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turn back the toxic tide

A Project of Earth Economics
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February 1, 2007

Mr. Bill Gates and Mr. Steve Ballmer
Microsoft Corporation
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052-6399

Dear Mr. Gates and Mr. Ballmer:

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter. We are the Basel Action Network; a
Seattle based environmental organization named after an international treaty called the Basel
Convention. We work to prevent the dumping of toxic waste, technologies and products from
rich developed countries to developing countries. Presently, our unsustainable production and
consumption patterns and economic norms lead to a situation where massive quantities of
hazardous waste continue to be generated on planet earth and externalized via the free market
to disproportionately burden those living in the poorer communities in the developing world.
This exported waste is believed to be contributing to the already high rates of death and disease
in the developing world.

Recently we have become very involved in trying to prevent massive quantities of electronic
waste from being disposed of in developing countries. Currently you may be shocked to learn
that between 50 to 80% of the electronic waste now given over to recyclers for alleged
recycling is instead exported quickly offshore via container ships to China, Africa and other
destinations in the developing world. There the material is largely dumped and burned or is
recycled in conditions not much superior to dumping and burning. Electronic waste is now
believed to be the most heavily traded hazardous waste and for this reason was recently the
focus of the most recent meeting of the United Nations Environment Program's Basel
Convention meeting in Nairobi. For your information about this emergent issue we have
enclosed two films we have produced: *Exporting Harm,* and *The Digital Dump*.

Also enclosed is a press release we released a few days ago regarding the probable negative
impacts the release of *Vista* will have with respect to this offshore dumping of obsolete
electronic hardware. Due to our work in the last years on e-waste, we have become
increasingly aware of the inter-linkages between software innovation and hardware
obsolescence and waste. It is our hope that in the next month and years industry leaders such
as Microsoft will work with non-governmental organizations in legitimate and not just token
efforts to de-link innovation and obsolescence.

We are aware that this is not a simple proposition and the first step is an industry and indeed global recognition that obsolescence is indeed unsustainable and undesirable. This is a challenge because to date obsolescence has certainly improved the profit bottom line, but clearly at the expense of the environmental and social bottom lines.

With this letter we propose a dialogue on this matter, a meeting of leaders in this field to begin this all important discussion. We have some ideas of how this might be done and with whom but not wanting to pre-suppose solutions just yet, we wish to first meet or exchange views.

We look forward to working with our Puget Sound neighbor Microsoft to grapple with this thorny but all important issue. In this regard we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Jim Puckett
Coordinator, Basel Action Network
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