Civil Society Resistance Against Aviation Grows - 38 Organizations Call for Real Solutions Against Climate Change

The aviation sector is the world's fastest growing greenhouse gas emittor and one of the most polluting sectors. Nevertheless, no real solutions to address this climate problem are put forward so far. Instead, the aviation industry is planning to greenwash their growth strategy.

38 organizations, among them Attac, Friends of the Earth International, La Vía Campesina Europa, Transnational Institute, Fern, and several groups struggling against airport construction projects, therefore support the global petition "No to aviation growth! No to false climate solutions!".

False promise of "carbon-neutral growth" of aviation

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a specialised UN agency, is planning a strategy called "carbon-neutral growth" of aviation. This is supposed to be achieved mostly by offsetting the emissions from aviation through a market mechanism. This means that the aviation industry would pay others to make cuts in emissions or absorb emissions, so that the aviation industry can continue to expand. A market mechanism would allow for investing in offsets (compensation projects), for example a tree plantation or a large hydrdam [1].

"These plans are absurd. The aviation industry tries to continue with their business as usual by redeeming itself through offsets", says Teresa Perez.

Real solutions for climate change

The international civil society puts forward real solutions for fighting global warming: "Cut down flights and stop building new airports or investing in airport extensions. Instead, invest in affordable train transport. Those are necessary answers", says John Stewart who is active in the resistance movement against the airport extension project in Heathrow, UK. "States need to stop incentives for aviation and airports, and impose an energy tax on aviation fuel. Flights are so cheap only because Kerosine is tax-free, and because the consequences like health risks, environmental damage and climate change, are being paid by society, not by the aviation industry", explains Magdalena Heuwieser from Finance & Trade Watch (Austria).

Offsets lead to more problems than they solve

"Offsets do not solve, they cause problems. For many communities in the Global South offsets lead to land grabbing, forced displacement or prohibition to acces their territories putting at severe risk their livelihoods", says Teresa Perez from the World Rainforest Movement. This is particularly true for offsets that involve storage of carbon in forests and soils (especially REDD+) [2]. Apart from that, offsets are a license to pollute and hardly ever reduce the emissions they promise.

Part of the campaign: Fake-offsetting website

In order to show the problems connected with Offsets and emissions trading, some organizations created the website www.climate-neutral.org. By imitating real offsetting sites, like the “UN-Climate Neutral Now” initiative, the website ridiculizes this false solution which dominates more and more climate policits. “Many believe that we can only prevent climate change if we change our economy and our lifestyle –fly less, drive less, shop less. Isn’t there an easier way? Climate Neutral has the solution: With only a few clicks, you can redeem yourself and become CO2-neutral!”, the website advertises. It exists in four languages (English, French, Spanish, German), and includes a promotion video, a fake carbon footprint calculator, and presents actually existing carbon offset projects.

Petition website: http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/no-aviation-growth-no-false-climate-solutions/
Fake offsetting website: www.climate-neutral.org

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Footnotes:

[1] ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) consists of 191 Member States as well as aviation industry groups – which is why ICAO decisions are increasingly seen as industry-driven. ICAO will take their decision on how to contribute to climate change mitigation at their assembly from 27 September to 7 October 2016. The proposal is to achieve „carbon-neutral growth 2020“ mostly by market-based measures, which means offsetting. A position paper released by the “Global Aviation Industry” in 2013 states that “The industry believes that a simple carbon offsetting scheme would be the quickest to implement, the easiest to administer and the most cost-efficient.

(See: http://www.icao.int/Meetings/EnvironmentalWorkshops/Documents/2015-Warsaw/6_1_An-introduction-to-market-based-measures-MBMs.pdf / https://www.iata.org/policy/environment/Documents/atag-paper-on-cng2020-july2013.pdf / http://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLM-MBM/Pages/HLM_briefing.aspx / http://www.fern.org/icao /)

[2] Land-based carbon offsets, such as from REDD+ projects (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) or from agriculture, are particularly contentious. By nature, REDD+ projects place restrictions on existing land use - that is how they generate the carbon "savings" sold as offset credits. Because the large majority of REDD+ projects (wrongly) blame deforestation on small-scale peasant farming, in particular where it involves shifting cultivation, such restrictions have a detrimental impact on peasant livelihoods and forest peoples’ way of life. By contrast, REDD+ projects that tackle the real drivers of large-scale deforestation – extraction of oil, coal, mining, infrastructure, large-scale dams, industrial logging and international trade in agricultural commodities – are by and large absent.

With the challenges of counting emissions reductions and distributing offset payments to multiple small-scale farmers, there is a risk that agricultural offsets would favour large-scale farmers or monoculture farming practices, creating one more driver of land dispossession of smallholder farmers, particularly in the Global South.

CO2 storage and sequestration in soil and forests should not be used to displace or reduce mitigation in other sectors, like aviation. Sequestration of carbon in forests cannot compensate for continued

emissions. Fossil fuel emissions are effectively permanent, whereas carbon sequestration in forests and soils is temporary by comparison. Offset credits from forest conservation, tree plantation or soil carbon sequestration carry the additional risk of becoming null and void when wildfires, storms or natural decay cause uncontrollable release of carbon stored in the trees, soils or other natural habitats.

Calculations are never clear and can be easily manipulated - fraud has been common. Many so-called offset projects would arguably have taken place anyway. The reduction declared on the paper often is not a real reduction, the planting of trees would have happened anyway. Therefore no extra savings of emissions back the 'offset' credit that justifies an extra emission by the buyer of the credit.

(See: http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/mercantilization-of-nature/redd/ and http://www.redd-monitor.org/ and http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/ and https://www.internationalrivers.org/node/9204)