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Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 9 January 2009

Dear IUCN Director General, Julia Marton Lefevre,
Dear IUCN Deputy Director General, Bill Jackson,
Dear IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands Director, Willem Ferwerda,

Re: Our correspondence of January 10, 2008 and Motion 107 at the IUCN – World Conservation Congress 2008

We are writing to inform you that Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) has decided to withdraw its membership from the IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature .

The decision was made at the FoEI Bi-annual General Assembly in Tegucigalpa, Honduras from 10-15 November 2008, following deliberations both at the Assembly and within the FoEI Executive Committee.

Our main reason for withdrawing is our concern about the corporate partnership between Shell and the IUCN, a concern already articulated in our January 10 2008 letter and in motion 107 of the IUCN Congress 2008.

Since IUCN is going ahead with its corporate partnership with Shell - despite all of the concerns voiced about the company and the partnership - FoEI has decided to withdraw from IUCN in order not to undermine the work of the 77 organizations that make up our federation.

It is of particular concern to FoEI that in our review of IUCN's collective positions regarding Shell's environmental and social performance over the past few years there either is an unnatural silence or no clear articulation from IUCN on many critical aspects of Shell's activities, including: gas flaring, abuse of human rights, environmental degradation, exploitation of tar sands, arctic drilling, and corporate lobbying against European Union climate change policies.

FoEI finds the IUCN-Shell partnership especially worrying in light of the fact that Shell is and continues to be brought to court - by governments as well as by interest groups - for environmental and human rights abuses in numerous countries, including the US, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Russia, and Argentina.

FoEI believes that IUCN's approach towards Shell will not have any meaningful impact on the company's performance, and that the partnership will not help in finding long-term solutions to the environmental and human rights challenges posed by Shell's operations.

It is our belief and experience that partnerships between transnational corporations such as Shell and conservation organizations such as IUCN have a disadvantageous effect on community struggles to protect their environment, health and well-being from corporations. Indeed, these partnerships are used to 'greenwash' harmful corporate activities and distort the reality on the ground. Our membership in IUCN, given the present situation of partnerships between IUCN and corporations, and in particular with Shell, seriously undermines our members' daily activities in various locations around the globe.

In addition, it is critical to note what happened with Motion 107 at the IUCN 2008 Congress in Barcelona.

Motion 107 called for the termination of the agreement between IUCN and Shell. More than 70% of non-government organizations and 60% of all members participating within IUCN's World Congress voted for the agreement to be terminated. However, this majority was blocked as government delegates within the IUCN have a weighted vote. Nonetheless, 15 governments voted for the termination of the agreement.

FoEI is also skeptical about the impact of IUCN's engagement with various other corporations. These include Holcim, which has pushed for the harmful incineration of waste in its plants in South Africa against the wishes of civil society organizations – and Rio Tinto, which has been branded as one of the world's dirtiest corporations.

We do hope that the dangers of such partnerships will be recognized through the internal review process recently set up in IUCN. We also hope that the information we provided about Shell's case may be of assistance during your review.

Please note:

Various FoEI members are also members of IUCN, and while FoEI has collectively decided to withdraw from IUCN, we recognize that some national members of FoEI are still participants within IUCN.

We believe that these FoEI members will seek to engage with internal processes within the IUCN to ensure that IUCN take a more critical and realistic approach to partnerships with the corporate sector.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nnimmo Bassey', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nnimmo Bassey,
Friends of the Earth International chair
Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria Executive Director

Copy to:

Friends of the Earth Switzerland / Pro Natura
Friends of the Earth Swaziland / Yonge Nawe
Friends of the Earth Paraguay / Sobrevivencia
Friends of the Earth Bangladesh / Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
Friends of the Earth Chile / Comité Nacional pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora
Friends of the Earth Germany / Bund Naturschutz in Bayern
Friends of the Earth Hungary / Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége
Friends of the Earth Togo / Les Amis de la Terre-Togo
Friends of the Earth Tunisia / Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement - ATPNE
Friends of the Earth Uganda / National Association of Professional Environmentalists - NAPE