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## [The Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative as a real alternative for forests and forest peoples](#)

“The worst immorality is a studied ignorance, a purposeful refusal to see or know” (Andrea Dworkin)

‘Development’ and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) together with the main decision makers within them, often attempt to justify destructive projects and policies on the proposition that neo-liberal economic policy incarnates the one-way high street to poverty alleviation and environmental protection. As the collection of articles presented here demonstrates, continuing to uphold this proposition amounts to “a purposeful refusal to see or know”.

Looking at the history of IFIs as regards forests, manifests -more than studied ignorance- a perpetual, systematic and institutionalized success in withholding access to the decision making processes from indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities. Communities and peoples, who are the rightful owners of these forests, constitute the most directly affected by these decisions and who, as a group, represent a great mass of impoverished populations.

The Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative comprises the uniting principles of a global movement to ensure peoples' rights over forests and forest conservation. It first surfaced from within the aspiration for ‘another possible world’, during the 2004 World Social Forum and was reiterated and revised during the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre. It is a concrete statement of principles solidifying the voices of a diverse coalition of organizations and individuals working towards social and environmental justice in forests.

Its point of departure is that, “Indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities living in and using forests for their survival needs are the true protectors and governors of these forests and enjoy inalienable rights over forests.” [Principle #1]

It continues attesting that, “The protection and conservation of forests demand that their rights be ensured.” (Principle #2)

The first two principles, first in essence as well as spatially, arise from the firm understanding that forest issues are quintessentially social and political, therefore requiring social and political, rather than technical, solutions to confront them.

This broad-based Initiative builds on the long standing demands of indigenous peoples for self-determination and their rights over their ancestral territories, as it does on the long experience with ‘development’ projects, structural adjustments and aid conditionalities imposed by IFIs. These bitter experiences bare witness to consistent calls for transparency being met with increasing secretism (see article on AsDB) and cries for greater access to the minimum survival resources met with more pervasive exclusion from them (see article on WB). This movement for social and environmental justice can, and will, not ignore these experiences as it will not disregard the rights of indigenous peoples. It therefore opposes “...any involvement of the World Bank, IMF, WTO and other International Financial Institutions in policies and projects than can affect forests and forest peoples.” (Principle # 11)

Expressing the increasingly conscious desire to challenge the ‘global monoculture of the mind’ and the one size fits all paradigms it professes, the peoples’ integrating the Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative found the future on diversity, mutual acceptance and respect and the right to choose the speed and means of ones ‘development’:

“The institutional mechanisms for the social control by forest peoples -including indigenous peoples

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and other forest dependent communities – over forests will evolve according to the socio-ecological and economic needs of the communities and will take separate shapes according to the varied cultural profiles of the communities in various parts of the world.” (Principle #3)

To the greatest extent the root causes of poverty throughout most the tropical world are a direct consequence of the social, cultural, political and economic transformations imposed by invaders from the ‘old world’ during colonization. The policies of International Financial Institutions have perpetuated and continue to impose the socio-cultural ideological constructs of the West on the pretext of the universality of these values. In tropical forests, this process has translated in a prioritization of the needs of western consumers and companies over local inhabitants and needs leading to increasing social conflicts and a desperate race to deplete tropical forest ecosystems. If there could be said that some good can always be seen in the bad, it is that this long history of ostentatious disrespect towards peoples and ecosystems has been instrumental in creating a solid and united counter current with concrete principles and focused determination. We appeal to all of you join this process.

The full text of the Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative can be accessed at:  
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/statements/Mumbai/index.html>

A brief commentary on the each principle is available through:  
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/91/MumbaiPA.htm>

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