

# Letter of critical opposition to the “Round Table on Responsible Soy”

April 2009

We, the undersigned, call for the abandonment of the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS), on the following grounds:

## 1. RTRS allows and encourages the expansion of soy monocultures

The expansion of soy monocultures is resulting in:

\*Environmental degradation, including: loss of forests and savannahs due to direct destruction by soy monocultures or displacement of existing agriculture (particularly cattle ranching and small holder agriculture); related losses of biodiversity; release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere through land-use changes, fertiliser use including NOx emissions; soil erosion and disruption of surface and ground water and rainfall patterns;

\*Socioeconomic problems such as land conflicts leading to human rights violations, loss of livelihoods, and expulsion of rural communities, small farmers and indigenous peoples from their land. Such expulsions are effectively forcing displacement of the local population into urban poverty or previously undisturbed natural areas, violating communities' fundamental right to food, increasing concentration of land ownership by big companies, and feeding rises in related rural unemployment, low employment and slavery-like conditions on industrial farms, poverty, malnutrition, rising food prices and loss of food security and sovereignty due to displacement of staple food crops and increasing corporate control over food production; and

\*Severe health problems and poisoning in the local population due to the over-use of agrochemicals.

## 2. RTRS promotes GM soy as “responsible”

The RTRS will enable the certification of genetically modified (GM) soy as "responsible", even though there is increasing evidence that after a few years of GM soy cultivation, both overall agrochemical use and resistance problems increase substantially.

Brazil recorded nearly an 80 per cent increase in the use of the herbicide Roundup (based on glyphosate) between 2000 and 2005, and a 15-fold increase was recorded in the United States between 1994 and 2005.[1] This has led to an increase in herbicide-resistant weeds in Brazil,[2] Argentina,[3][4] and the United States,[5] pushing farmers onto a new pesticide treadmill of increasing applications of glyphosate-based herbicides in addition to other herbicides (such as the more dangerous Paraquat).[6][7] As a result, GM soy has increased production costs and environmental degradation rather than decreasing them as promised by GM companies. Neither does GM soy increase yields[8] or increase ability to crop in dry or salty land, as often cited by supporters.[9]

Use of Roundup Ready (RR) soy (genetically engineered to tolerate glyphosate-based herbicide) has also facilitated indiscriminate fumigations (often by aerial spraying) affecting human health, food crops and the environment. A report by the Rural Reflection Group (Grupo de Reflexión Rural, or GRR, from Argentina) documents how spraying glyphosate-based herbicides on RR soy leads to an increase in health problems in the countryside such as cases of cancer at early ages, birth defects, lupus, kidney problems,

respiratory ailments and dermatitis, evidenced by the accounts of rural doctors, experts and the residents of dozens of farming towns.[10]

GM crops are rejected by millions of consumers, NGOs and governments all over the world for many reasons. This means the vast majority of the GM soya crop can only be sold as animal feed and meat, dairy products and eggs produced using GM feed are sold unlabelled in the countries that reject GM as food for humans. There is mounting scientific controversy as to the adverse impacts of GM on health and the environment, as seen by recent studies produced in France,[11] Austria,[12] the US,[13][14] and Sweden.[15] These studies demonstrate that we do not yet fully understand the impacts of GM cultivation and use on human and animal health, soil structure, and biodiversity. Their widespread use should therefore be halted to prevent irrevocable harm.

### **3. RTRS principles and criteria are too weak to protect the integrity and biodiversity of the Amazon, Cerrado, Chaco and other regions from immediate, severe, and irreversible degradation**

The Amazon, Cerrado, Chaco and other regions are under immediate threat from a constellation of damaging agricultural practices and social impacts, as described above, for which soy cultivation is a core enabling factor. The RTRS principles and criteria cannot and will not effectively address these issues.

Unless these immediate crises are addressed promptly, which cannot be done through voluntary certification, these regions will be reduced from farmland to wasteland, and the smallholders and indigenous people of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and elsewhere will be displaced and become the new urban poor.

By providing a cover of “sustainability” for an inherently unsustainable system of production, the RTRS is an obstacle to progress. We call on governments, civil society and companies to tackle the real problems (e.g., over-consumption, inequitable distribution of resources like land and water) and to promote real solutions such as:

- \*phasing out GM and intensive non-GM soy in favour of agricultural practices which work with nature instead of against it, like organic agriculture and integrated crop management;
- \*executing land reforms in producing countries, which will address highly inequitable land ownership and concentration;
- \*substituting soy in animal feed with locally-grown protein crops in importing countries;
- \*stopping the promotion of large scale agrofuel production as a sustainable solution;
- \*developing better transport systems that reduce demand for energy and fuel; and
- \*increased government support for diversification of production and stimulation of local production for local markets that contribute to food security and food sovereignty in producer and consumer countries.

The RTRS process will not deliver improvements in these or a host of other areas and should be abandoned.

#### **Signed (groups):**

Anthra – Hyderabad, Andhar Pradesh, India

Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft – Lüneburg, Germany

A SEED Europe – Europe

Associação dos Consumidores de Produtos Orgânicos do Paraná – Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil

Biofuelwatch – UK

Campaña “No te Comas el Mundo” (Xarxa de l'Observatori del deute en la Globalització, Xarxa de Consum Solidari, Veterinarius Sense Fronteres), Spain

Carbon Trade Watch – Netherlands / UK / Spain

Centro de desenvolvimento Sustentável e Agroecologia Sapucaia – Amargosa, Brazil

Centro de Referência do Movimento da Cidadania Pelas Águas Florestas e Montanhas Iguassu Iterei (Iguassu Iterei Water, Forest, Mountain Citizenship Movement Reference Centre) – São Paulo, Brazil

Centro "E. Balducci" Udine – Italy

Colectivo La Otra Movida – Buenos Aires, Argentina

Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle, WA, USA

Corporate Europe Observatory – Europe

Ecologistas en Acción, Spain

EcoNexus – UK

EdPAC (Educación para la Acción Crítica) – Barcelona, Spain

Enginyeria Sense Fronteres – Barcelona, Spain

FERN (Forests & the European Union Resource Network) – Brussels, Europe

FIAN Austria – Vienna, Austria

FIAN International – International

FIAN Netherlands – Netherlands

49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium – Australia, Canada, Columbia, South Africa, UK, USA

Fórum Carajás – Brazil

Forum for Biotechnology & Food Security – New Delhi, India

Friends of the Earth Australia

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Friends of the Earth France

Friends of the Earth International

Friends of the Earth Spain (Amigos de la Tierra España)

Gen-ethical Network, Berlin, Germany

Glasgow Group, Friends of the Earth Scotland

Global Forest Coalition (members: BIOM – Kyrgystan; BROCC – Russia; Friends of the Siberian Forests – Russia; Viola – Russia; Dzelkova – Georgia; Tarun Bharat Sangh – India; Lokayan – India; Kalpavriksh – India; Atree - Bangalore India; Atree – Nepal; The Resources Himalaya Foundation – Nepal; Nefan – Nepal; The Wildlife Trust – Bangladesh; AT – Brazil; Terra di Direitos – Brazil; Sobrevivencia – Paraguay; Alter Vida – Paraguay; Censat Agua Viva, Amigos de la Tierra, Colombia; COECO-CEIBA - Costa Rica; The Asociación Indígena de Limoncocha – Ecuador; CENDA – Panama; Fundación para el Conocimiento Tradicional – Panama; Friends of the Earth – Argentina; CODEFF – Chile; Institute for Cultural Affairs – Ghana; Justica Ambiental – Mozambique; The Centre for Environment and Development – Cameroon; The National Association of Professional Environmentalists – Uganda; Timberwatch - South Africa; IIN – Kenya; Global Justice Ecology Project – USA; FoE – Australia; TWOE – Aotearoa; PIPEC - New Zealand; The Ole Siosiomaga Society – Samoa; RMI - The Institute for Forest and the Environment – Indonesia; ICTI – Tanimbar Indonesia; Cordillera Peoples Alliance – Philippines; Impac – Thailand)

GM Freeze – UK

GMWatch – UK

GRAIN

GRR-Fundación Pasos – Argentina

Grupo de Reflexión Rural – Argentina

Grupo Semillas – Colombia

Iterei–Refúgio Particular de Animais Nativos (Iterei Private Fauna and Flora Reserve, affiliated to the Planet Society of Unesco's Culture of Peace) – São Paulo, Brazil

Kheti Virasat Mission – Punjab, India

Living Farms – Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India

MPA (Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores) – Brazil

Mouvement Ecologique – Luxembourg

NOAH - Friends of the Earth Denmark

PRO ECO grupo ecologista – Asociación Civil – Tafí Viejo, Tucumán, Argentina

pro-Natural Food Scotland – Glasgow, Scotland

Pro Regenwald – Germany  
Proyecto Gran Simio (GAP/PGS - España) Asociación Internacional e Nacional – Madrid,  
Spain

Rettet den Regenwald, Germany / Salva la Selva, Alemania  
Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha Medha – Maharashtra, India

Scottish Green Party

Soil Association – UK

Soya Alliance – International

Terræ Organização da Sociedade Civil – São Paulo, Brazil

Thanal – Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Transgenics Fora! – Barcelona, Spain

Union paysanne – Québec, Canada

Via Campesina European Coordination

Washington Biotechnology Action Council, Seattle, USA

World Rainforest Movement – Uruguay

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## Notes

1. These figures are based respectively on Brazilian government and US government data, and are cited in “The only responsible soy is less soy: The Roundtable on Responsible Soy frustrates real solutions”, Friends of the Earth International statement – 22 April 2008, [www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/FoEI-RTRS.pdf](http://www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/FoEI-RTRS.pdf). The US government data are also cited in “Agricultural Pesticide Use in US Agriculture”, Center for Food Safety, May 2008. Data on herbicide use in the US after the introduction of GM crops in 1996 until 2004 are available in Benbrook, C., “Genetically engineered crops and pesticide use in the United States: The first nine years”, BioTech InfoNet, Technical Paper No. 7, October 2004, [http://www.biotech-info.net/Full\\_version\\_first\\_nine.pdf](http://www.biotech-info.net/Full_version_first_nine.pdf)

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