Costa Rica: support to Osa Peninsula forests

Statistics of year 1997 show that the deforestation rate in Costa Rica reached 16,400 hectares a year while the reforestation rate was by that time of 12,600 hectares a year. These figures could make us think that there is only a slightly negative balance in annual forest cover. Nevertheless it needs to be underscored that “reforestation” is based upon monocultures of exotic species as gmelina, teak and pine, and the regrowth of secondary forests, while primary forests continue to disappear. The case of forests at Osa Peninsula has recently drawn international attention due to the repression suffered by the environmentalists that are struggling to protect them (see WRM Bulletin 20).

This peninsula is home of the remaining Pacific Costa Rican forests, whose complexity and richness in biodiversity –according to a recent report issued by Fundacion Neotropica- is similar to that of the Amazon forests or the tropical forests of Africa and Asia: 1513 plant species, some of them endemic and including 500 tree species have been detected in Osa, while only at Corcovado National Park 124 mammifer species and 375 bird species have been registered. The delicate balance of the ecosystem is sustained by the existence of the forest. Both at the Corcovado and at the Piedras Blancas National Parks logging is banned. On the contrary, logging is permitted at Golfo Dulce and Manglares de Sierpe-Torraba Forest Reserves by means of special concessions issued by the government that require the presentation of a management plan. Environmental organizations have denounced the abuses committed in these areas. Another serious problem affecting Osa Peninsula is the situation of 6000 small peasants that, due to their weak economic position, are prone to accept the offers of logging companies to clearcut the forest.

In the framework of the campaign for the defense of the forests of the Osa Peninsula, the environmentalists have claimed that the Ministry of the Environment makes an audit of the ongoing management plans of logging companies. A local Osa Peninsula organization is also asking the authorities to stop logging permits nrs. 781 and 1043.The river Agujitas, which provides water to the local peasants and hotels of the zone would be negatively affected by these projects. Additionally, there is the risk of soil erosion, since the forest to be cut down occupies a steep slope. As part of the campaign at the local level, a monitoring study of the ongoing plans is being performed, focusing on the detection of irregularities.

Sources: JUPA (Juventud y Participación), 15/3/99; Nefer Munoz, IPS, 22/3/99.