

**Change Tourism, Not Climate!**

ANITA PLEUMAROM

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Third World Network

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# 1

## Background

The Davos Declaration, adopted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism convened by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in October 2007, urged “action by the entire tourism sector to face climate change as one of the greatest challenges to sustainable development, and to the UN Millennium Development Goals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” It also called on concerned parties to come up “with concrete commitments and action plans” toward adaptation and mitigation and agreed that the UNWTO, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) further leads the climate change and tourism process.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, the UNWTO and other international bodies produced a number of reports that explore the new realities of tourism in the carbon-constrained world. These include assessments of the implications of climate change for tourist destinations, calculations of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from the three tourism sub-sectors – transportation, accommodation and activities – and proposals for mitigation and adaptation.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> In addition, private sector initiatives were launched to develop future scenarios and solution strategies for the tourism sector.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

The recent research findings are particularly alarming in terms of tourism’s present and future contribution to global warming, which is primarily due to the high energy use for transport. As Scott, Peeters and Goessling point out, if tourism was a country, its current GHG emissions would today rank fifth, after the USA, China, the European Union and Russia.<sup>9</sup> Given the expected

international tourism boom in the coming years, the forecasts are even more perturbing. Unless tourism policymakers take drastic action to reverse the dominant “business-as-usual” attitude within the industry, tourism “will become a key force of GHG emissions in a world seeking to decarbonize in all other sectors of the economy”<sup>10</sup>, undermining the overall progress made for the global climate.

This untenable situation has emerged because the 1997 Kyoto Protocol does not explicitly include GHGs generated by tourism in any global reduction targets, while other sectors are required to make quantifiable commitments. As the first commitment period for emission reduction under the Protocol expires in 2012, and this issue remains grossly neglected in negotiations on the post-2012 reduction targets, the danger is real that tourism becomes a “climate destruction magnet”<sup>11</sup> or the “biggest climate killer”<sup>12</sup>.

One question that needs to be asked is why the industry is allowed to grow indiscriminately and irresponsibly in an environment of impunity at a time when all nations and economic sectors have to make commitments to scale down energy-intensive activities that exacerbate climate change. While the rhetoric of “sustainable tourism”, “green global tourism economy” or “low carbon travel & tourism sector” features prominently, no concrete commitments and no plans for a more stringent policy framework have been presented in advance of the Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Many parts of the world, tourist destinations included, are already experiencing climate change impacts of catastrophic proportions, often combined with a social, economic, environmental and political crisis as well. Notwithstanding that local communities and peoples, particularly in the South, are worst affected, a perspective of equity and justice is missing in the tourism and climate change discussions led by policymakers and industry leaders. The UNWTO that insists its tourism and climate change policies are pro-poor and consistent with the Millennium Development Goals seems to not even really understand that the most marginalized and

vulnerable of the international community, including women, indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers and fisher folks, forest dwellers, workers, migrants and displaced people, are suffering manifold, e.g. from

— a whole range of problems resulting from unsustainable tourism development that have remained unresolved for many years and are still exacerbating;

— climate change, to which tourism significantly contributes; and

— more and more misguided climate change mitigation strategies, some of which tourism policymakers are promoting as “solutions”.

# 2

## Myths of tourism's “pro-poor” and “sustainable” nature

The tourism sector's failure to deliver realistic and acceptable climate change responses needs to be discussed in the broader context of political, socio-economic and environmental development objectives.

There is still the all-pervasive view that tourism is a key driver for economic development and poverty reduction in the developing world. So, it is argued, tourism must be allowed to expand without restrictions. Nevertheless, experts and international agencies, including the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP)<sup>13,14,15</sup>, have widely acknowledged that tourism comes with many hidden costs so it can hardly be regarded as an economic panacea or a “quick-win” in overcoming the poor socio-economic conditions found in developing countries<sup>16</sup>.

Undoubtedly, tourism is one of the world's biggest money spinners. But as it is an industry largely controlled by corporations based in developed countries of the North, financial “leakages” need to be taken into account that occur, for example, due to repatriation of profits earned by foreign tourism companies, income and royalty remittances, repayment of foreign loans and import of equipments, materials, capital and consumer goods to cater to the needs of international tourists and overseas promotional expenditures. Whereas the World Bank estimates an average leakage level of 55% for developing countries, UNCTAD and UNEP provide estimates as high as 80% for some countries.<sup>17</sup>

A 2008 report by the UK-based New Economics Foundation (NEF) and the World Development Movement (WDM) includes an analysis of the potential economic impact of curbing UK aviation growth – due to new national and international climate policies, for example – on four leading UK tourist destinations: Kenya, the Maldives, Thailand and the Dominican Republic. These four countries are also facing serious impacts of climate change. In each case, the calculation of the real economic contribution to those nations reveals that, once we account for the money which effectively leaks out of those economies to foreign-owned companies and imported resources, the economic impact is marginal. This is a confirmation that the benefits of tourism to the economies of developing nations have been significantly and systematically exaggerated.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the lure of foreign investment in large-scale tourism projects has often induced cash-strapped governments of developing countries to support transnational corporations, while development activities that lead to more balanced and sustainable economic growth and the improvement of public services have been neglected or insufficiently funded.

Tourism has proven unsuitable to deliver more equitable development, rather it has contributed significantly to widening the gap between the rich and the poor among and within nations. International financial institutions, especially the World Bank and regional development banks, have been responsible for promoting failed tourism development models and financing the infrastructure for inequitable and unsustainable tourism in the developing world.<sup>19</sup> The situation has even worsened as a result of multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements and other liberalization policies<sup>20,21</sup> as well as the establishment of special economic zones (SEZ) and more specifically special tourism zones (STZ)<sup>22</sup>.

Besides only receiving a trickle from the wealth created by tourism, local communities are paying a high price for the social and environmental impacts of tourism.<sup>23,24,25,26</sup> The erosion of social structures, traditional values and cultural heritage can be experienced in all tourist destinations driven by

over-commercialization. Behind the tourist centres' glittering facades, the majority of local residents are suffering from rising living costs, mafia-style politics and corruption, social erosion, sex, drugs and crime, as well as from environmental degradation.

Today's international tourism system that emerged from western industrialized societies is one of the clearest manifestations of unsustainable, wasteful consumption. "For the twentieth century tourist, the world has become one large department store of countryside and cities," said Schivelbusch some 20 years ago.<sup>27</sup> Travel for leisure, facilitated by modern transport modes such as aviation, can be regarded as "purposeless mobility that has now become a basic need for well-to-do people."<sup>28</sup> The globalization of tourism and resort lifestyle is also a form of exploitation, the victims being the urban upper-class people in developing countries who are encouraged to spend their surplus income on dreams and illusions, at the expense of the environment and other members of society. Yet, the fact that it is still less than 2% of the world population who participate in holiday trips abroad on a yearly basis, reflects the elitist character of contemporary international tourism.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, the trend is towards even more wasteful tourism as travellers make more frequent and more distant trips, reduce the length of stay, use more frequently high-energy vehicles and stay in more luxurious hotels. "Sustainable" tourism industry is and remains a pipe-dream. Tourism industrialization of the most remote and most pristine corners of the world, commonly circumscribed with the euphemism "ecotourism", requires even more energy-intensive travel. In addition, it very often wreaks havoc on biodiversity, land and marine ecosystems, many of which are ancestral domains of indigenous peoples.<sup>30,31</sup>

Tourism leads to unhealthy urbanization processes, exacerbating pollution problems and traffic congestion and exerts increasing pressure on resources on which local communities depend for their livelihood. The massive land use change from food-producing land and marine areas to tourism zones, which increasingly take the form of mega-resorts with hotels, residential

housing, golf courses, marinas, shopping and entertainment complexes, can seriously undermine efforts to battle hunger and poverty.<sup>32</sup> The exact number of small-scale farmers and fisher-folks who have lost their land and livelihood over the last half century due to unjust and environmentally harmful tourism projects and practices is impossible to calculate; so are the human rights violations that have accompanied misguided tourism development.

If the UNWTO and industry leaders declare that the global tourism sector offers solutions to the immense challenges of climate change and poverty, they must also recognize their historical responsibility for allowing uncontrolled and unsustainable tourism developments spreading the world over. It is also illusory to invoke notions of pro-poor tourism without any meaningful involvement of civil society organizations as well as grassroots communities and indigenous peoples whose livelihoods, wellbeing and welfare are severely affected by all-prevailing irresponsible tourism.

# 3

## Tourism's responsibility to tackle climate change

UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-Moon recently wrote in an article published by the *International Herald Tribune*, stating: “Climate change is the pre-eminent geopolitical issue of our time. It rewrites the global equation for development, peace and prosperity. It threatens markets, economies and development gains. It can deplete food and water supplies, provoke conflict and migration, destabilize fragile societies and even topple governments.”<sup>33</sup>

At the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change, held in Anchorage, Alaska, in April 2009, delegates declared: “We are deeply alarmed by the accelerating climate devastation brought about by unsustainable development. We are experiencing profound and disproportionate adverse impacts on our cultures, human and environmental health, human rights, well-being, traditional livelihoods, food systems and food sovereignty, local infrastructure, economic viability, and our very survival as Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>34</sup>

Notably, climatic consequences have particularly serious effects in countries and regions, where climate-sensitive tourism has major economic importance. According to research conducted by Deutsche Bank, this applies in Europe to Malta, Cyprus, Spain, Austria and Greece. In the Caribbean, e.g. Bahamas and Jamaica are disproportionately affected; in Asia, Thailand and Malaysia, and in Africa, Tunisia and Morocco. The island states in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean are also overly reliant on tourism.<sup>35</sup> The study also points out: “Unlike natural disasters or terrorist attacks, [there]

is not just a short-term effect that could then be quickly forgotten. Rather, climate change will permanently alter the attraction of some holiday regions and force them to take steps to adapt in the next decades.”<sup>36</sup>

Tourism official and industry leaders are now well aware of the extremely serious situation in many destinations. The UNEP report on a high-profile tourism seminar on climate change adaptation and mitigation, held at Oxford University in 2008, includes a comprehensive list of “tourism resort & product vulnerabilities” due to climate change, from sea level and temperature rises; flooding and drought, landslides; storm surges and wildfires; biodiversity loss and ecosystem changes; water scarcity and impact on food security; negative impact on health and spread of diseases; damage to infrastructure and impaired tourist attractions; to security and insurability issues.<sup>37</sup>

As it stands, there is not only reason for grave concern about the well-being of local communities in tourist destinations but also “a clear business case for tourism”<sup>38</sup> to leave behind “business-as-usual” attitudes and immediately begin to reduce the industry’s emission footprint.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, however, failed to address international tourism’s increasing climate debt and left a giant loophole for the industry which is free of binding mitigation measures. Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Protocol, only called on developed countries to regulate international aviation and shipping emissions, working through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO). Incomprehensively and disturbingly, both the ICAO and IMO that are both special UN agencies like the UNWTO have done nothing over the last 12 years to solve the problems, thus allowing heat-trapping pollution from planes and ships to continue spewing unchecked into the atmosphere.<sup>39,40</sup>

According to the European Federation for Transport & Environment, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from aviation exceed 730 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually; that means international aviation emits more CO<sub>2</sub> than France or Australia.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from air transport, the booming cruise ship industry is also a sub-sector of tourism that ranks high as a climate polluter: Excessive international shipping emits 870 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year – more than the UK or Canada.<sup>42</sup> One cruise ship alone can generate during one port visit emissions of more than 12,400 cars.<sup>43</sup>

Tourism's overall contribution to climate change is still an under-researched theme. The UNWTO/UNEP/WMO study, which for the first time attempted to calculate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the main tourism sub-sectors – transportation, accommodation and activities – concluded that in 2005, tourism was responsible for approximately 5% of total carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. Most of this was attributed to air transport (40%) and car transport (32%), while accommodation contributed 21% and “activities” 4 percent.<sup>44</sup>

However, there are other GHGs besides CO<sub>2</sub>, such as nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>), that also need to be included into the calculations. “In the tourism sector, this is particularly relevant for emissions from aviation, which, at flight altitude, has an enhanced impact on global warming. Radiative forcing (RF) is thus used to calculate the entire contribution of tourist (air) travel to global warming. Radiative forcing measures the extent to which emissions of greenhouse gases raise global average temperatures now or at a specified year in the future.”<sup>45</sup>

Hence, tourism's real contribution to climate change is considerably higher than previously thought, amounting up to 12.5-14% of GHGs.<sup>46,47</sup> The UNWTO and the ICAO were criticized on several occasions for presenting figures that do not take into account the radiative forcing factor and therefore failing to present assessments and projections based on accurate scientific information. In 2008, a coalition of European NGOs pointed out in a letter to the UNWTO<sup>48</sup> that if it continues to follow the ICAO calculating method that camouflages the actual impact of air transport, it would be in conflict with the findings and work of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and consumers would be misinformed about the actual impact of air travel. The following example was used to illustrate the

vastly different results of the various calculation methods: When taking into account the RF index recommended by the European Environment Agency and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund), for example, emissions of a single flight from Frankfurt to New York, would amount to 2000 kg. Using ICAO method, the emissions of the same flight would “only” be 416 kg.<sup>49</sup>

If the UNWTO’s official forecasts for the growth of international tourism are reliable, the tourism sector’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are likely to increase to 160% in the 2005 to 2035 period, with the share of air transport exceeding 50% and to over 80% of the total GHG impact.<sup>50</sup> Considering that the worst case scenario for the global increase in GHGs contemplated by the IPCC involves a maximum increase of 88% from 2000 to 2030, tourism’s potential for climate destruction becomes all too clear.

Yet, tourism’s climate debt may be even higher. One major reason for climate change is land use change. So the massive clearings of forests, mangroves, wetlands and hillsides for building of tourism-related complexes and infrastructure such as airports, roads, power stations, telecommunication need to be considered as well. Moreover, there are a whole range of “indirect emissions” that are not included in tourism’s climate accounting, e.g. emissions resulting from energy used for the transportation of food and consumer goods to satisfy tourists’ needs in destinations, the production and transportation of hotel accessories and equipments of tourist activities (e.g. golf clubs, jet skis, diving equipments).<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, as tourism researcher Buades rightly notes, if it is stated that transportation is the dominant constituent of GHG emissions from international tourism, “this is because there are problems in defining what is included in the tourism energy bill. If the total energy (embodied energy or “energy”) required for sustaining highly touristed societies were included, there would be many surprises.” Based on experiences of the Balearic Islands in Spain, he argues, “the tourism business clearly feeds off the energy outsourcing process that has enabled the explosive emergence of the global factory (and the global office).”<sup>52</sup>

How critical it is that countries and major industries set appropriate GHG reduction targets is shown in the latest UN scientific report that reviewed emission plans from 192 nations and calculated the consequences for global warming. It concludes that even if the developed world actually cuts its emissions by 80% and the developing world cuts theirs in half by 2050, temperatures will still rise by 1.7 degree celcius by the end of this century. But the most likely outcome from the negotiations in Copenhagen still translates into an increase of 2.7 degree celcius, which is not enough to prevent a climate catastrophe, according to climate scientists.<sup>53</sup>

Many developing countries, civil society organizations and people's movements are demanding developed countries and their corporations that are primarily responsible for the looming climate crisis to lift up their targets of cutting GHG emissions to at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020. Small island developing states (SIDS) that are in danger of being obliterated by rising sea levels are calling for a binding emissions reduction target for developed countries of at least 45% below 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 95% by 2050.<sup>54</sup> At the Anchorage Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change, participants agreed to the same targets as SIDS.<sup>55</sup>

Tourism as probably the fastest growing climate-polluting economic sector is still far from setting concrete and relevant emission reduction goals. While bunker fuel emissions from aviation and cruise ships will at least be included into international legislation, tourism as a whole is not obliged to make any commitments.

The fact that the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism's most influential private sector association, has proposed reduction goals ranging from -25 to 30% by 2020 and to -50% by 2035<sup>56</sup> is of little value. Notably, the WTTC has declared that these targets are "aspirational" only, and it is highly unlikely it will agree to more than voluntary mitigation measures.

Without the establishment of stringent regulatory frameworks for tourism at national and international levels, however, there is minimal chance for making

good progress. “The problems incurred in self-regulation are documented in the (non)-progress made under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization to address GHG emissions from aviation over the last decade, which has recently led both the Australian and UK governments to call for the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) to sidestep ICAO and take charge of emissions from both aviation and shipping in a sectoral approach.”<sup>57</sup>

Addressing tourism’s emissions by legislation is one matter, departing from unsustainable tourism development models is another. Major adjustments in international tourism are inevitable. These may include a decrease of international travellers, a switch from air and car transport to more sustainable transport modes and develop alternatives to tourism in destinations of the South. In any event, to effectively avert the worsening climate crisis all possible actions must be taken to overcome dependency on fossil fuels and to bring about renewable energy economies, sources and systems that can help nations and local communities to achieve energy security and sovereignty.

# 4

## Tourism's involvement in false climate change solutions

New initiatives towards “low carbon” or “carbon-neutral” tourism need to be subjected to critical examination because several proposed mitigation measures only claim to save carbon and some may do more harm than good. There are also increasing complaints that such activities are leading to the violation of human rights, increasing land grabs and conflicts with local communities and peoples in countries and regions of the South. Such “false solutions”<sup>58</sup> or “dead strategies”<sup>59</sup> should be addressed head on and phased out because they make a mockery of the principle of climate justice and delay or obstruct pathways towards a genuinely non-polluting future.

As the UNWTO and tourism industry leaders want to ensure further growth of the energy-intensive, high-emission tourism sector, they rely on market-based instruments to offset tourism's booming climate debt.

What tourism policymakers have to comprehend and accept is that the most effective climate protection strategy is to leave the remaining fossil fuels in the ground and to focus instead on appropriate energy-efficiency and safe and clean renewable energy. In contrast, carbon markets and related activities as well as the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) allow major polluters, such as aviation companies, to continue their “business-as-usual” operations by buying relatively cheap GHG pollution rights elsewhere, instead of reinvesting in non-fossil technologies, for example. “Carbon credit mechanisms cannot reduce overall emissions. They are not designed to. The net climatic effect of even the most successful carbon credit-generating project cannot be more than zero, since every

greenhouse gas molecule a project supposedly “saves” is used to license emissions elsewhere.”<sup>60</sup>

Critics argue that carbon trading and offsetting schemes are “dangerously distracting”<sup>61</sup> or “a cynical effort to ignore the problem”<sup>62</sup>; they delay valuable and necessary innovations toward a truly climate-friendly future. “Rather than encouraging the fundamental changes to lifestyle and corporate behaviours necessary to tackle climate change, carbon offsets provide a convenient loophole to appease regulators and personal consciences.”<sup>63</sup>

As the following case study from Uganda illustrates, these activities can also seriously threaten peoples’ rights. The project in question, which promised to invest air travellers’ carbon offset contributions in tree plantations according to the CDM under the Kyoto Protocol, has caused enormous hardship for the Benet ethnic people.<sup>64,65</sup> The Dutch organization called Forests Absorbing Carbon-dioxide Emissions (FACE) Foundation, has been working with the Uganda Wildlife Authority in the project at Mount Elgon in Eastern Uganda that has a guaranteed lifespan of 99 years. Among other things, FACE sells the offsets to GreenSeat, a Dutch carbon-offset company doing business with airline companies. GreenSeat has claimed that a mere sum of US\$28 covers the costs of planting 66 trees which “compensates” for the carbon-dioxide emissions of a return flight from Frankfurt to Kampala. Even if there was verifiable CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, the social costs of the project are unacceptably high because many Benet were forcefully evicted from their land. Having lost everything they owned they are now living as squatters facing human rights violations on a daily basis. Some people have even lost their lives.<sup>66</sup> In early 2007, the locals were so angry and desperate that they cut down half a million of the project’s trees and planted food crops and fruit trees on the land.

Similar conflicts are likely to occur when the tourism industry continues to promote carbon sink projects like the “Tourism Earth Lung” in Sri Lanka – an initiative that was first introduced at the 2007 Davos Climate Change and Tourism Conference. Since then, it has been paraded as a success story at

several key global “Climate Change and Tourism” forums of the UNWTO, UNEP, UNDP (UN Development Programme), PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association), ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations), the World Travel Mart-London (WTM), the International Tourism Bourse-Berlin (ITB) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)<sup>67</sup>, even though a solid implementation plan is still not available.

The idea of the project under the leadership of the Sri Lankan Minister of Tourism is to ensure the long-term use of the environmental resource base of tourism, while sequestering GHGs through forest management and other “green programmes”. The basic paper that outlines the project states, “...a strategy will be developed where all stakeholders of Sri Lanka tourism both in the public and private sector, the people of Sri Lanka and the destination’s visitors collaborate and create a carbon neutral tourism haven.”<sup>68</sup> But there are no elaborations on how this can be achieved; it is only said that research is being conducted by the UNDP.

That the initiative is more led by image concerns and marketing thinking than based on scientific knowledge and reason is also revealed on the Earth-Lung Travel website: “With intensive use of energy resources for cooling and heating, with luxurious lifestyle elements being met while on holiday and placing pressures on competing local resources, [tourism] becomes a frontline focus on the global warming issues with resultant ‘travel guilt’ affecting the demand for long haul destinations like Sri Lanka.”<sup>69</sup> And to leave no doubt that public relations plays a pivotal role in the project, it says, “the promotional value of the effort is immense.”<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, there is no mention on how the “Tourism Earth Lung” project may affect local communities, land ownership, use of natural resources, traditional livelihoods, food sovereignty, etc.

There is also concern that a carbon offset project in Brazil, funded by the international hotel chain Marriott, represents little more than a greenwash. The hotel group has donated US\$2 million to the Juma Sustainable Development Reserve Project, in the State of Amazonas. Hotel guests are

invited to contribute to the Juma rainforest protection fund to voluntarily offset the calculated emissions from their individual hotel stay. “Ten dollars will offset the carbon for your next ten room-nights at Marriott hotels and is tax deductible for US taxpayers” says the hotel’s website.<sup>71</sup>

The Juma Reserve project, managed by FAS – the Portuguese acronym for Amazonas Sustainable Foundation –, calls itself the first REDD (reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation) initiative and recently received the validation to the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Standards (CCBS) in Brazil, issued by the German audit company Tüv Süd. According to the FAS, it is the first project in the world that earned the top score in the *Gold* category, and it is the first in Brazil and in the Americas to be certified for avoided deforestation.<sup>72</sup>

Established by the Government of the State of Amazonas in 2006, the Juma Reserve in the municipality of Novo Aripuanã borders the road AM-174, a high risk deforestation region. The project is expected to become the model for REDD, a global strategy under discussion to protect endangered forests. During the climate change negotiations in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008, countries that have ratified the UNFCCC agreed on the broad rules governing how REDD will work. However, details still need to be worked out at the forthcoming climate conference in Copenhagen.

The FAS calculates a contention of deforestation of 366,151 hectares of tropical rain forest, out of the total 589,612 hectares which make up the Juma Reserve. Until the end of the first period of certification, in 2016, it is expected to avert the emission of at least 3,611,723 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e (CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent). It is estimated that by 2050, the project will have generated credits of 189,767,027 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e. In addition to the climate mitigation gains associated with the reduction of GHG from deforestation, the project aims at “strengthening of environmental monitoring; increase in the generation of income through the promotion of sustainable businesses; enhancement of education; development of scientific research, and a direct payment for environmental services through a programme called ‘Bolsa

Floresta””, which is a stipend for the 322 families of the Juma Indigenous People living in the area, who will be trained and remunerated to protect the rainforest.<sup>73</sup>

Environmentalists and indigenous rights activists have criticized the project for paying off the locals, while failing to address communities’ rights and land tenure issues.<sup>74,75</sup> The winners are transnational corporations such as in this case the Marriott Hotel Group that can polish up their image by participating in such “green” programmes and the project owners who are allowed to make hefty profits by selling the rainforests.<sup>76</sup> “Sustainable” forest management that was enthusiastically offered as eco-friendly solutions for communities can easily aid and abet corruption particularly in poor countries with weak democratic structures. This is a major reason why many environmental organizations, community groups and the Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change oppose REDD.<sup>77</sup>

Carbon credit schemes, such as those now offered by tourism agencies and companies, are lacking “widely accepted definitions, methods and data for counting sinks”, according to David Victor, the author of the book *The collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the struggle to slow global warming*. In his opinion, “Even if nations could agree on the necessary procedures, there would still be enormous potential for cooking the books – only a monitoring system larger and more intrusive than anything ever attempted under international law could settle the inevitable disputes. Moreover, the carbon content of forests and soils varies naturally – decades of monitoring would be needed to (as)certain that a ‘sink’ was not merely transient and deserved full credit.”<sup>78</sup>

REDD has also come under fire, because as it stands, related projects not only involve natural forests but may also include monoculture tree plantations that are destructive to biodiversity and ecosystems. An international NGO conference that focused on climate, forests and plantations – organized by the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) in Heredia, Costa Rica, in March 2009 – concluded in its final declaration “that monoculture plantations

displace communities, destroy forests, pollute the planet and generate further climate change, and that the defense of the climate, forests and other ecosystems by the people is the only possible alternative for the future we are building.”<sup>79</sup>

The WRM, an international network of citizen groups renowned for its valuable forest research around the globe, also recently warned of tree plantations as carbon sinks because of the high risks of fire.<sup>80</sup> Consider the following scenario: An airline in the North engages a company that promises to “offset” its emissions by planting trees. Even if the trees are planted and that they do absorb the entire amount of carbon emitted by the polluting airline, the plantation may burn down. The result will be that the burnt plantation will have released the entire amount of carbon that it was supposed to “offset”. In conclusion, the plantation’s only use will be to allow the airline to escape from what is most necessary to protect the climate, namely cutting emissions at the source.<sup>81</sup>

Inspired by Friends of the Earth’s “Dangerous Distraction” study, the British travel agency responsibletravel.com, which in 2002 was among the first tourism companies to introduce carbon offsets, recently made an encouraging move by removing its carbon offset offering from the website. Managing director Justin Francis said: “We believe that the travel industry’s priority must be to reduce carbon emissions, rather than to offset. Too often offsets are being used by the tourism industry in developed countries to justify growth plans on the basis that money will be donated to projects in developing countries. Global reduction targets will not be met this way... Carbon offsets distract tourists from the need to reduce their emissions. They create a ‘medieval pardon’ for us to carry on behaving in the same way (or worse).”<sup>82</sup>

# 5

## **Biofuels for aviation — another false solution**

At the ICAO High Level Meeting on International Aviation and Climate Change in Montreal, Canada, in October 2009, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) which represents 230 airlines, pledged to improve fuel efficiency by 1.5% annually until 2020, to set a goal of “carbon-neutral growth” by 2020 and to work toward a 50% net reduction of carbon emissions in 2050, using 2005 as a baseline.<sup>83</sup> Apart from offsetting GHG emissions in air transport, IATA’s goal is for its members to be using 10% alternative fuels by 2017.

As a Dutch research report on biofuels concludes, “there is no suitable alternative for kerosene and diesel for aviation” for the medium to longer term.<sup>84</sup> And investing in agrofuels, or biofuels, as now particularly promoted by the transport industry, is a controversial affair since it just sustains the infrastructure of fossil fuel dependence instead of replacing it.<sup>85</sup> In fact, there are no “sustainable” industrial fuels as claimed by the World Economic Forum (WEF), for example, which promotes in its study the “accelerated development and deployment of low carbon sustainable fuels in the aviation sector” as a “most promising” mitigation measure and a pathway to a “low carbon travel & tourism sector.”<sup>86</sup>

What needs to be considered is that the production of first generation agrofuels (made from plants) and second generation agrofuels (made from trees) require immense amounts of land. To give an example, one Boeing 747-400 flight over 10,000 km consumes 32,000 gallons or 140,960 litres of agrofuel, and that amount would require 52 hectares of *Jatropha* plantations.<sup>87</sup>

In order to replace 238 million tonnes of fuel, which is currently the amount of kerosene that the world's commercial jet fleet consumes annually, with agrofuel produced from *Jatropha*, more than one million square kilometers of land would be needed, which comes close to the size of Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium combined. If this is not mind-boggling enough: This area would even increase by a factor of two by 2020 if the forecasts for further aviation growth are realized.<sup>88</sup>

As numerous reports from different parts of the world show – e.g. from Indonesia, Burma, India, Uganda, Cote d'Ivoire to Columbia and Ecuador – the booming agrofuel business also leads to land concentration in the hands of a few, expansion of environmentally damaging monocultures, destruction of small-scale farming systems, less land available for food crops and higher food prices.<sup>89,90,91</sup>

With agrofuels under fire for threatening food security and biodiversity, industry giants – including Exxon Mobile, Shell and aircraft producer Boeing – are stepping up research into third-generation fuel from algae. Boeing and UOP, a subsidiary of Honeywell, have teamed up with several airlines to create the Algal Biomass Organization (ABO), a trade group which aims to test and develop algae fuels for use in aeroplanes.<sup>92</sup>

Although algae need much less land to grow than conventional biofuels and do not consume too much of scarce freshwater resources for irrigation, it is too early to call it a solution for the transport sector. Experts acknowledge the production of algae fuel is not economically viable and there are still a whole range of technical problems to tackle, e.g. concerning “algae harvesting, dewatering, drying, lipid extraction and conversion”, according to Bernard Raemy, executive vice-president at the Carbon Capture Corporation (CCC), a US-based company which claims to be a leader in the nascent algae-based biofuel industry. A life-cycle assessment of algae-biofuels, performed by French scientists raised concerns over the environmental impact of the whole process chain, from biomass production to biodiesel combustion.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, widespread mass production of algae for biofuel production is hampered by high costs of the equipment and structures needed to begin growing algae in large quantities. “For most algae applications we are still in fundamental research,” Raffaello Garofalo, executive director at the European Algae Biomass Association (EABA) recently admitted. He warned against over-enthusiasm for the technology and refused to make predictions about when the technology could become commercially viable.<sup>94</sup>

# 6

## What the UNWTO should be doing

It is a general problem that tourism policymakers and industry leaders respond belatedly and poorly to tourism-induced problems. The UNWTO's mission has been to promote global tourism without any barriers, but given the enormous challenges caused by today's major crises – climate, energy, environment, food crises – it is indispensable and urgent that the agency rethinks its policies and programmes, not only in order to adequately respond to the risks of climate change, but to tackle irresponsible and unsustainable tourism development in a comprehensive way.

When addressing the critical issues such as poverty and climate change, the UNWTO's main concern seems to be the economic well-being of the tourism industry. In the meantime, valuable research, including those of other UN agencies, and the voices of civil society organizations and local and indigenous communities who present tourism realities from a grassroots perspective have been constantly ignored or played down. The well-being of the millions of people in tourist destinations, many of whom are impoverished and marginalized due to unjust and harmful tourism, has hardly featured on the agency's agenda over the last decades.

Acknowledging tourism's ecological and climate debt is a precondition for the development of proper solutions and action plans to solve tourism-related problems. But the UNWTO's common practice is to resort to public relations and to actively participate in the greenwash of the industry. It is disturbing to see how UNWTO representatives continue to hoodwink the public about tourism's real role in climate change. For instance, whereas

scientists leave little doubt that local communities in many destinations around the world are facing catastrophic and irreversible consequences of climate change, Geoffrey Lipman, the UNWTO's Assistant Secretary-General, recently made careless statements in an interview at the UN News Centre. Suggesting that the climate crisis was no different from events like the oil crisis or hijackings of planes that temporarily hampered the industry, he opined tourism "found ways to respond and overcome it. There is no reason why it can't adapt now."<sup>95</sup>

The UNWTO may not be qualified and credible enough to take leadership in the climate change and tourism process. If the UNWTO is serious about its commitment to public good and not only short-sighted and profit-making industry interests, it should act according to the following recommendations:

- Ensure that its contributions to climate protection and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals are based on relevant and reliable research and scientific standards;
- Guarantee that the public is given complete, accurate and impartial information about all tourism-related concerns, including tourism's multidimensional impacts on communities and the environment, tourism's real contribution to global warming and climate change impacts on destinations;
- Establish a formal structure and mechanisms within the UNWTO that allows all concerned parties, including committed civil society organizations, to fully and meaningfully participate in the climate change and tourism process. It is of vital importance that communities and peoples adversely affected by both tourism and Climate Change play an essential role in defining and guiding the work of the process and all related activities;
- Ensure that the process reflects grassroots calls for equity and jus-

tice and respects the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As the Indigenous Peoples Anchorage Declaration on Climate Change states: “We uphold that the inherent and fundamental human rights and status of Indigenous Peoples, affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), must be fully recognized and respected in all decision-making processes and activities related to climate change. This includes our rights to our lands, territories, environment and natural resources as contained in Articles 25–30 of the UNDRIP. When specific programmes and projects affect our lands, territories, environment and natural resources, the right of Self Determination of Indigenous Peoples must be recognized and respected, emphasizing our right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent, including the right to say ‘no’.”<sup>96</sup>

- Fundamentally rethink the effectiveness of global tourism growth as a means of achieving poverty reduction under current political and socio-economic conditions. The New Economics Foundation research found, for example, that between 1990 and 2001, “for every \$100 worth of growth in the world’s income per person, just \$0.60 found its target and contributed to reducing poverty below the \$1-a-day line. To achieve every single \$1 of poverty reduction therefore requires \$166 of additional global production and consumption, with all its associated environmental impacts.” In conclusion, “there is a danger throughout the global economy, and not least tourism, of locking in a self-defeating spiral of overconsumption by those who are already wealthy, justified against achieving marginal increases in wealth amongst poorest members of society.”<sup>97</sup>
- Acknowledge that the global tourism system, which has emerged in and is controlled by rich developed countries, has a historical responsibility and needs to provide compensation for the ecological and climate debt that it owes to destinations in developing countries;
- Agree to a comprehensive review of international trade and investment rules, which have resulted in the exploitation and destruction of the environment, disruption of local social and economic systems, obstruction

of climate justice and exacerbation of peoples' vulnerability to natural and human-induced disasters;

- Distance itself from World Bank's and other international financial institutions' tourism-related funding policies and programmes as they have exacerbated unsustainable development and climate change;
- Encourage and assist UNWTO member states to return and restore lands – including Indigenous Peoples' territories – forests, waters and oceans, cultural heritage and sacred sites that have been illegally and unfairly taken over for tourism purposes, causing hardship to communities and peoples and exposing them to activities and conditions that contribute to climate change;
- Use its influence to ensure that international tourism as well as air and maritime transport are included in all future climate change negotiations and agreements and dealt with in an equitable manner in accordance with the historical responsibility of developed countries and the tourism industry;
- Join efforts to persuade private travel and tourism companies to drastically reduce their energy use and increase energy efficiency; furthermore, to undertake deep cuts of GHG emissions at their source, even though this may result in a shrinking of the industry;
- Agree in principle to environmental taxation in tourism; this should primarily include a global ecotax on jet fuel and/or a levy on GHG emission rights. As Buades notes, “it is critical that the level of the levy is genuinely dissuasive, that is, aimed not at revenue collection but rather at encouraging a real and considerable decrease in the volume of international tourism via airplanes and cars.”<sup>98</sup>
- As corporate social responsibility and other voluntary initiatives have proven insufficient, support initiatives for a stringent international

policy framework not only to tackle climate change but to systematically phase out damaging and unsustainable tourism practices;

- Object to false solutions to climate change – such as carbon trading, the Clean Development Mechanism, forest offsets, REDD and agro-fuels – that negatively impact local communities’ rights, lands and natural resources and threaten traditional livelihoods and food security.

In conclusion, the climate crisis requires nothing less than a fundamental transformation of the global system — in economic, political, socio-cultural terms. The greatest burden of adjustment must be on the rich developed countries and their corporations, as well as on southern elites, all of whom have to share responsibility for this crisis. Where tourism is heading to is difficult to predict, but profound structural change of the industry will be inevitable. The UNWTO is called upon to play a meaningful role in reorganizing the international tourism system in a way that it no longer blocks forward-looking and just global climate policies and people-centred sustainable development.

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## Change Tourism, Not Climate!

Tourism has been identified as one of the major contributors of global warming, primarily due to the high energy use for transport. If tourism was a country, its current Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions would today rank fifth, after the USA, China, the European Union and Russia. Given the expected international tourism boom in the coming years, the forecasts are even more perturbing.

This book sets out to explain why this untenable situation has emerged, namely the failure of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to explicitly include GHGs generated by tourism in any global reduction targets as well as in the negotiations on the post-2012 reduction targets. It highlights the absence of considerations of equity and justice in tourism and climate change discussions among policymakers and industry leaders and critically assesses the UN World Tourism Organisation and its position on sustainable tourism.

Unless tourism policymakers take drastic action to reverse the dominant “business-as-usual” attitude within the industry, tourism will become a key force of GHG emissions in the world, undermining the overall progress made to stem global climate change.

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