

Captain Hook Awards for Biopiracy 2008

The Coalition Against Biopiracy exposes Hooks and celebrates Cogs
Winners announced at the UN's Biodiversity Convention in Bonn*

Today the world learned which corporations, governments, institutions and individuals earned a spot in biopiracy's hall of shame when the Coalition Against Biopiracy (CAB) announced the winners of the 5th Captain Hook Awards at a lunch-time ceremony during the Ninth Conference of the Parties (COP9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Bonn, Germany.

“The Maritim Hotel, where the CBD meets this week and next, was the perfect place to dock our ship and divvy up booty between black-hearted biopirates and hard-working cogs – those tireless biopiracy resisters working to foil plots to monopolize genetic resources and indigenous knowledge,” said Golda Hilario of SEARICE, who doubled as Tinkerbell at today's award ceremony. SEARICE, based in the Philippines, is a member of the Coalition Against Biopiracy. [N.B. In the Middle Ages, cogs were small ships built with high sides to make them less vulnerable to pirate attacks.]

“Climate-change profiteers commanded the stage for the first time at the biopiracy awards,” noted Jim Thomas of Ottawa-based ETC Group, another CAB member. Thomas donned eye-patch and cape to transform himself into Captain Hook, Tinkerbell's less endearing counterpart. “Climate chaos offers biopirates unprecedented opportunities for pillaging the commons,” explained Thomas. “On the one hand, we have Gene Giants like Monsanto and BASF monopolizing so-called ‘climate-ready’ genes in crops; on the other hand, we have geo-engineering companies like Planktos, Inc. and ONC trying to break into the carbon market with reckless – and scientifically dubious – schemes to sequester carbon in algae; and, on the...hook, we have companies pilfering high oil-content plant varieties to grow more of their destructive agrofuel crops.”

A special crowd pleaser at today's award ceremony was the prize for “Best Smokescreen” won by non-profit Public Research and Regulation Initiative, “for tirelessly advocating and defending corporate biotech interests under the banner of publicly funded researchers.”

But biopirates have met their match in the most resilient cogs sailing the high seas. Today's Captain Hook winners were forced to make room at the podium for Cogs to receive well-deserved recognition. Verónica Villa of ETC Group points out that, “While some are trying to profit from climate change,

* The Coalition Against Biopiracy is a group of civil society and peoples' organizations that first came together at the 1995 Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Jakarta. CAB notes that the Awards are a collaborative effort and acknowledges it would not identify the most deserving Hooks and Cogs without the vigilance and analysis of civil society and peoples' movements from around the world. This fifth Captain Hook Awards ceremony is preceded by ceremonies at COP8 in Curitiba, Brazil (2006), COP7 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2004), COP6 in The Hague (2002) and COP5 in Nairobi (2000).

others are working to help the world survive it. The Nyéléni World Forum on Food Sovereignty, involving more than 500 people from over 80 countries, received a Cog award for advocating the right to food sovereignty and the primacy of community-based food.” Villa laments, however, that many Cogs honored today must spend so much of their time, energy and talent on fighting out-of-control biopirates. “Civil society organizations in the Philippines, for example, received a Cog award for demanding their government to stop an Australian-based company called Ocean Nourishment Corp. from carrying out a dangerous climate-change profiteering scheme that involved dumping urea in the Sulu Sea.”

Hope Shand of ETC Group points out that, “Ironically, the majority of biopirates receiving awards in Bonn today haven’t broken the law. The problem is that intellectual property regimes and internationally trade agreements legally condone patents and activities that are predatory on the indigenous knowledge or sovereign genetic resources of other people. And the CBD, thus far, has failed to provide mechanisms to effectively combat these regimes and agreements.”

Two posters listing all the awards presented today in Bonn, along with citations, can be downloaded from the CAB web site: www.captainhookawards.org.

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