No aviation growth! No false climate solutions!

We won't be fooled by the false promise of “carbon-neutral growth” of aviation.

The plans by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a specialised UN agency, to greenwash the aviation industry are absurd [1]. They claim it is OK to increase emissions if they pay others to reduce them – the so-called “offset” projects. But it is a fallacy that offsets can neutralize the emissions caused elsewhere, especially offsets that involve storage of carbon in forests and soils[2].

Offsets lead to more problems than they solve. They are a license to pollute. They increase emissions, often lead to violations of human rights [3], and distract from real solutions. Emissions need to be cut at the source. That is why the air traffic volume needs to shrink, not grow.

We want real solutions for climate change!

— No new airports and airport expansions. There are hundreds of airport and airport expansion projects around the world, destroying ecosystems, agricultural land, and livelihoods. We cannot afford to invest in more highly-destructive and carbon-intensive infrastructure [4].

— No substitution of kerosene by biofuels. Biofuels are anything but carbon-neutral and would lead to even more land grabbing and less land for food production [5].

— Stop state incentives for aviation and airports, and impose an energy tax on aviation fuel.

— Invest in affordable and attractive train transport. Save and expand the night trains for longer distances.

— Reduce the global transport of goods, and shift the remaining trade to more environmentally friendly forms of transportation. Strengthen the local and regional production and consumption of goods [6].

Background

A historic climate agreement was reached last December in Paris to keep the global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, and strive towards 1.5 degrees. To achieve this, and for the planet to be habitable for future generations, we need real change now!

The aviation sector is the world’s fastest growing greenhouse gas emitter and one of the most polluting sectors. The need to tackle this is urgent. Rather than expanding or building hundreds of new or bigger airports, and rather than planning false “green” growth strategies, aviation needs to reduced - and so do the overall number of flights [7].

Footnotes and background

[1] The 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. The 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/61An-introduction-to-market-based-measures-MBMs.pdf and https://www.iata.org/policy/environment/Documents/atag-paper-on-cng2020-july2013.pdf and http://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLM-MBM/Pages/HLM_briefing.aspx and http://www.fern.org/icao

[2] Offsets don't fulfill the emission reductions they promise:

1) 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.

2) 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. This is one of the reasons why the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) excludes all offset categories related to forest or agriculture land use except for afforestation, reforestation and biomass energy projects. Even then, credits from these tree planting offset projects are sold as temporary carbon credits that need to be bought again in a matter of years because credits from tree planting projects cannot be considered to permanently store carbon.

See: www.fern.org/misleadingnumbers and http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/v3/n9/full/nclimate2006.html and www.climate-neutral.org

[3] 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.

In short, land-based offset credits are controversial, and experience from REDD+ has shown that

certification standards or safeguards cannot prevent conflicts.

See: http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/mercantilization-of-nature/redd/ and http://www.redd-monitor.org/ and http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/

[4] For example between 2006 and 2015 there have been built 50 new airports only in China.
See: http://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/handel-konsumgueter/peking-baut-mega-infrastruktur-china-klotzt-mit-neuen-riesen-airports/11366142.html

[5] See http://www.wri.org/publication/avoiding-bioenergy-competition-food-crops-and-land?? or https://www.transportenvironment.org/publications/globiom-basis-biofuel-policy-post-2020

[6] In 2014, airlines transported 51.3 million metric tons of goods, representing more than 35% of global trade by value. On average, cargo business generates 9% of airline revenues.
See: http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/cargo/pages/index.aspx

[7] Aviation is the most climate-intensive form of transportation, as well as one of the fastest growing industries in terms of its greenhouse gas emissions. The ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) forecasts that by 2050 the emissions from aviation could grow by a further 300-700%.
See: http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/transport/aviation/index_en.htm
Nevertheless, aviation was not mentioned in the Paris Agreement. But as a source of human-made greenhouse gas emissions, which states committed themselves to reduce for keeping global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees, aviation indirectly does form part of the Paris Agreement. In addition to CO2, aircraft emit a number of other harmful compounds into the atmosphere. The emissions of aerosols and water vapour by aircraft engines in humid air layers also form contrails which contribute to cirrus cloud formation. This has a potentially strong climate impact.
See: https://www.oecd.org/sd-roundtable/papersandpublications/49482790.pdf
While aviation until now has only been used by aproximately less then 10 per cent of the world population, climate change is already now affecting most strongly by societies in the Global South – the ones least responsible for aviation emissions and global warming.
See: http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/reihe-abgehoben-die-flugmeile-und-ihr-preis.976.de.html?dram:article_id=307990