

World News

Cari Shiffman

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WORLD NEWS

by Cari Shiffman*

AFRICA

BUDDING BIOFUELS INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa recently joined a partnership with India, the United States, China, Brazil, and the European Union to explore the production and development of biofuel options.¹ In addition to its involvement in this alternative energy partnership, the South African government has approved a “Draft Biofuels Industry Strategy.”² The goal of this strategy is for biofuels to eventually make up 75 percent of South Africa’s renewable energy supply.³ Maize, sugar, soya beans, sunflowers, and other similar crops will be harvested to create the biofuels.⁴ However, some critics have decried the use of such traditional foods that are needed for “food security” in South Africa.⁵ Still, some commentators laud the push for biofuels, suggesting that the biofuel market will actually increase food security in South Africa.⁶ Additionally, South Africa hopes that a burgeoning biofuels industry will create more opportunities for employment.⁷

The use of biofuels for renewable energy is already occurring in some regions of South Africa. For example, the government in South Africa’s Eastern Cape is undertaking a project to create a biofuel industry in the region.⁸ The biofuel would be produced mainly from canola crops, as well as sugarbeet, combined with diesel or ethanol fuels.⁹ Several billion rands will be invested in the project to grow the crops and to synthesize the biofuel.¹⁰

AMERICAS

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULES EPA MAY REGULATE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

In a landmark case on global warming, *Massachusetts v. EPA*,¹¹ the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) violated the Clean Air Act (“CAA”) by failing to regulate greenhouse gases from motor vehicles.¹² In 1999, several groups petitioned the EPA to “regulate ‘greenhouse gas emissions from new motor vehicles under § 202 of the [CAA].’”¹³ After the EPA declined to pursue the rulemaking, Massachusetts and several other state and local governments brought suit against the EPA.¹⁴

Justice Stevens, writing for the majority, began the opinion by asserting “[a] well-documented rise in global temperatures has coincided with a significant increase in the concentration of

carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.”¹⁵ The Court held that the states did have standing to sue.¹⁶ It further reasoned that the EPA did have the authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions for vehicle emissions,¹⁷ and by only providing a “laundry list of reasons not to regulate,”¹⁸ the EPA violated the CAA’s statutory mandate.¹⁹ The Court additionally ruled that the greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and hydrofluorocarbons, are air pollutants under the CAA, despite the EPA’s argument to the contrary.²⁰ The majority held that the EPA may not decline to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the CAA, unless it provides a “reasoned explanation.”²¹ Chief Justice Roberts, in a dissenting opinion, lamented that the Court should have never found standing for Massachusetts and the other states.²²

Environmental groups hope that the opinion will push the U.S. government into action to support climate change mitigation measures.²³ Even since the Supreme Court decided to hear the case in mid-2006, there has been an emergence of state and Congressional plans to curb greenhouse gas emissions.²⁴ Many industry groups have also sought to create laws to limit greenhouse gas emissions.²⁵

ASIA

SINGAPORE TO INVEST IN CLEAN ENERGY

The Singapore government recently announced plans to invest U.S. \$250 million over the next five years in clean energy.²⁶ The government aims to become a leader in clean energy—a “global green energy hub”²⁷—with its investment in clean energy technologies, through research and development projects.²⁸ It further hopes that its focus on clean energy will attract groups to Singapore wishing to develop clean energy projects.²⁹ The clean energy projects, driven in part by the rising price of fuel,³⁰ will include, for example, solar panels, biofuels, fuel cells, and wind power.³¹ Solar power is especially important for some segments of the Singapore population, and other Southeast Asians, that live off-the-grid, i.e. in areas that are not served by traditional power lines.³² Singapore plans to launch the project by utilizing clean energy in several government buildings.³³ Furthermore, a fuel cell car prototype is already being tested in Singapore.³⁴

The government plans to carry out its clean energy plans by attracting businesses to Singapore, investing in domestic clean

* Cari Shiffman is a JD candidate, May 2007, at American University Washington College of Law and an MA candidate, December 2007, at American University School of International Service.

energy research, and by exporting its new technologies globally.³⁵ Singapore's push for clean energy technology will also create over 7,000 new jobs, and in less than ten years account for approximately 0.6 percent of Singapore's GDP.³⁶ Singapore's decision to heavily invest in green energy technology compares with worldwide investment of U.S. \$63 billion dollars in clean energy in 2006.³⁷

EUROPE

PORTUGAL LAUNCHES SOLAR POWER PLANT OPERATIONS

In line with Portugal's bid to invest in renewable energy projects,³⁸ the country began operating a major solar power plant in the southern town of Serpa that will be able to serve 8,000 homes.³⁹ Portugal also plans to build an additional solar power plant in Moura, a town neighboring Serpa.⁴⁰ Recognizing the need to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions, over 77 percent of the Portuguese population supports the move towards increased solar power.⁴¹

The utilization and acceptance of solar technology signals a step towards Portugal's push for renewable energy to make up 45 percent of all of its power usage by 2010;⁴² an important move as Portugal's greenhouse gas emissions have increased almost 37 percent since 1990.⁴³ Portugal also has a regional obligation because it takes part in the European Union "burden sharing" agreement, where the EU member States collectively seek to

reduce their greenhouse gas emissions under the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change.⁴⁴ To further reduce their emissions, Portugal is also pursuing other renewable energy projects such as wind power and biomass plants.⁴⁵

MIDDLE EAST

OPEC SUPPORTS EXPLORATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries ("OPEC"), which includes many countries in the Middle East, as well as Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia, has indicated its support of exploration of climate change mitigation options.⁴⁶ OPEC, which distributes more than one third of the global oil supply, is interested in exploring new technologies for carbon capture and storage to help address climate change.⁴⁷ The organization wishes, in part, to promote carbon storage technologies so that it can continue to utilize and export oil and gas resources, yet help alleviate problems in a future "carbon-constrained environment."⁴⁸ OPEC's President, Mohammed al-Hamili, reported that member countries currently carry out climate change studies and participate in international talks to find climate change solutions.⁴⁹ OPEC's Secretary General Abdalla el-Badri, stressed that the organization is committed to the environment and "a cleaner, safer world."⁵⁰ Further, OPEC avowed that it aspires to stabilize its oil supply without harming the environment.⁵¹ 

Endnotes: World News

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⁸ Khumalo, *supra* note 6.

⁹ Khumalo, *supra* note 6.

¹⁰ Khumalo, *supra* note 6.

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¹² See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, *id.*; Robert Barnes & Juliet Eilperin, *High Court Faults EPA Inaction on Emissions*, WASH. POST, Apr. 3, 2007, at A1.

¹³ *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 2007 WL 957332, at *8.

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³⁴ Tan, *supra* note 30.

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