

## Palm Oil: Are Philanthropists being scammed by Green NGOs like Greenpeace and FOE?

Microsoft Corp co-founder Bill Gates and billionaire investor Warren Buffett are launching a campaign to get other American billionaires to give at least half their wealth to charity.

Buffett, chairman and chief executive officer of Berkshire Hathaway Inc, said in a letter that he couldn't be happier with his decision in 2006 to give 99 per cent of his roughly US\$46 billion (RM150.3 billion) fortune to charity.

Patty Stonesifer, former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said on Wednesday that Gates and Buffett had been campaigning for the past year to get others to donate the bulk of their wealth.

The friends and philanthropic colleagues are asking people to pledge to donate either during their lifetime or at the time of their death. They estimate their efforts could generate US\$600 billion for charity.

Last year American philanthropies received a total of about US\$300 billion in donations, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Four wealthy American couples have announced their pledges, including Los Angeles philanthropists Eli and Edythe Broad, Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest of Philadelphia, John and Ann Doerr of Menlo Park, California, and John and Tasha Mortgridge of San Jose, California.

In addition to making a donation commitment, Gates and Buffett are asking billionaires to pledge to give wisely and learn from their peers. They said they were inspired by the philanthropic efforts of not just other billionaires but of the people of all financial means and backgrounds who have given generously to make the world a better place.

Their philosophical forebears were the Carnegie and Rockefeller families, who donated most of their wealth to improve society and were the grandparents of modern philanthropy, said Stacy Palmer, editor of The Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Ted Turner's announcement 13 years ago of a US\$1 billion gift to United Nations programmes also was done in part to inspire other big givers, but did not have a noticeable result, Palmer said.

"It's a stretch to see how they're going to get to the US\$600 billion figure," she said, noting that only 17 people on the Forbes list of the 400 wealthiest people in America are also on the Chronicle's list of the most generous American donors.

Many of these people might be giving anonymously or planned to donate when they die, but the bulk of money raised by charities today came from non-billionaires giving US\$5, US\$10 or US\$50 at a time, Palmer said.

Buffett's plan will eventually split most of his shares of his company between five charitable foundations, with the largest chunk going to the Gates Foundation. He also plans to give Class B Berkshire shares to the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, which he and his late first wife started, and to the three foundations run by his three children.

Buffett said in 2006 that his other 73,332 Class A shares of Berkshire stock, worth about US\$8 billion, would also go to philanthropy, but he didn't specify how those shares would be distributed.

Bill and Melinda Gates have made a similar pledge through the establishment of their Seattle-based foundation. Gates and Buffett are asking each individual or couple who make a pledge to do so publicly, with a letter explaining their decision.

"The pledge is a moral commitment to give, not a legal contract. It does not involve pooling money or supporting a particular set of causes or organisations," they explained in a statement about the project.

In the view of PalmHugger.org, whilst the motives of Buffett and Gates may be noble it is entirely conceivable that a significant portion of these donations may end up in the pockets of fraudsters. At least in the case of some charities like the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and green NGOs like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (FOE) and the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) the sneaky suspicion that donations from well meaning donors like philanthropists, governments, corporations and the public have been misused by these green NGOs to fund their lavish lifestyles,

refuses to go away!

How do we reconcile the baffling anomalies when one of the most inherently healthy and sustainable of edible oils like palm oil is irrationally and inexplicably attacked as, believe it or not, unhealthy and unsustainable?

Given that these NGOs are only too aware that philanthropy are often issue driven, how better to stimulate a quick outpouring of donations than to create an issue where none exists. Better yet when the target of the issue is a commodity like palm oil predominantly planted by developing third world countries - countries that are as yet unfamiliar with the intrigues and machinations of economic and industry sabotage, and probably ill-equipped to respond effectively, especially when the world media is still controlled by the west from where these NGOs hail!

First in the mid eighties, CSPI using science that would find it hard to pass muster for a high school paper, falsely alleged that palm oil was saturated fat and therefore bad for heart health! The media went to town on this issue and it was only when tons of medical and scientific research published in peer reviewed journals were brought to bear that palm oil was, in fact, heart friendly and healthful, that CSPI and others beat a hasty retreat. Today these NGOs have more or less conceded on the health issue.

Some 20 years later, CSPI reemerged with a "report" called "Cruel Oil: How palm oil harms health, rainforest and wildlife" in which they made wild and unsubstantiated claims that palm oil cultivation was causing massive deforestation and threatening the extinction of biodiversity such as the orang utan.

The report was prepared with the assistance of Aid Environment listed as partners with Hivos &#8212; a Netherlands based civil society group with direct links to campaigns in Indonesia. Hivos, in turn, is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for up to two-thirds of its annual 100m Euro budget.

The irrefutable truth is that palm oil is inherently the most sustainable of all the oilseeds. How else can it be explained when Malaysia (a small country roughly the size of Vietnam) which has been cultivating the crop for more than a century could be the world's largest producer of the commodity and yet still retain forest cover of more than 60%. According to the FAO, as at 2001, Malaysia has forest cover of 60.8%.

In addition, a recent research report from the Wageningen University published just last month, declared that palm oil, along with cane sugar and sorghum are the 3 most sustainable energy crops. (see "Palm Oil, Sugar Cane Most Sustainable Energy Crops, Study Shows" at <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601072&sid=atgC7em.HRHg>)

The university's finding is a rejection of environmental NGOs and the anti-palm oil lobbyists who consistently claim that palm oil is unsustainable.

Its research found that palm oil, sugar cane and sweet sorghum are currently the most sustainable energy crops. These commodities also produce "far smaller quantities of greenhouse gases than fossil fuels".

The report's author, Sander de Vries, concluded that sustainable sugar canes and oil palms get the most energy per hectare and cause the least environmental damage.

That is largely due to the incredible productivity of the palm oil tree itself. With a yield of 4-5 metric tons (which, in some cases, in well managed plantations with high yielding clones, can yield as high as 9-10 metric tons per hectare). That explains why palm oil occupies just 1% of the world agricultural land and yet supplies 30% of the world's edible oil stock.

It is clear from the foregoing that palm oil does not require quite as much land as its critics would want the world to believe. Malaysia had also made a firm commitment in the Rio Earth Summit to maintain 50% of the country under forest cover. If we were to put that into perspective, the UK currently has forest cover of 11% whilst the EU has forest cover of 25%.

Granted, Indonesia had elected to adopt the EU standard of 25% forest cover as its national target. However, if 25% forest cover is acceptable in the EU, what is so objectionable for Indonesia to adopt the same standard, if we take into account the fact that Indonesia is a developing country which is one of the most densely populated in the world with hundreds of millions of hungry mouths to feed?

After all, contrary to popular opinion, palm oil is not cultivated by greedy corporate types with no compunctions, but also by smallholders. In fact, close to 40% of palm oil production in both Indonesia and Malaysia are produced by smallholders, eking out a living on their smallholdings. In Malaysia's

case, most of the palm oil smallholders are resettled in FELDA schemes which had been hailed by the World Bank and others as an example of a successful working model for rural poverty eradication.

Yet, the EU had, by funding up to 70% of FOE Europe's annual funds, been wittingly or unwittingly, financing the anti-palm oil campaigns of FOE, which by design or by coincidence has been escalating their anti-palm oil activism at the same time as funding from the Directorate Environment of the European Commission were increasing.

Curiously, the EU had also issued a Renewable Energy Directive (RED) which clearly discriminates against palm oil by ascribing an unusually onerous default greenhouse gas emission value on palm oil, whilst other EU cultivated crops were not subjected to similar treatment.

Dr Gernot Pehnelt, founder and director of GlobEcon, an independent research institute based in Germany, recently released a new study that revealed the prejudicial nature of the EU's Renewable Energy Directive towards foreign biofuels.

The report, entitled "European Policies Towards Palm Oil: Sorting Out Some Facts," demonstrated that the assumptions contained in the directive about the ecological impact of foreign biofuels reflected political and not scientific or economic reality.

Dr Pehnelt came to the defence of the rich biodiversity in oil palm plantations, the excellent crown cover that oil palms provide and the yield per hectare advantages of this low-energy and low-fertilizer crop.

"Sadly, many of the claims that foreign biofuels, specifically palm oil, are a threat to the environment are seriously flawed, some even completely unfounded," he said, adding that the side effects of the flawed policies could give rise to political friction and trade disputes to severe economic handicaps for developing countries.

A favored but devious ploy used by green NGOs such as Greenpeace to discredit palm oil producing countries like Indonesia, (and used to devastating effect) is to take satellite imagery of a small part of the country showing large areas of logged over areas in a cold, cynical and deliberate attempt to create the impression that the entire rainforest system of the country has been decimated.

Unfortunately, the mass media fell for it and they were soon drumming up reports on the massive deforestation caused by palm oil and the imminent demise of the orang utan!

The sheer volume of these baseless attacks against palm oil by Greenpeace and the Friends of the Earth, appears to be moving the political process in the countries in which palm oil is proving to be a serious threat or making inroads against oil seed producers in those countries towards some type of policy restricting palm oil imports - but insidiously and cleverly disguised as policies to prevent deforestation and climate change.

Although palm oil is not entirely blameless, it is clear that it has been unfairly maligned, not for the official reasons trundled out by CSPI, FoE and Greenpeace, but to create an artificial trade barrier against palm oil on the pretext of environmental activism, which raises the ugly specter of these NGOs selling out for the funds that these irrational anti-palm oil campaigns generate!

Let the philanthropists, governments and corporate donors and the public beware - your well intentioned donations and funds could be falling into the hands of NGOs whose primary concern is not to use your funds equitably and judiciously but to pay their conveners and executives obscene salaries and perks that would make corporate captains blush. The red flag is when these NGOs take up strangely inequitable and irrational issues! THE END

## About the Author

[Palmhugger](#) is a palm oil advocacy site that makes no apologies for exposing the lies, untruths and equivocations on palm oil spewed by a coterie of environmental morons against the world's most sustainable edible oil and biofuel feedstock. We are part of a collective group of palm oil sympathizers that have grown tired of the blatant untruths, spin, lies and unfair trade bloc promoting activities of green NGOs like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (FOE) against palm oil.

In vigorously exploding the myths and falsehoods propagated about palm oil in relation to deforestation, global warming, palm based biodiesel, the environment and the sustainability of palm oil, let the environmental morons be forewarned: In the interests of truth, we'll never hesitate to call a spade a spade; in exposing your lies about palm oil, with absolutely no holds barred!"

Palmhugger is made up of professionals and individuals with a great passion for the truth. We are biologists, creative designers, engineers, business

men and women, professional tennis players, stay-at-home moms, retirees, college students, film makers, journalists, communication experts&#8230;  
you name it!

Our goals are all the same - to advance the cause of truth through better and wider dissemination of true palm oil environmental news and views, assisting in CSR initiatives, or developing programs for advocacy and lobbying of palm oil environmental matters, always with an emphasis on truth.

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