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**Sent:** Thursday, May 15, 2008 7:50 AM  
**To:** Paul Barker; Tom Diwai Vigus  
**Subject:** Fw: Carbon Trading Blasted by Indigenous Groups

Carbon Trading Blasted by Indigenous Groups

Haider Rizvi, OneWorld US Mon May 5, 6:53 PM ET

UNITED NATIONS, May 5 (OneWorld) - The United Nations is facing scathing criticism from the world's indigenous communities for its attempts to promote carbon trading as a tool to address climate change concerns.

"The UN is allowing companies who are the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases to continue to pollute," said Tom Goldtooth of the U.S.-based Indigenous Environment Network (IEN).

Last week, at the end of a two-week international gathering, a UN body said the World Bank funding for carbon trading had set "good examples" for partnership with indigenous peoples.

The term "carbon trading" refers to commercial approaches to promoting environmental responsibility. Under carbon trading programs, energy companies and others that release greenhouse gases can either agree to reduce their carbon emissions or buy the right to keep polluting.

The United Nations describes carbon markets as an efficient system that can guide investments toward the cuts that are the cheapest.

But indigenous leaders and independent experts on climate change dispute this notion on various grounds.

"It's a new way to make money," said IEN's Jihan Gearon. "It has nothing to do with environmental concerns or indigenous peoples' rights."

Janet Redman, lead author of a new study released by the Washington, DC-based Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) last month, tends to agree, especially with respect to the World Bank's role in facilitating carbon trading programs.

"It is making money off of causing the climate crisis and then turning around and claiming to solve it," she said of the Bank in a recent interview with OneWorld. "It's dangerously counterproductive."

Both Gearon and Redman think carbon markets will not only violate indigenous peoples' rights, but also further aggravate the threat of pollution and climate change.

IPS' 79-page report, entitled "World Bank: Climate Profiteer," shows that instead of encouraging clean energy investors, the Bank is lending much of its financial support to the

fossil fuel industry.

"It's playing both sides of the climate crisis," said Redman, who notes that in just the past two years the Bank loaned no less than \$1.5 billion to companies investing in fossil fuels.

For its part, the Bank claims to be an "honest broker" of carbon deals. "We have carried out global consultations with indigenous peoples on climate change," Navin Rai told the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues last week.

Critics say such claims are highly questionable because the Bank, like many governments, is still reluctant to accept that indigenous peoples must give their prior and informed consent before any development projects are initiated on their lands.

Scientists say drastic cuts in the use of oil, gas, and coal are needed to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate change. The World Bank does not deny this, but still it's doling out a lot of money to energy corporations involved in fossil fuel businesses.

Out of its \$2 billion carbon finance portfolio, the Bank has directed nearly 80 percent to projects involving polluting industries.

In her research, Redman tried to explain at length how the Bank's policy on carbon credits is affecting indigenous communities who have no say in projects aimed at reforestation.

In her view, trading forest carbon credits "has become a burgeoning business" for the Bank, which is "encouraging" a land-use shift from subsistence agricultural cultivation to agroindustrial forestry.

This is clearly not the approach most indigenous groups would support, had they been given a choice.

The Bank admits that indigenous peoples, who manage 11 percent of the world's forests and lands, have "a small carbon footprint and that their contribution to global warming is minimal."

Indigenous leaders say that carbon markets will not effectively address the issue of climate change because, ultimately, those markets are driven by the economic concerns of profit-seekers.

"Our vision of environmental issues is based upon spiritual thinking," said Marcos Terena, an indigenous activist from the Amazon region in Brazil, in an interview with OneWorld.

"We respect Mother Earth," he said. "It's the governments and corporations that are responsible for environmental destruction."

Terena and other indigenous leaders told OneWorld that they were planning to take their case to Bonn, Germany, where the United Nations is due to hold an international meeting on issues concerning the loss of biodiversity later this month.

The international treaty on biodiversity considers the world's 370 million indigenous peoples' perspectives as an essential part of the struggle to preserve the millions of species of life on the

planet.

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