

Withdrawn resolution on solar geoengineering at UNEA-6 is a “victory for common sense”, says HOME! Alliance

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Nairobi, Kenya - In the early hours of this morning at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) a resolution on solar geoengineering was withdrawn. Numerous African countries, along with many others from the Global South, advocated for the Assembly to reaffirm a precautionary approach to geoengineering, as it has been established by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other UN bodies.

The African Group at UNEA-6 highlighted the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) call for a Solar Geoengineering International Non-Use Agreement. However, some of the highest emitting countries, especially those already investing in geoengineering research, opposed the mention of precaution in the resolution and wanted instead to study the “risks and benefits” of solar geoengineering technologies, thereby prioritizing research institutions and programs that are already led or heavily influenced by geoengineering advocates.

Solar geoengineering, also known as Solar Radiation Modification (SRM), describes an array of geoengineering techniques designed to partially block sunlight from reaching the Earth, to mask the heating effect of greenhouse gasses. The most common of the proposed techniques is Stratospheric Aerosol Injection (SAI), which involves spraying sulfur dioxide (a coolant that also erodes the ozone layer) into the stratosphere, which would further pollute the Earth’s already-polluted atmosphere.

The CBD introduced a moratorium on SRM and other forms of geoengineering in 2010, recognizing the serious impacts on biodiversity and related livelihoods that this technology can entail.

Read reactions from members of the Hands Off Mother Earth! (HOME!) Alliance below:

Silvia Ribeiro, ETC Group Latin America Director

“Solar geoengineering is a dangerous techno-fix brought by researchers and powerful actors in the same Northern countries that have caused climate change: it’s about adding more pollution to an overpolluted world. At UNEA-6, precaution prevailed over the attempts to legitimate this risky and unfair technology.”

Mfoniso Antia, HOMEF Program Manager and Hands Off Mother Earth Africa Working Group

“Even if solar geoengineering is only deployed over the northern hemisphere, it will disrupt local and regional weather patterns and further imbalance the climate, with potentially catastrophic effects for Africa, including on water availability and food production. I’m happy for Africa’s leadership on geoengineering at UNEA-6, which builds on the African Ministerial Conference on the Environments decision on the non-use of solar geoengineering technologies.”

Barbara Ntambirweki, ETC Group, African Technology Assessment Platform (AfriTAP)

“The Africa Group at UNEA-6 led powerful opposition to Switzerland’s solar geoengineering resolution—withdrawn this morning—forming the basis for future efforts towards a non-use agreement on solar geoengineering internationally.”

Mary Church, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

“The vocal opposition to geoengineering at UNEA-6 sends a powerful message underscoring a broad commitment to upholding established norms of international environmental law. Solar Radiation Modification (SRM) technologies are dangerous and do not have any role to play in our common future. These technologies cannot tackle the root causes of the climate crisis and would instead enable major polluters to delay the urgent need to phase out fossil fuels.”

Niclas Hällström, Director, WhatNext?

“The strong negotiations by Africa and other developing countries around the UNEA-6 negotiations on the solar geoengineering resolution is a major victory. They insisted any resolution on SRM must acknowledge the existing geoengineering moratorium, the call for a Solar Geoengineering Non-Use Agreement and that solar geoengineering poses massive, unacceptable risks and can never be a response to climate change. This was not acceptable to countries hoping for these kinds of dangerous technologies, which caused the negotiations to collapse. The ground is now set for a coalition of African and other willing countries to further exert leadership by advancing a Non-Use Agreement on their own terms.”

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