

Public Eye (formerly Berne Declaration)

Press Release

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Dirty Diesel: Toxic Air from Africa Returns to Switzerland

Today, the “Irenes Rainbow” leaves the Port of Accra and sets course for Antwerp. On board is a container labelled “Return to Sender” which Public Eye and its African partner organizations plan to deliver to the door of the trading company Trafigura in Geneva. It is filled with toxic air from the capital of Ghana, which owes much of its pollution to Swiss commodities companies that produce and distribute fuels with high levels of sulfur. Already, more than 12,000 people have signed a [petition](#) calling on industry leader Trafigura to sell its African customers only diesel and gasoline that meet European quality standards. The dirty fuel business model has been criticized by authorities as well.

On [dirtydiesel.ch](#), the three-week-journey of the Irenes Rainbow can be followed in real time. As of now, a ship tracking service makes it possible to virtually accompany the toxic air container on its 7,000 km voyage to Antwerp. From there, the transport continues to Geneva, where this symbolic gift, along with the petition, will be presented to Trafigura in November. This „Return to Sender“ action is based on the findings of the Dirty Diesel [report](#) which stirred great media interest around the world when it was published two weeks ago and continues to generate headlines especially in West Africa. In Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Senegal, the responsible authorities and members of government had to answer many critical questions about the health-damaging sulfur standards and the low quality of fuels.

A few days ago, growing public outrage compelled the National Petroleum Authority in Ghana to offer our partner organization ACEP (Africa Centre for Energy Policy) and other stakeholders to enter into a discussion about a significant improvement to current standards. The influential Ghana Chamber of Bulk Oil Distributors is supporting the adaptation of sulfur standards to European levels, too. At the same time, political protests against the production of toxic fuels in the areas around Rotterdam and Amsterdam and their export to Africa are gathering steam in the Netherlands. Dutch trade minister Ploumen calls it a “gross scandal” that companies intentionally export toxic fuels to countries with weak standards.

The Swiss government for its part, [answering](#) to a query by MP Lisa Mazzone from Geneva, said that it expected companies based in Switzerland to exercise their social responsibility in compliance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The companies in question, in their public statements to date, are still hiding behind the argument that they are abiding by the weak standards of the countries concerned. If Trafigura were to live up – at the last moment – to its ethical claim of being an industry leader and were to become the first clean fuel supplier to Africa, the container would be rerouted to a different Geneva address.

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