

## Tar sands in Congo Basin poses huge risks for one of world's poorest countries and will worsen runaway climate change

On the eve of the G8 Summit, civil society groups meeting in Sardinia are calling for Italian oil company Eni to rethink plans to develop tar sands and agro-fuels in Africa's Congo Basin. Ongoing research by the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank (CRBM) and Rencontre pour la paix et les droits de l'homme (RPDH) highlights the potentially devastating impacts of the investment on the environment and local communities.<sup>1</sup>

The project also raises questions about the commitment of G8 companies and governments – specifically Italy, G8 host and Eni's major shareholder – to tackling climate change and improving access to energy for the world's poorest citizens, key themes at this year's G8. In May, energy ministers said that: *"coping with the interlinked issues of energy investments, energy access and availability, and the climate change challenge is key to the future of our countries."* They promised *"resolute action"* to address energy poverty, particularly stark in Africa, despite the continent's vast fossil fuel wealth and renewable energy potential.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, Eni signed agreements to spend \$3 billion on developing tar sands, palm oil for fuel and food, and electricity in the Republic of Congo, located in the Congo Basin, the second largest area of tropical forest left in the world and a vital carbon sink.<sup>3</sup> Italy's G8 Action Plan includes a specific commitment to *"safeguarding the forests of the Congo Basin"*.<sup>4</sup> Congo is one of the poorest countries in the world, despite decades of oil production, with a history of corruption and conflict. Barely 25% of the population have access to electricity, and the country lacks any proper environmental regulation.

Barbara Unmüßig, President of the Heinrich Boell Foundation says: *"This is the first tar sands project in Africa and its impacts on the local environment and communities, and on our climate, would be huge. Neither Congo nor the world can afford it."* Tar or oil sands production is currently only occurring in Canada, where its environmental and social costs are well-known: they include water depletion and pollution, habitat destruction and deforestation, and the creation of vast, toxic tailing ponds. Production of a barrel of tar sands bitumen is 3-5 times more intensive in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than a barrel of conventional oil.<sup>5</sup> Monoculture palm oil has also been heavily criticized by civil society groups for causing deforestation, higher GHG emissions, threats to food security and to indigenous groups.<sup>6</sup>

Local communities in Congo have long complained about the social and environmental impacts of oil, especially the health impacts of gas flaring at Eni's M'Boundi oil field. According to Christian Mounzé, President of human rights organisation RPDH, *"there has been no meaningful consultation with local communities, which contradicts Eni's human rights policies. Turning flared gas into electricity could be a good step, but the flaring must stop urgently, and Congolese people also need guaranteed access to the electricity."*

CRBM campaigner Elena Gerebizza says *"Eni and the Italian government are putting profit above the environment and poverty eradication. As host of the G8, promoting protection of the Congo Basin and a new development partnership with Africa, Italy's support for this project undermines its international credibility"*. Civil society groups are calling on Eni to:

- Disclose full information about the impacts of its investments in Congo, including current gas flaring levels at M'Boundi, and the detailed timetable for the tar sands and palm oil development.
- Organise meaningful consultation with affected communities, as per Eni's own environmental and human rights policies. Local communities and indigenous groups must give free, prior, informed consent before any development takes place.
- Stop further development of the tar sands and palm oil investments until their potential risks have been fully assessed, including their impact on greenhouse gas emission levels, and a credible risk management plan adopted.

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### Notes

1. For more background, see “*Eni's new investment in tar sands and agro-fuels in the Congo Basin*” by Heinrich Boell Foundation (Germany's Green Political Foundation), Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank (Italy), and Rencontre pour la paix et les droits de l'homme (Congo), and supported by non-governmental groups from throughout the G8 and Africa; [www.crbm.org](http://www.crbm.org) or [www.boell.org](http://www.boell.org). An international civil society discussion is being held on 3 July 2009, on the extractive sector, natural resources management and climate justice, as part of an alternative G8 meeting taking place in Sardinia from July 1- 5 2009. See [www.gsotto.org](http://www.gsotto.org).

2. JOINT STATEMENT BY THE G8 ENERGY MINISTERS, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER AND THE ENERGY MINISTERS OF ALGERIA, AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, CHINA, EGYPT, INDIA, INDONESIA, KOREA, LIBYA, MEXICO, NIGERIA, RWANDA, SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH AFRICA, AND TURKEY, 25 May 2009. See [http://www.g8energy2009.it/pdf/Session\\_II\\_III\\_EC.pdf](http://www.g8energy2009.it/pdf/Session_II_III_EC.pdf)

3. Eni 2008. “*Eni and the Republic of Congo launch a new integrated model of cooperation*”. 19 May 2008; [http://www.eni.it/en\\_IT/media/press-releases/2008/05/19-05-2008-integrated-model-congo.shtml](http://www.eni.it/en_IT/media/press-releases/2008/05/19-05-2008-integrated-model-congo.shtml).

4. “*G8 Africa's Goals for 2009*”, [http://www.g8italia2009.it/G8/Home/G8\\_africa/G8-G8\\_Layout\\_locale-1199882116809\\_G8\\_Africa\\_Presidenza.htm](http://www.g8italia2009.it/G8/Home/G8_africa/G8-G8_Layout_locale-1199882116809_G8_Africa_Presidenza.htm).

5. See <http://nonewoilsands.wordpress.com>; Polaris Institute, 2009. *Moratorium Now! 6 Good Reasons why there should be a Moratorium Now on the expansion of the Alberta Tar Sands*, [www.tarsandswatch.org/files/Polaris\\_Tarsands\\_Moratorium\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.tarsandswatch.org/files/Polaris_Tarsands_Moratorium_Declaration.pdf). Also *BP and Shell: Rising Costs in Tar Sands Investments*, Greenpeace UK, Platform and Oil Change International, September 2008 & “*The Viability of Non-Conventional Oil Development*” Innovest Strategic Value Advisors, Research Note, March 2009, [www.innovestgroup.com](http://www.innovestgroup.com).

6. See for instance <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/forests/palm-oil>; *Declarations against the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO): In defence of Human Rights, Food Sovereignty*, October 2008, <http://www.wrm.org.uy/index.html> & “Halt Climate Change – Halt Forest destruction – Halt Plantations”, <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2009/06/10/halt-climate-change-halt-forest-destruction-halt-plantations/>