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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
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### **IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251 OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Europe – Third World Centre, World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), non-governmental organizations in general consultative status, and Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP), a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2007]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

**Ethanol fuels are not a green energy and  
compete directly with the food needs of people!**

The “ethanol partnership”, launched with great pomp and ceremony by the United States and Brazil on 9 March 2007, marks a new phase in the energy strategies of the great powers, just as does the decision by the European Union to replace 5.75% of its transport fuel from fossil sources with ethanol by 2010 and 20% of it by 2020. The infatuation is such that one hears talk of an “ethanol OPEC”. These policies are part of the search for cheap alternatives to fossil energies (petroleum, coal and gas) by the United States, the European Union and countries such as Brazil or China. Underpinning them is the desire to reduce dependence on producing countries of the Persian Gulf and elsewhere (especially Venezuela, for the United States).

The use of fuel from biomass (corn, sugar cane, colza etc.) raises numerous questions. What is the effect of this sort of production – based on monoculture and intensive agriculture – on the environment (especially biodiversity) and on local populations? Are these energy sources really a viable alternative to petroleum? What is today the end result of agricultural production if it is not oriented to growing food for humans and animals? Who are the real winners of the ascendance of ethanol fuels?

The environmental and social consequences of the production of ethanol fuels (often erroneously called bio-fuels even though there is nothing “bio” about them – on the contrary) have been vehemently denounced by farmers organizations, such as the international movement La Vía Campesina.

Many countries of the South have already jumped on the ethanol fuels band wagon, sacrificing their tropical forests and the traditional peasantry on the altar of fast profit. Forests have been razed in Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia – the list is long! – with, as a result, population displacements owing to lack of access to arable land and soil erosion and depletion. In twenty years, an area equal to six times territory of France has been destroyed in the interest of intensive cultivation of, in particular, sugar cane, palm oil and corn.

In Europe, the limits of space pose the question of the profitability and viability of ethanol fuels in a different way. According to Jean-Marc Jancovici, an engineer and specialist consultant on the subject of green house gases, 118% of the total surface of France would have to be given over to growing sunflower seeds to replace all the 50 million equivalent tons of petroleum consumed every year in France for transportation. (If colza were used exclusively, 104% of the country’s land would be needed; 120% for sugar beets; 2,700% for wheat.) On the European level, the European Union’s objectives seem very much beyond reach, for “simply using 5.75% of ethanol fuels with petroleum making up the rest, would require 20% of the land used for grain growing. By using the entire agricultural area of the European Union, one would still provide for only 30% of the current fuel needs.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the production of ethanol fuels, in order to be profitable, requires an immense use of petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides to boost the productiveness of the soil. It also involves the use of huge quantities of water. Thus, according to the region where it is produced, it requires between 500 and 1,000 liters of water to produce a kilo of corn, and

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<sup>1</sup> The position of the Coordination paysanne in *Mensuel agricole indépendant Uniterre*, March 2007.

between 1,000 and 1,500 liters to produce a kilo of wheat. This water must be taken from water tables, wells, lakes etc. wherever available. Thus, such cultivation is in direct competition with the vital need for potable water of the local populations.

The energy costs of the (very complicated) manufacture and transportation of ethanol must also be taken into account. According to the journal of the European Civic Forum, *Archipel*, in order to produce a liter of ethanol in a plant in Iowa (U.S.A.), 2.37 kilos of corn, 500 grams of coal and four liters of water are required.<sup>2</sup> The use of fossil energy in the ethanol transformation process is thus far from negligible. Add to this the collateral effects (deforestation, fires to clear forests, water drainage, treatment of polluted water etc.) and the belief that ethanol pollutes less and is a green fuel is firmly called into question.

Owing to its greater profitability, ethanol is inexorably overtaking food production. Many countries, particularly in the South, already feel the effects of this “land competition”. On the world markets, the price of sugar has doubled, and the price of rice and wheat increased by 25% last year.<sup>3</sup> Countries such as Mexico and Guatemala, major importers of United States corn, saw the price of the tortilla increase by practically 80% at the beginning of 2007, for the United States had decided to export a much smaller part of their corn crop, keeping it instead of ethanol production. For the countries of the South and the poorest people, the development of the ethanol industry is a catastrophe. This industry cannot grow except at the expense of their security, their sovereignty and their right to food.

The ethanol industry that has developed over the past few years is the real winner of this frenzy. The automobile, grain and petroleum industries work hand in hand. “These multinationals are seeking to achieve a concentration of their research, production, transformation and distribution activities relative to our food and fuel systems.”<sup>4</sup>

The development of ethanol throughout the world as a response to the decreasing availability of fossil fuels is a chimera, for, at least in its present form, it is neither a viable nor realistic alternative to fossil fuels and will not bring about a reduction of planetary warming. On the contrary, this production puts the traditional functioning of agriculture – the production of food stuffs for humans and animals – in grave danger, not only by taking over land and pushing toward the destruction of primeval forests, but also by withdrawing from the food chain elements of life-sustaining necessity for the profit of the automobile industry.

The signatories recommend the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to study this question in the framework of his next report.

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<sup>2</sup> « Mettez du sang dans votre moteur ! » in *Archipel*, N° 149, May.

<sup>3</sup> V. « Biofuels : the Illusion and the Reality » in *Third World Resurgence*, TWN, N° 200, April 2007.

<sup>4</sup> “The five myths of the transition to ethanol”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, No 639, June 2007.