European Convention on Global Sustainable Bioenergy

24 – 26 February 2010, Delft, The Netherlands

European GSB Bioenergy Resolution*:

Europe has the ability to provide substantial shares of its future energy demands from sustainable bioenergy. It has a unique set of opportunities including demographic trends (declining population and stable consumption), geographic conditions and institutional and political capacity to aggressively develop bioenergy solutions.

Europe's energy portfolio today is neither secure nor sustainable. It is dependent on fossil fuel imports that are subject to political and economic disruption and result in global environmental change. Bioenergy produced in sustainable ways is a necessary component of the set of solutions needed to address the forces of climate change, energy security and rural development. Among renewable alternatives, bioenergy has unique contributions to make in transport (e.g. aviation, heavy duty, long distance), electricity (base load), heat (district, crop drying / processing), and carbon management. The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that to achieve the International Panel on Climate Change 2050 climate change targets, bioenergy must provide at least 20% of society's energy demand. Europe must pick up this challenge.

Europe could achieve very substantial shares of its energy using land that is either currently 'available' or that needs to be made available through sustainable productivity improvements in conventional agricultural and forestry systems in eastern and western Europe. Several projections have highlighted that 40 million hectares of agricultural land can be mobilised in a sustainable way in Europe for biobased applications. This could deliver up to a third of the future energy needs in Europe. A fraction of this land could satisfy the IEA's projected European bioenergy requirements.
Such a dramatic transformation in land use will deliver large scale employment and investment benefits in often rural and deprived areas of Europe. With careful siting, it will deliver significant benefits to biodiversity, water cycle, soil stability and quality, as well as enhancing carbon stocks and food crop production.

To achieve these benefits, agriculture and bioenergy policy must be integrated for the sustainable and synergistic production of food, fibre, chemicals and bioenergy. The biomass produced could be directed to multiple divergent or parallel uses in response to changing needs.

Examples of the integrative benefits of bioenergy include the simultaneous production of bioenergy and food through double cropping, the exploitation of wastes and residues, recovery of protein and nutrients for animal feed and fertilisers, the use of perennial crops to enhance ecosystem services and redesigning landscapes to enhance resilience and productivity.

There are powerful and urgent reasons why such an approach needs to be taken and grounds for optimism that multiple benefits will accrue if done well. This is the challenge to Europe's policy makers and politicians, who need to set the robust sustainability frameworks needed to deliver sustainable bioenergy systems, but also the incentives and long term signals necessary to make it happen. Transparent and credible analyses are needed to foster understanding and consensus as well as to elaborate the multiple and sustainable paths to a bioenergy-intensive future.

* *First draft agreed at European GSB Convention on Friday 26 February 2010*