at Palais des congrès in Old Montreal, a group of NGOs held an early morning press conference across the street. Greenpeace, ETC Group and Biofuelwatch joined forces to warn that the “green” energy of the biotech industry was mostly hype, that governments should not add to their already generous subsidies of the industry and that the feedstock on which it is all based – so called “biomass” – is neither plentiful nor easily converted into renewable chemicals, plastics and fuels.

**Jim Thomas, a researcher from ETC Group**, charged that behind the thin, green veneer of clean energy and renewable plastics, Big Bio is, in fact, engaged in a huge industrial power grab: “The Gene Giants’ control over the smallest components of life such as DNA has now become much more rapid and sophisticated with billions of dollars being invested in new technologies such as metagenomics and synthetic biology. Twenty-five percent of the world’s so-called biomass has already been commodified. Now industry is going after the remaining seventy-five percent. The quest for greater quantities of plant cellulose – the most abundant organic material on earth – will make nature reserves and marginal lands more commercially valuable than ever before. Three years ago, NGOs warned that the demand for corn ethanol would lead to higher food prices and hunger. We were right. And today we’re warning that this massive biomass-grab will bring about similarly devastating consequences for people – especially in the Third World, because that is where these companies will look when there’s no more feedstock closer to home.”

**Rachel Smolker from UK-based Biofuelwatch** challenged the companies present at the BIO Conference to ask themselves a fundamental question: “Is there enough biomass out there for the all the purposes being envisaged? The answer is a resounding no.” She cited targets and figures for biomass-use being used by governments and industry to prove the point: The U.S. has adopted a target of 36 billion gallons of biofuels per year by 2022, claiming there is 1.3 billion tons of available biomass. Yet by some analyses, this would require mowing down 80% of the available biomass from agricultural, forest and grass lands! And this is just one target. The U.S. air force has set itself a goal of replacing 25% of its fuel demand with biofuels, and commercial aviation is following suit. The chemicals industry has set a target of replacing 10% of its feedstocks with biomass as well. Meanwhile, policy measures intended to support the development of renewable energy (electricity and heat) are largely (about 70 percent of subsidies) translating into co-firing of biomass with coal and other biomass technologies. These combined targets are entirely unsustainable, especially in light of the need to feed a growing population, declining ecosystems and soil and water degradation.

**Eric Darier, Director of Greenpeace Quebec**, urged governments and private investors to approach the BIO lobby with great caution and to resist blindly jumping on the “innovation

bandwagon.” “We need to support and apply the precautionary principle as recognized in international law and conduct vigorous and independent life cycle analyses before declaring any technology ‘green.’” Darier denounced the lack of public participation in debates over biotech and questioned our ability to ensure independent scientific expertise to properly check industry’s claims. “This will require a full strategic assessment of each technology as it is being developed. If not, we shall be left to clean up the mess decades from now, just as we are doing with toxic chemicals and pesticides today.”

The three speakers are available for media interviews.

Eric Darier, Greenpeace Quebec	+1 514 605-6497	<a href="http://www.greenpeace.org">www.greenpeace.org</a>
Jim Thomas, ETC Group	+1 613 261-8580	<a href="http://www.etcgroup.org">www.etcgroup.org</a>
Rachel Smolker, Biofuelwatch	+1 802 735-7794	<a href="http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk">www.biofuelwatch.org.uk</a>