



Issue 141 - April 2009

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- The FAO has no time to be “distracted” from its mission of promoting plantations

The FAO has recently released the 2009 edition of its “State of the World’s Forests” which, as usual, includes tree plantations as being part of the world’s “forests”. In spite of all the evidence documented by WRM and others proving that monoculture tree plantations result in social and environmental disaster –including forest destruction- the FAO continues to provide a “green” disguise to the plantations industry by defining them as “planted forests”.

In its recent report, when describing the situation in Latin America, the FAO says that “planted forests will increase”, but that “it is unlikely that the increased planting rate will

be sufficient to offset continuing deforestation.” In FAO’s language, this means that if a land surface equivalent to the deforested area were to be planted, for instance, with monoculture eucalyptus plantations, deforestation would have been “offset” and thereby no deforestation would have occurred. To say it in the simplest possible terms, according to the FAO, 5 bananas minus 5 apples = 0 bananas.

How can a biodiverse tropical forest be equated with a monoculture alien tree plantation? For the FAO the answer is simple: because both produce wood. Although the FAO does not clearly explain this, an example can suffice to prove it. Until the year 2000, the FAO did not define rubber tree plantations as “planted forests”. However, in 2000 rubber plantations suddenly became “planted forests”. The main reason for this miracle was that rubber prices had slumped and that rubber trees were been cut and industrialized into wood products. They thus became wood providers and therefore deserved being classified as “planted forests”, because for the FAO a forest is simply a wood-producing system.

This is obviously absurd. It is plainly clear that monoculture tree plantations have nothing in common with forest ecosystems. While the latter provide habitats and food to countless species of native flora and fauna, the former are basically void of biodiversity. While forests regulate the hydrological cycle, plantations deplete water resources. While plantations result in the export of soil nutrients, forests recycle them constantly. While forests provide livelihoods to forest-dependent peoples, plantations destroy the resources they depend upon.

It is important to stress that the definition of forests is not an academic or linguistic discussion: it is a political issue having serious social and environmental consequences at the ground level. Defining plantations as forests empowers the corporate sector -particularly plantation companies- and disempowers local communities opposing them to protect their livelihoods. The FAO continues playing this role by refusing to change its definition.

Fortunately, the FAO is becoming more and more isolated on this issue. In 2008, a group of over 100 forestry professionals and students from 29 different countries released a statement expressing that “Throughout the world, governments are actively promoting the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, despite the serious social and environmental impacts already witnessed on existing plantations. The promoters of this model claim that plantations are forests, which simply is not true. Plantations are not forests. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues in the forestry sector support this model, and our teaching institutions continue to train new generations of forestry professionals to perpetuate and expand this type of forestry model, aimed at seeing forests where they do not exist.”

Last September, a WRM representative presented the foresters’ statement to FAO officials in Rome and they admitted their concerns about certain types of tree plantations -which they recognized as having negative impacts. However, their response was that for the moment the organisation is unwilling to change the definition because this would be “a distraction to the FAO-led process of guidelines for improving plantations.”

This is unbelievable. How can a powerful organization such as FAO pretend that it cannot carry out two related tasks at the same time? Is it so difficult to change a definition while simultaneously continuing to lead a process for providing guidelines for plantations? The obvious answer is that the FAO is unwilling to change a definition that has proven to be so effective for the expansion of plantations under the guise of “planted forests”.

The fact is that the FAO continues to be a major actor in the promotion of plantations. Evidence on this is also provided in its recent report on the state of the world’s forests. Analysing the potential impacts of the current economic crisis on the forest sector, the report suggests “the pursuit of a ‘green path’ to development”, including – surprise surprise- “through afforestation and reforestation”. In FAO language, those two words -afforestation and reforestation- mean the same type of monoculture tree plantations that are impacting on people and the environment. Such plantations will be not only provided with the “planted forests” disguise, but also with fake social and environmental credentials through FAO’s voluntary guidelines for “improving” them. This, and not the organization’s claim that it has no time to be “distracted”, explains its reluctance to adopt a serious definition of forests that excludes plantations as such.

Whether the FAO likes it or not, more and more people throughout the world are raising their voices stating the simple and obvious truth : plantations are not forests! The FAO can pretend to be deaf, but the message is increasingly loud and clear.

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Bolivia: For the protection of the last isolated indigenous peoples

We recently received a publication released in 2008 by FOBOMADE and Rainforest Foundation Norway, written by Pablo Cingolani, Álvaro Díez Astete and Vincent Brackelaire and entitled “Toromonas. La lucha por la defensa de los Pueblos Indígenas Aislados en Bolivia” (Toromonas: the struggle for the defence of the Isolated Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia), which presents an exhaustive account of the situation of isolated indigenous peoples in the region.

Among the various articles that make up the publication, we would like to highlight one that addresses the Bolivian government’s adoption of Resolution 48, a historic measure in defence of an isolated indigenous community:

“The government of Bolivia, headed by the first indigenous president to ever take power in the country, Juan Evo Morales Ayma, adopted on 15 August 2006 a historic resolution with regard to the situation of the last indigenous peoples living in isolation in Bolivian territory. Through this resolution, the president declared as an Absolute Reserve Area the lands encompassed by the Madidi National Park and Integrated Management Natural Area (PNANMI). Madidi, a national protected area that spans almost 19,000 square kilometres and is one of the planet’s most important reservoirs of biodiversity, is home to one of the last peoples living in isolation in Bolivia and the world: the presumed descendants of the Toromona people (see WRM Bulletin No.

105), who cut off all contact with Bolivian society in the early 20th century in order to escape the genocide of the rubber boom era.

“This was the first time in the history of the Bolivian republic – in which major first nations peoples such as the Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní coexist – that the Bolivian state has taken action to address the issue of indigenous peoples living in isolation, initial contact and/or situations of extreme vulnerability.

Within the complex and colossal issue of indigenous reality, it is currently believed that there are at least nine ethnic groups or segments of ethnic groups living in isolation in Bolivia, although there are none classified as living in ‘initial contact’.

“The isolated communities for which there are varying degrees of evidence, but which are all believed to exist, are the following:

- * Department of La Paz: Toromona, Araona, Ese Ejja
- * Department of Santa Cruz: M’bya Yuki, Ayoreode
- * Department of Pando: Pacahuara
- * Department of Beni: Yuracaré, T’simanes, Mosetene

“In this new country that we are striving to build, repairing the damages of a hidden and forgotten genocide, healing historic wounds, moving past scandalous omissions, the adoption of Resolution 48 and the consequent creation of an absolute reserve for the protection of an indigenous community living in isolation in the Amazon rainforest is not only a historic landmark. It also represents the possibility of building, at the same time, a platform for effective action by the plurinational and intercultural state being established on the basis of the constituent assembly to save these peoples from extermination and guarantee their human rights.

“Resolution 48 – which represents the crystallization of years of work around the situation of the people living in isolation within the borders of Madidi National Park – sets a strategic precedent for the protection of isolated indigenous peoples in Bolivia, and should serve as a much-needed visible and practical platform for future government actions that draw not only on national power and commitment but also on the widespread international solidarity regarding this issue, since the last isolated indigenous peoples in Bolivia are also some of the last isolated indigenous peoples in the world.

“In addition to the resolution to create an absolute reserve area to protect the isolated indigenous people of Madidi, there are also a series of actions underway to support and strengthen mixed-raced communities in the surrounding area, as a way of ending their tragic dependence on a predatory economy which, at the same time, represented the main threat to the ethnic group that is to be protected through the resolution adopted.

“From the perspective of an integrated vision and the search for the projection of democratic intercultural communitarianism within the state and society as a whole, these isolated indigenous peoples – who live in total interdependence with the land they occupy, where biodiversity has been preserved through ancestral balance – have

become an archetype of the new socio-state paradigm. Not only can we consider them a cultural treasure, but also as a living testimony and reflection of the fact that another society, one that is more humane, more sound and more creative, is possible.”

Extracted and adapted from “Zona de Reserva Absoluta Toromona: una medida histórica del gobierno de Evo Morales Ayma hacia una política nacional de protección integral de los últimos pueblos indígenas aislados de Bolivia”, by Álvaro Díez Astete and Pablo Cingolani, an article in “Toromonas. La lucha por la defensa de los Pueblos Indígenas Aislados en Bolivia”, written by Pablo Cingolani, Álvaro Díez Astete and Vincent Brackelaire and published by FOBOMADE and Rainforest Foundation Norway in 2008. Available at:

http://www.cebem.org/admin/cmsfiles/publicaciones/Toromonas_.pdf

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- India: Lepchas arrested for opposing mega hydro project

The old Lepcha tribe were isolated forest dwellers living harmoniously with nature over centuries. They were hunters and gatherers leading nomadic lives until mid-nineteenth century when they began practicing settled agriculture. They are known for their rich cultural heritage and for being sacred and restricted, especially to outsiders.

The Lepchas inhabit the Dzongu valley in the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim, close to the Chinese border. The area, with dense forest cover, has been officially demarcated as a reserve for the community. It borders the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and is located about 70 km north to the State Capital, Gangtok, bounded to the south-east by the Teesta river which the Lepchas consider their holy river. The Teesta traverses a 414 km distance cutting across Sikkim, parts of Darjeeling hills and the plains of Jalpaiguri before submerging into the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. With its dense forest cover and rich biodiversity, the Teesta river basin hosts one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world and any obstacle in the natural flow of the turbulent river would eventually bring about disaster to the local communities.

In 2003, an initiative was launched to construct 162 massive hydroelectric schemes across 16 Indian states, nearly always located in the impoverished and tribal areas of the north. Seven projects are proposed within the Dzongu Reserve, in the river Teesta and its tributaries, such as the Rangyang river where the 280mw Panan Hydropower Project is being projected. The project has so far got environmental clearance but is yet to get forest clearance and clearance from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA). It is developed by Himagiri Hydro Energy Ltd promoted by the Nagarjuna Fertilisers.

The setting up of mega projects is being opposed by the Lepchas who consider them a threat not only to the environment but also to their traditions and culture. They fear that the river's disappearance into a series of tunnels will be accompanied by their own marginalisation. Two hydropower projects already built, coupled with other factors, have started taking their toll: landslips and landslides in the region have increased.

Lepchas have come together to create the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) and launch a campaign in the classic form of a *satyagraha* (non-violence movement) that includes marches, fasts and suchlike. ACT has been spearheading the protests in Sikkim against mega hydro projects, especially in the Protected Lepcha Reserve of Dzongu. They have managed to stall four out of the six hydro projects located inside Dzongu and now they are in for the Panan Hydropower Project.

Recently, on last February 7, Sikkim police arrested 43 protestors including 7 women and two juveniles of the ACT based on a complaint filed by the general manager of the Himagiri Hydro Energy Private Limited, developers of the Panan Hydropower project. The arrested activists included Dawa Lepcha, General Secretary, Tenzing Lepcha and Gyatso Lepcha, the President of the Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim (CLOS) and the Vice President of the Sangha of Dzongu. Two juvenile protestors were, however, released. The rest was taken in to police custody where they were kept in prison on charges of arson and trespass at the project dam site.

This is the first time in the history of Dzongu that police went inside the Lepcha Reserve and arrested so many people.

ACT had been demanding unconditional release of the arrested members on grounds of arbitrary arrests. They finally applied for a bail petition and on March 9, the ACT activists were granted bail.

"Dzongu is all that is left to us, how can we let them destroy it?"

Article based on information provided by Soupama Lahiri, e-mail: soupama.lahiri@gmail.com, and Voice of Sikkim, <http://www.voiceofsikkim.com/ACT/Environment/ACT/>

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- Save the Mekong, a coalition to keep the river alive

The Mekong River is one of the world's major rivers and flows along 4,350 km (2,703 miles) draining an area of 795,000 km². (1) As Aviva Imhof from IRN beautifully describes it, "the Mekong River is a changing kaleidoscope of cultures, geography and plant and animal life. From a small trickle in Tibet, the river quickly gathers steam and carves magnificent gorges through Yunnan Province of China. It then turns into what it remains for most of the rest of its journey: a fast-flowing, meandering waterway that forms the heart and soul of mainland Southeast Asia." (2)

The river system is also the base of the regional food security as long as its wealthy aquatic biodiversity, which is second only to the Amazon, is not only home to migratory fish stocks and endangered species but also supports one of the most productive inland fisheries in the world, especially small-scale fisheries. Also farmers are able to thrive on rain-fed rice farming and freshwater fish. Thus, over sixty million villagers from China, Burma, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam who live in and around and share the Mekong River depend on it; for them water is more than a

source of life, it is a way of life.

Yet, deaf to all warnings and blind to the potential harm to the rivers' biological and cultural richness as well as the survival of villages, the governments of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand are planning a series of eleven big hydropower dams for the lower stretches of the Mekong River. The purpose is to cater for increasing urban electricity hunger and even export electricity to distant cities. Big consortiums of hydropower companies might be rubbing their hands at the perspective of huge profits out of replacing a "river of life" with an industrialized series of reservoirs.

The dams put in peril the ecology of both river and forest ecosystems of the Mekong river system as well as the lives of the millions of riverside people who depend upon the river for their income and food security (see WRM Bulletin N° 136) and each of the water resource development projects proposed for the Mekong River basin has the potential to damage the ecology. Evaluation studies by the Mekong Resource Center have confirmed that the dams threaten the future viability and sustainability of the Mekong's fish and fisheries as long as they would obstruct fish migration, degrade aquatic habitats and affect the flow regime. Studies also revealed that "there is no existing mitigation technology that can effectively deal with the barrier effect of mainstream dams on fish migrations" and that "(T)he cost of replacing this essentially-free resource with another source of food, income and employment would be prohibitive. With this perspective, it is clear that the conservation of capture fisheries is crucial to maintaining food security and social stability."(3)

Large-scale generation –for whom and for what?– generated at a remote site and transported by long distance transmission lines to the consumer is one of the key underlying issues of the problem.

As a response, non-government organizations, local people, academics, journalists, artists and ordinary people from within the Mekong countries and internationally sharing a concern about the future of the Mekong River, joined to create a coalition. Save the Mekong was created "to protect the river, its resources and people's livelihoods, and encourage policymakers to adopt more sustainable ways of meeting people's energy and water needs."

The coalition has created a website <<http://www.savethemekong.org>> and carries out a campaign urging Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to keep the Mekong flowing freely. In March and April, coalition members will be collecting signed postcards from people in the countries who would be affected by the projects and around the world. They invite anyone to support the campaign by adding one's name to the corresponding online petition at <<http://tinyurl.com/Save-the-Mekong>>, asking the governments to Save the Mekong and protect the livelihoods of those who depend on it.

(1) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mekong>

(2) World Rivers Review, International Rivers Network,
<http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/WRRjune2007Final.pdf>

(3) http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au/events/past/Conference_Nov2008/AMRC%20fish

- Uganda: The Batwa issue declaration calling for their rights to be recognized

The Batwa (often described as “pygmies”) are widely regarded as the original forest-dwelling inhabitants of the Equatorial forest in the Great Lakes Region comprising Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Uganda, they lived in the forest of the Mufumbira Mountains in the South West. They were hunter-gatherers that relied on the forests for their livelihood and found in the forests the sustenance for their spiritual and social life.

In the 1930’s, the Batwa’s lands were declared forest and game reserves by the British colonial power, which implied the Batwa began to have restricted access to their own land, though the forest continued to be economically and culturally important to them.

In 1991, and without the Batwa’s participation, those forest reserves became national parks along the colonial and neo-colonial construct of “Fortress Conservation”: Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Echuya Central Forest Reserve. The circle around the Batwa was closed: they were banned from their traditional forest activities and displaced from their lands, receiving little or no compensation at all. At present, almost half remain landless (squatting on others’ lands and working for non-Batwa masters in bonded labour agreements) and almost all live in absolute poverty. They have poorer levels of health care, education and employment than their ethnic neighbours.

In a recent Declaration (13 February 2009) submitted to the Ugandan Government and signed by 41 Batwa community representatives of five districts of South West Uganda, they state that since that time they are “homeless, landless and one of the poorest and most marginalised communities in Uganda”. In their declaration, they add that “because we are destitute, we depend on casual labour for survival and erect temporary shelter on land belonging to other communities around us. We are denied an opportunity to live a dignified life and contribute to national development like other citizens of Uganda contrary to International Human Rights Standards and the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda”. Some 6700 Batwa live in Uganda.

As one Batwa representative expressed at the recent meeting that produced the declaration, “Why is it that animals are guarded by guns and yet we the people are suffering? We have been voting but are we citizens of this country?”

A press release from the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) regarding the Batwa’s declaration, describes the sad and unfair destitution of an original people that used to live since time immemorial in coexistence with the environment: “The Batwa temporarily camp on other people’s land in Kisoro, Kabale, Kanungu, Mbarara and Masaka. They offer daily casual labour in exchange for food. Where this condition is breached, the consequence is expulsion from the individual’s land. The Mutwa [Batwa] woman is limited to receiving food for her labour and not even enough food to feed her infant children. She is also compelled to divert her

older children from school to provide labour.”

The Batwa have raised a basic demand of justice: “Conscious that all human beings are equal and entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect”. They remind the government that it is obliged by Constitutional provisions “to institute an effective machinery to deal with any hazard or situation resulting in general displacement of people or serious disruption of their livelihood” –which is the situation that they are confronting.

In their declaration, the Batwa claim respect to their “fundamental right to our ancestral lands” and that -pending the resolution of their land claims- “the government should provide alternative land” for their resettlement. At the same time, they demand that “since the forest forms the basis of our cultural and spiritual heritage, the government should allow us access the forest for purposes of preserving our cultural values.”

As the UOBDU press release states, “The declaration of the Batwa, now submitted to the Ugandan Government, will spearhead their strategy for their continuing struggle for their rights to be recognised. We strongly recommend that the Government pay attention to the plight of the Batwa people and integrate them into the national development efforts of Uganda. The Batwa are deprived of their access to their forests and most are landless. The Ugandan Government has obligations under international law.” It is now time for the government to act and repair a long standing injustice.

Article based on UOBDU press release of February 23, 2009, at http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/africa/uganda_batwa_declaration_press_rel_feb09_eng.pdf, disseminated by Amarantha Pike, e-mail: amarantha@forestpeoples.org, and Batwa Declaration at http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/africa/uganda_batwa_declaration_feb09_eng.pdf

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: On Women’s day, peasant women struggle against tree plantations

On International Women’s Day in Brazil, once again women lead the struggle against monoculture tree plantations.

Starting in 2006, when close on 2 thousand peasant women from Via Campesina destroyed greenhouses and nearly 8 million eucalyptus saplings belonging to the pulp mill company Aracruz Celulose (see WRM Bulletin No. 104), 8 March has now become a day for mobilization and complaints against monoculture tree plantations.

In the State of Espírito Santo, some 1,300 women from Via Campesina arrived in 14 buses at the port of Portocel (Barra do Riacho) in the north of the State. The port is the property of Aracruz Celulose (together with Japanese pulp producing company, Cenibra) and is the only port in Brazil specializing in loading pulp, with an annual

loading capacity of 7.5 million tons of pulp. The operation, which lasted half an hour, stopped for almost five hours the activities of some 50 trucks ready to load pulp. The peasant women also threw paint on bundles of pulp, spoiling approximately two tons. (1)

The operation was aimed at denouncing to society Aracruz Celulose's appropriation of land. This company is one of the main representatives of agribusiness in the country. Close on 300,000 hectares of land are occupied by eucalyptus plantations to produce pulp for export and part of these thousands of hectares are lands belonging to indigenous, Afro-descendent, fisher-people and riparian communities. Aracruz Celulose also appropriates water: it consumes 248 thousand cubic metres of water per day, equivalent to the consumption of a town of 2.5 million inhabitants. To do this it has diverted part of the Doce River, to the detriment of various local communities (see WRM Bulletin No. 72).

Land occupation by monoculture eucalyptus plantations has been done at the expense of food sovereignty and to the detriment of peasant production. In a booklet recently published by the Espírito Santo Movement of Smallholders (Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores), diversified agriculture is compared to the eucalyptus plantations promoted by these companies ("Um alerta sobre o fomento florestal": http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Fomento_Florestal.pdf). The booklet clearly shows that for peasant families, diversified production guarantees healthy food and work for the whole family, while the eucalyptus plantations only cause damage. In spite of this it is the forestry companies that continue to receive the most State support: as an example, the Votorantim group recently received one million dollars to purchase Aracruz shares and save it from possible bankruptcy.

Another of the measures for opposing the expansion of tree plantations took place in the State of Maranhão where 10 or more municipalities have been affected by monoculture eucalyptus plantations. At a landholding of the company Vale do Rio Doce in Açailândia, women from Via Campesina set fire to several bundles of eucalyptus logs. In this area the eucalyptus planted supplies an industrial charcoal factory that is responsible for considerable air pollution, affecting the lives of over 1,800 inhabitants in the neighbouring California Settlement. The company has another 200,000 hectares to be allocated to eucalyptus plantations for supplying the Suzano Papel e Celulose mill to be installed in the region.

The action was taken demanding public policies guaranteeing food and energy sovereignty for the Brazilian people, instead of funding major projects involving international capital that destroy natural resources and do not generate jobs. (2)

Furthermore, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, some 700 peasant women occupied the Ana Paula ranch, belonging to the Votorantim Celulose y Papel (VCP) company, in Candiota. The occupation started by cutting down eucalyptus trees at the establishment and was part of the women of Via Campesina's National Day for Struggle, aimed at denouncing the consequences of eucalyptus monoculture plantations in the region: lack of water for human consumption and production, desertification and soil acidity, loss of biodiversity with serious consequences on grassland ecosystems. Many neighbours of VCP are already feeling the impacts of

the monoculture plantations, such as the drying up of their wells and changes in the fauna, leading to the invasion of animals damaging their crops. (3) However, public money that comes out of the population's pockets as taxation is still allocated to agribusiness banks and companies that degrade the environment and evict peasants from rural areas and that do not generate employment. The occupation of the Ana Paula ranch was subsequently violently repressed by the Military Brigade.

Other actions carried out by women in Pernambuco, Paraná, São Paulo and Brasília, denounced the damage caused by major irrigation projects, extensive cattle raising for export at the expense of forests and biodiversity, monoculture plantations of sugar cane, soy beans, eucalyptus, pine; in other words, the expansion of agribusiness. (4)

Brazil has 130,000 landless families organized in camps that are waiting for land rights and over 4 million landless families. "The application of the agrarian reform and the consolidation of the new agricultural model depend on defeating the present model," warns Itelvina Masioli from Via Campesina. It is a model that appropriates and dominates water, land, energy sources, minerals, seeds and the whole of biodiversity. The allocation of the Government's rural credit to agribusiness during this season (2008/09) amounted to some 30 billion dollars, while for family enterprises only some 5.8 billion dollars were allocated.

The Director General of FAO, Jacques Diouf himself, supported the proposals made by Via Campesina. On the second day of mobilizations, Diouf received a peasant delegation in Brasília and listened to their report on action taken. He declared that their action is "just and necessary." (5)

Peasant, riparian, extractivist, indigenous, Afro-descendent and landless women want to denounce with their political action the extreme gravity of the situation of rural workers in Brazil. Faced by the repression and criminalization of social struggles, they reaffirm their right to fight in defence of agro-ecology, biodiversity, cooperative peasant farming, the production of healthy food, agrarian reform, land, water, seeds, energy, as assets of nature at the service of human beings. They announce that "we break the silence to salvage our culture and our peasant knowledge, to salvage our Brazil. And for this purpose we call on all the Brazilian people to join the struggle, to unite and build a new development project – benefiting the Brazilian people." (6)

- (1) "Via Campesina occupies Aracruz Celulose's port", Gazeta On Line, <http://gazetaonline.globo.com/conteudo/2009/03/64300-via+campesina+ocupa+porto+da+aracruz+celulose.html>; "Mulheres da Via Campesina ocupam porto da Aracruz no ES", MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6377>
- (2) "Mulheres queimam toras de eucaliptos da Vale no Maranhão", MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6393>
- (3) "Trabalhadoras ocupam área da Votorantim no RS", MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6381>
- (4) Mulheres lutam contra agronegócio em quatro regiões, MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6395>
- (5) "Diretor-Geral da FAO elogia luta das mulheres camponesas", MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6425>

(6) "Peasant Women In The Struggle Against Agro-Business, For The Agrarian Reform And Food Sovereignty", <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6398>

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- China: Facing two evils -deforestation and monoculture tree plantations

The entrance of China into the global capitalist market with the ensuing accelerated expansion of its economy has been marked by a growing hunger for timber.

The path to industrialization first swallowed the country's forests. Rampant logging led to the irretrievable loss of China's natural wealth: accelerated desertification, decline of biodiversity and loss of forests up to the point that there is almost no old-growth left in China. The case of Yichun serves to illustrate the issue. The Guardian's correspondent Jonathan Watts, reports (1) that in "Yichun, a north-eastern city in Heilongjiang province close to the frozen river border with Siberia, the forests were once so dense that the area was known as the Great Northern Wilderness. But more than fifty years of unsustainable logging have taken their toll. Yichun was classified last year (2008) as one of China's 12 'resource-depleted cities.' 'We are in a situation where we have no wood to cut. None of the forests are mature enough,' Dong Zhiyong, former vice-minister in the forestry administration said."

With the soil exposed to erosion fierce sandstorms have lashed the country while deforestation –especially in the upper reaches of river systems-- has contributed to devastating floods that caused thousands of deaths and millions of displaced people.

In 1998, a sweeping logging ban was established. However, wood consumption still increased, now at the expense of the forests of neighbouring countries (e.g. Burma, Cambodia, Russia) as well as of far away countries such as those in Western Africa, among other.

The need for papermaking resources added to wood demand and as result China launched in 2000 a Fast-growing and High-yielding Timber Plantations Program. The program –part of a wider set of six key programs- was to be established in 18 eastern and southwestern provinces and by 2012 the government aims to have planted an area of 44 million hectares (see WRM Bulletin N° 85). This has implied land tenure reforms shifting from state-run or collectively owned land to land privatization in a country where farmer population is 1 billion out of a population of 1.5 billion.

Tax reductions and leeway management of fast growing, high-yield tree plantations have been established in an attempt to attract private investment. According to a Canadian report (2) "reforms are now moving from the recognition of individual assets and the encouragement of private companies to large-scale natural resource management".

A number of pulp and paper firms have taken advantage of the opportunity and arrived to China to invest in planting trees and producing paper. Stora Enso, with business such as an integrated pulp and paper project in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous

region, where the company leases 91,000 hectares of land for eucalyptus plantations plans to reach 160,000 hectares by 2010 to supply Stora Enso's pulp and paper project in Beihai (3). The notorious Asia Pulp and Paper has stakes in over 20 pulp and paper enterprises, as well as more than 20 tree plantation sites in China. (4) The Finnish UPM-Kymmene is also looking into investing further in the country in planting fast-growing trees. (5)

Soon an alert sounded: the province of Guangdong experienced a worsening drought coincidentally with the establishment of some 700,000 hectares planted with eucalyptus trees. Local authorities as well as members of the Chinese Academia exposed the link between the increasing number of eucalyptus tree plantations and the worsening drought in Guangdong (see WRM Bulletin N° 106).

The weakness of the monoculture model –that lacks the natural protection provided by biodiversity- expressed itself in the case of poplar tree plantations, which became prone to insect attacks causing severe damage to leaves and trunks.

To amend the mess, a worse problem was introduced: genetically modified (GM) trees. Two genetically modified poplar lines were developed with support from Germany, FAO, and UNDP: *Populus nigra* and *Populus* hybrid named Poplar-12 and Poplar-741, which produce a Bt toxin in their leaves that kills leaf-eating insects.(6)

In 2002, both varieties were released for commercial use. Poplar is a fast-growing tree and the plans involved the establishment of commercial plantations with a ten-year rotation period covering an area of approximately 17 million hectares by the year 2012. (7)

China is the first country to approve the commercial release of GM trees.(7) According to Huoran Wang of the Chinese Academy of Forestry, "The accurate area of GM plantations cannot be assessed because of the ease of propagation and marketing of GM trees and the difficulty of morphologically distinguishing GM from non-GM trees." He adds that "a lot of materials are moved from one nursery to another and it is difficult to trace them." (8)

In spite of official assertions that GM poplars were female varieties with altered fertility –which allegedly would prevent cross-breeding– the Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science has already found genes from the GE poplars appearing in natural varieties. The threat of GM pollution has now become a tragic reality.

The case of China exemplifies the intrinsic problems of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, as well as those stemming from trying to address them through genetic manipulation. Reforestation is of course necessary in a country with few forests left, but much will depend on how it is understood. Reforestation can either mean larger monocultures of fast-growing tree species for wood production –including GM trees- or biodiverse plantations adapted to local environments and aimed at forest restoration. Planting billions of trees –as currently carried out in China- can be very good or very bad, depending on how it is implemented. We hope that the enormous effort carried out every year by the Chinese people and government will have the positive result of helping to bring back the country's native forests.

- (1) "China's loggers down chainsaws in attempt to regrow forests", Jonathan Watts, guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 11 March 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/mar/11/china-forests-deforestation>
- (2) "The Development of China's Forestry Sector and Its Implications for Canada", Jason (Guangyu) Wang, CIC Junior Fellow Preliminary Paper, July 2008, http://www.canadianinternationalcouncil.org/download/resourcece/archives/foreignpol/cic_wang_e
- (3) "Stora Enso: Sustainable paper production", China Daily, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-10/24/content_7136326.htm
- (4) "Special supplement: APP China pushes green initiative in making white paper", Fu Yu, China Daily, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-04/12/content_6611376.htm
- (5) "Nation's Tree-planting Strategy to Meet Paper Sector's Needs", China Daily, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/BAT/87695.htm>
- (6) Cheng Wenjing, TWN (2008), GE trees in China, presented at the International Biosafety Forum-Workshop 3, organized by Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science, GTZ/BMZ, Central University for Nationality College of Life and Environmental Science and TWN, Beijing, September 25-26, 2008, http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/China/GE_Trees_in_China.pdf
- (7) "Seeing once is better than studying a thousand times", GMO Safety, <http://www.gmo-safety.eu/en/wood/poplar/325.docu.html>
- (8) "The New Chainsaw", Katie Shafley, The Dominion, http://www.dominionpaper.ca/environment/2006/05/20/the_new_ch.html

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- Mozambique: Pine plantation project brings misfortune to 31 families in the North

Thirty-one families from the districts of Lichinga and Sanga in northern Mozambique have not been able to harvest any crops this 2008/2009 season due to their obligatory withdrawal from their crop areas (*machambas*) to other new areas because of a "reforestation" megaproject. The inhabitants are blaming the reforestation projects for the devastation of their *machambas*.

Less than 10 years ago, Niassa was identified by the Government of Mozambique and bilateral Swedish Aid as one of the regions in the world with the greatest potential for timber production. Over 2.4 million hectares were identified for possible tree plantations.

In order to encourage investment in the forestry sector, the Malonda Foundation was set up in 2006 to establish partnerships with national and foreign investors. To ensure and attract investment, the Foundation needed to obtain the concession of vast tracts of land. In Mozambique, the State owns all the land and can only allocate rights over community lands through a process of community consultation and negotiation. In practice, these consultations and negotiations were not sufficiently wide or comprehensive.

A recent report from the Swedish Bilateral Aid *Helpdesk* (October 2008) on the consultations and negotiations over community lands confirmed what had been verified in the field: “a tendency to work only with traditional leaders...resulting in a feeling of marginalization in the population.”

Very often the traditional kinglets, ignoring the law regulating land use and pursuing financial interests, sign documents for the forestry area investors, placing at risk the peasants' right to use the land. The companies maintain contact with the kinglets of the respective areas haphazardly. The inhabitants only notice the existence of a particular project when it is already being implemented.

In the case of the Mussa-Chimbunila region in the District of Lichinga, land concession has been problematic. Up to 25% of the concession granted to the Foundation overlaps with productive community lands.

Idrissa Assane, president of the Mussa Farmers Association said she saw her machamba being measured without any prior information. “In an attempt to obtain some explanation I addressed the local structures, specifically the kinglet and later the administrative office and the reply was that I had to wait. To my horror I see that there is a project to plant trees on my land and here I am still waiting,” Assane lamented in 2008.

The 31 peasant families in the Assane region had areas where they grew much food sustaining their families all the year round. In the machambas abandoned because of the pine plantations they left many fruit trees behind such as banana, mango, pear, papaya, pineapple, peach, avocado and loquat trees and many root crops.

Following many complaints made throughout 2008, the Foundation started to respond to the question of how to find new areas for the affected families' crops. The Foundation technicians opened up new areas, provided seeds and fertilizer but this was all done too late. According to UNAC (the National Peasant Union) corn crops will be very poor. However the Maloda Foundation promised that there would be food security in the districts where it works.

In the village of Mussa, District of Lichinga, Baptista Iussufo Imede regretted that he had been obliged to leave his machamba with a large crop and allocated another area where the late sowing and inappropriate fertilizer for corn had resulted in failure.

Baptista and other families affected by the process have neither a cob of corn nor any other crops, stated Iussufo.

The Foundation's Bulletin “Noticias de las Comunidades” (News from the communities) contains information stating that the peasants are satisfied with their new machambas. This and other news in the Bulletin are neither true nor the community's real situation, according to information given by Salimo Ndala from the village of Mussa. According to him he was sad about the obligatory withdrawal, the lateness of tilling, sowing and the fertilizer – which, contrary to the statement of the Foundation's bulletin, are not satisfactory. A photo of Ndala appears in the bulletin.

According to some of the community voices contacted by the National Peasant Union Bulletin, “in Mozambique laws only defend the rich and not the poor;” This position is upheld by Baptista Iussufo Imede from the village of Mussa, District of Lichinga:

“In Niassa, all the reforestation projects enter with policies that do not favour the communities in terms of peasant development. They do not comply with the land law, with its clauses that say that community lands require consultation with the communities, pasture areas, conservation areas and consuetudinary rights.”

Ndala told the UNAC Bulletin that increasingly the peasants are becoming more vulnerable because some of the kinglets work for personal interests.

Rematuo Issa regrets that very often it is not the peasant women who take decisions: everything ends up with the men and the women only comply.

“Under these circumstances, it is the woman who most suffers, together with the children. Where is the struggle against poverty that the Government is always talking about? Is it that peasants will come out of poverty without land? Is this the Green Revolution?” asks Rematuo.

By Alifa Aide, Niassa, Lichinga, Mozambique. Sent by Janet Gunter, CAFOD, e-mail: jgunter@cafod.org.uk

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- Venezuela: Seizure of Smurfit tree plantations sets new course for the future

In 1999, shortly after he was elected, President Hugo Chávez received a letter from WRM (see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/22/Venezuela2.html>) in which we expressed our deep concern over the serious impacts on peasant communities in the state of Portuguesa generated by the monoculture tree plantations operated by Smurfit Cartón de Venezuela (a subsidiary of the Smurfit Kappa Group, a leading producer of cardboard for the European market).

The letter referred to the observations made during a WRM visit to the area in 1998 – before Chávez took office – at the request of local communities.

The conflict between Smurfit and the peasant communities in the region was a reflection of the incompatibility of two productive models: the agribusiness model based on large-scale monocultures, and the small- to medium-scale peasant farming model based on a diversity of crops.

Since its arrival in the region, Smurfit's operations had serious repercussions for poor local peasant communities with limited access to land. The company started out by deforesting the area to harvest timber, which altered the course of waterways and consequently led to the loss of local animals, fish and plants that had served as sources of food for the local population. After destroying the forests, the company began to plant fast-growing tree species – eucalyptus, pine and *Gmelina arborea* – which have a drastic impact on underground water reserves due to the large amounts

of water they consume.

During his visit to the area, the WRM representative was informed by the local people, among other things, about the “major impacts on the water a few months after Smurfit’s plantations were established. As in the rest of the world, these impacts are the result of the high consumption of water by these fast-growing plantations. But in this case, there is the added factor of the deliberate destruction of waterways with bulldozers, used to flatten the terrain in order to plant more trees (it seems to be company policy that every centimetre of land must be planted) and the destruction of gallery forests that protect and regulate river basins. The result (denied, of course, by the ‘experts’ periodically brought in by the company to demonstrate the indemonstrable) is that the streams are drying up and the volume of water in wells is constantly shrinking. Local animals, fish and plants that provided much of the food resources for the local population are also rapidly disappearing, as their natural habitats are replaced by green deserts of trees and more forests are cut down to feed the pulp mill. ‘I have never seen a bird sit on one of those trees,’ say the locals. They also say that rabbits formerly abounded in the area, but are now only found a long distance away from the plantations. They say that they used to hunt armadillos and deer, and that they ate fish from the streams, but now, because of the plantations, these have practically disappeared.” (See <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Venezuela/discordia.html>)

The conflict came to a head in 1997. An aerial spaying with herbicides carried out by Smurfit destroyed 190 hectares of crops and caused the poisoning of local schoolchildren. Additionally, Smurfit purchased La Productora, a large estate that local peasants had expected to be turned over to them as part of the national agrarian reform programme. The estate had been formerly used by its owners for commercial agriculture and cattle raising, but peasants from the neighbouring communities of Morador and Tierra Buena were allowed free access to the property for fishing, hunting and recreational purposes. When the estate was taken over by Smurfit, the situation changed dramatically: the land was occupied by monoculture tree plantations and surrounded with barbed wire fences, attack dogs and armed guards to keep people out.

On 14 July 1997, acting under the protection of Venezuelan legislation that prohibits large landholdings and places priority on the allocation of agricultural land, the peasants occupied La Productora. The response was brutal repression (see WRM Bulletin No. 18).

The letter sent by WRM in 1999 to the newly elected Venezuelan president and the Venezuelan Senate Environmental Committee, addressing this critical situation, constituted an international action in support of the struggle of these communities. As the letter stated: “Among the multiple problems generated by this corporation [Smurfit] in that region, the more apparent are those related to the impacts of its extensive monoculture tree plantations on water, flora and wildlife, which result in serious problems for local peoples’ livelihoods” (see WRM Bulletin No. 22).

In 2004, WRM once again called on the Venezuelan president to provide government support for the area’s peasants to enter into negotiations with Smurfit, at a time when the company appeared to be willing to negotiate with the local communities. (See the

letter at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Venezuela/carta181104.html>)

In processes like these, viewed from a historical perspective, tangible and measurable results are difficult to achieve in the short term. This is certainly true in the case of the struggle of local communities against Smurfit and its large-scale tree plantations.

In 2007, after “fulfilling all of the requirements of the law,” the Venezuelan National Land Institute (INTI) repossessed from Smurfit the more than 2,000 hectares of land encompassed by La Productora, declaring it as underused land. Since then, this land has been allocated to agricultural production projects to be undertaken by around 700 peasant farmers organized in 32 cooperatives, in the framework of the creation of “a new system of social production that will allow peasant farmers to take advantage of the land’s vocation and become integrated in the productive apparatus.” (1)

Now, more than ten years after the abovementioned conflicts and the action spearheaded by WRM against monoculture tree plantations, the Venezuelan government has taken control of another 1,500 hectares of Smurfit’s plantations in the state of Lara, currently being used for eucalyptus and *Gmelina arborea* monocultures. The seizure was effected on the grounds that the land was not being used in accordance with government regulations. The eucalyptus trees planted for paper production “suck the water from underground, and the rivers are drying up,” observed President Chávez. (2)

At a time when the global corporate economic model is in crisis, it is vital to guarantee access to food, and this is fully understood in Venezuela. “We are going to use this wood (from the eucalyptus trees) in a rational manner, and we are going to plant other things there (...) like beans, corn, sorghum, cassava, yams,” pledged the Venezuelan president. (3)

The time has come to move away from productive models such as large-scale tree plantations, which are highly profitable for a small few but disastrous for the environment and for local communities who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. In this case, the Venezuelan government has finally recognized this fact: “The transnational corporation Smurfit, the cardboard producer, plants a specific type of tree which benefits only the corporation’s owners.”

The decision to seize these plantations, in addition to its importance for local peasant communities, also has symbolic power in setting a course towards food sovereignty, towards the dismantling of large-scale, destructive monoproduction models. The path to achieving these goals remains part of a long, arduous process.

Additional information was gathered from the following sources:

(1) Inti inició en Portuguesa rescate de finca La Productora, <http://www.mv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=19&t=45113>

(2) “Chávez expropió los terrenos de la papelera irlandesa Kappa”, AP, http://www.elpais.com.uy/09/03/06/ultmo_402921.asp

(3) Chávez anuncia la intervención de los terrenos de la papelera Smurfit Kappa, EFE, <http://www.abc.es/20090306/internacional-iberoamerica>

- Brazil: Occupation of Veracel's tree plantations calls upon land reform

April 17 has been declared by La Via Campesina the "International Day of Peasant's Struggles" to commemorate the slaughter by the Brazilian police in 1996 of 19 peasants of the "landless" movement while they mobilized to get access to some land.

The land issue has becoming a major one in Brasil and the Movement of Landless Rural Workers MST have been very active.

On last April 8, 1,500 landless families of the MST occupied the landholding Putumuju, of the pulp and paper company Veracel Celulose (a joint venture of the Swedish-Finnish pulp giant Stora Enso and Brazilian-based Aracruz Celulose), in Eunápolis, south of the state of Bahia. They cut down around 2 hectares of eucalyptus trees to make way for maize and bean planting.

The action claimed the illegality of Veracel's tree plantations in the municipality. The company occupies near 205,000 hectares of which some 96,000 are covered by eucalyptus plantations at the expense of the Atlantic Forest. Veracel's deforestation with tractors and bulldozers during its first year of operation led on 17 June 2008, to a historic resolution of a federal court which ordered Veracel to replant those plantations with native trees and pay a fine of US\$ 12,5 million (see WRM Bulletin N° 132).

Furthermore, over 20,000 hectares of those plantations are established on lands belonging to the Bahia state government that should be destined to land reform for small-scale agriculture ("terras devolutas") as the Federal Constitution determines.

The action aimed at raising awareness amid the Brazilian society about the urgency of setting in motion the standing Agrarian Land Reform as well as to denounce that Veracel's power has led to the disappearance of several agricultural subsistence crops in Eunápolis and land concentration at the expense of peasants. The MST wants to discuss the tree monoculture production in the state and the regularization of the 'terras devolutas'. "Over the past two years no lands have been taken by the government for land reform" and, according to Marcio Matos from the state direction of the MST, "while one company has here more than 20,000 hectares of lands that should be used to end with poverty and hunger in the region".

The office of the Secretary of Agriculture of the State of Bahia, in the state capital Salvador, was also occupied on April 14, with the aim of putting pressure on the state government to comply with the promises made in 2007, including field inspection of potential land reform areas.

La Via Campesina calls upon everyone to unite on this April 17 for peasant's rights (rights to land, right to seeds, right to water...) organising a demonstration, a public debate, a movie screening, a local food expo, a fiesta, a direct action, a singing competition, etc. (To join the action, subscribe to the distribution list for April 17 by

sending a message without text to:

http://viacampesina.net/mailman/listinfo/via.17april_viacampesina.net)

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WRM MEETING DECLARATION

- Declaration of Heredia on Climate, Forests and Plantations

Between 24 and 28 March 2009, in Heredia, Costa Rica, the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) brought together civil society organisations from around the world to address the subject of climate, forests and plantations and their interrelations with local communities.

Participants from 21 countries joined together for reflection, discussion and the exchange of experiences and information. They concurred that “climate change is the inevitable consequence of a social, political and economic system that has turned nature and people into commodities,” that monoculture plantations “displace communities, destroy forests, pollute the planet and generate further climate change,” and that “the defense of the climate, forests and other ecosystems by the people is the only possible alternative for the future we are building.”

The conclusions, commitments and proposals arising from the meeting, with a special emphasis on the need to “create our own agenda, focused on the needs and struggles of our peoples, to generate and contribute to a wide social movement with the objective of transforming the system from the bottom up,” were summarised in the Declaration of Heredia, which we present here:

Declaration of Heredia on Climate, Forests and Plantations Heredia, 28 March 2009

We, organisations of civil society from every continent, have met in Costa Rica between 24 and 28 March to share experiences, visit peasant communities, think and present proposals on the question of climate, forests, and plantations.

During the first part of our meeting we visited several peasant communities in the northern part of the country and were able to see the impact of pineapple monoculture on local communities, on their territories, sources of water, health, local ecosystems. We were able to see how these peasant communities continue to protect and regenerate their forests against all the attacks they suffer.

We were able to see clearly how the imposition of an agro-export model that is repeated in different shapes and with different crops all around the planet contributes to the current climate disaster. This model of commodity exports, with its system of monocultures, intense use of fossil-fuel based agro-chemicals and transport of products over thousands of miles for the consumption of the rich North, is one of the main causes of the current climate crisis.

Costa Rica sells itself to the world as a green country that defends its forests and biodiversity, but we have seen that this image does not reflect the reality of the environment or people of Costa Rica.

After two days of reflecting about the causes that have led our societies to this situation, and about the proposals put forward from official circles, we want to share our conclusions, commitments and proposals to address climate change.

Our first conclusion is that climate change is the inevitable consequence of a social, political and economic system that has turned nature and people into commodities. Even though climate change is one of the most serious threats that we face for the future, it is also part of a series of crises that have been happening in the last few years.

Secondly, we have come to the conclusion that none of the solutions proposed by governments and the United Nations really deal with the causes of climate change.

We have concluded that carbon trading, REDD mechanisms, payment for environmental services, offsets and all market-based mitigation mechanisms are instruments which not only do not fulfil their purported objective but also advance the commodification of life and therefore the destruction of our planet and aggravation of climate change. All of these proposals become “moving targets” which, by continuously changing, try to distract us from the real problems.

The global market, its huge corporations have co-opted UN climate negotiations and have taken them hostage, turning them into a business space which in no way responds to the real needs and urgent measures that need to be taken.

The World Bank, which has been responsible for financing the destruction of the planet, is now taking a leading role in climate negotiations, promoting failed market models that make a mockery of attempts to tackle the climate crisis.

Neither do the technologies that are being developed as a response – such as agrofuels, transgenic plants, the use of biochar, and others that may arise – constitute a real response to climate change. Behind all of these false solutions we find the corporations, with the complicity of the governments, who have become simple facilitators of the corporations’ business activities. At the same time, it is also the governments who are promoting repression and criminalisation of individuals and organisations who resist the imposition of plantations, monocultures and all of these false solutions.

For this reason, we commit to create our own agenda, focused on the needs and struggles of our peoples, to generate and contribute to a wide social movement with the objective of transforming the system from the bottom up.

Within this framework, the defense of the climate, forests and other ecosystems by the people is the only possible alternative for the future we are building. Women are playing a leading role on the path to changing the relationship between people and

with nature that privileges co-operation over domination and control.

We reject plantations and monocultures because they displace communities, destroy forests, pollute the planet and generate further climate change. This rejection is one of the main points on our agenda for the future. We underline the fact that plantations are not forests.

It is on this basis that we propose:

(1) The defense of land and territories against any type of land concentration in the hands of the few. We propose an integral agrarian reform, starting out from the integration of women and men in solidarity with their land and the protection of water and the biodiversity which sustains us. We completely oppose market-based agrarian reforms promoted by the World Bank, whose only objective is to displace communities in order to occupy their territories. Our proposal is to establish a relationship to the land in a respectful manner without aggression. We understand that defending the territory is defending our culture and our way of relating among ourselves and with the earth.

(2) Food sovereignty. We understand food sovereignty as the right of people to decide on everything that relates to the production of food and agriculture. Food sovereignty starts with the defence of native seeds and with the link to nature. In order to be sovereign, we need to produce locally the greater part of food for our own consumption in harmony with nature, and in this way we can produce food for all in a diversified way in order to avoid monocultures while cooling the planet and fighting climate change. This is the way to achieve healthy and harmonious people and ecosystems.

(3) Opposing market-based climate mechanisms. We will resist and denounce as false carbon trading, REDD, as well as similar market-based schemes that may arise in future. We commit to explaining in every possible arena why these will never provide a response to the climate crisis.

We will implement these objectives by carrying out activities in which we will coordinate with and support each other:

- Education and awareness-raising through the production of educational and audio-visual materials and any other tool that allows us to extend the number of people conscious of the problems;
- Carrying out case studies together with affected communities in order to document the impacts of climate change and its false solutions and accompany them in their struggles against them;
- Alliance building with all the social movements that question this economic system, including indigenous peoples, womens' organisations, human rights organisations and trade unions;
- Supporting movements of people affected by climate change, to help their voices be heard and to reinforce their strategies for survival;
- Working at local, national and international level in coordination and solidarity.

We return to our countries in solidarity with the people of Costa Rica in their struggles

against free trade agreements, in defence of biodiversity, water, modes of production in harmony with nature and a world of justice and solidarity.

Participants at the WRM meeting

Alejandra Porras (COECOCEIBA) - Costa Rica
Almuth Ernsting (Biofuel Watch) - United Kingdom
Ana Filippini (WRM) - Uruguay
Carlos Salvatierra (Savia) - Guatemala
Carlos Vicente (GRAIN) - Argentina
Chris Lang (REDD Monitor) - Germany
Eduardo Aguilar (COECOCEIBA) - Costa Rica
Elizabeth Bravo (Accion Ecologica) - Ecuador
Elvin Castellón (FEDICAMP)- Nicaragua
Francesco Martone (FPP)- Italy
Ginting Longgena (FoEI) - Indonesia
Grace Garcia (COECOCEIBA) - Costa Rica
Gustavo Castro (Otros Mundos / Amigos de la Tierra) - Mexico
Ines Soares Rodrigues (Via Campesina) - Brazil
Isaac Rojas (COECOCEIBA) - Costa Rica
Javier Baltodano (Friends of the Earth International) - Costa Rica
Juan Almdares (Madre Tierra) - Honduras
Juan Figuerola (COECOCEIBA)- Costa Rica
Jutta Kill (FERN) - Germany
Lambert Okrah (Institute for Cultural Affaire) - Ghana
Mariana Porras (COECOCEIBA) - Costa Rica
Miguel Marín (FEDICAMP) - Nicaragua
Nicola Bullard (Focus on the Global South) - Phillipines
Oscar Reyes (Transnational Institute) - The Netherlands
Ricardo Carrere (WRM) - Uuguay
Ricardo Navarro (CESTA) - El Salvador
Sarah Sexton (The Corner House) - United Kingdom
Winnie Overbeek (Alert against Green Desert Network) - Brazil
Witoon Permpongsacharoen (FER) - Thailand

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MORE ON PLANTATIONS

- Wilful ignorance: FAO and industrial tree plantations

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has long worked on behalf of the plantation industry. One of FAO's strategies to support the spread of monocultures is to pretend that industrial tree plantations are forests.

In December 2008, the Forest Products Journal published a report "Wood from planted forests: A global outlook 2005-2030", written by Jim Carle and Peter Holmgren, two of FAO's forestry experts. The report repeats the myth that plantations

are forests, as if through repetition the myth will miraculously become truth.

Carle and Holmgren appear to be so sure of their facts that they don't bother reading anything that might contradict them. The literature cited in their report includes none of the large number of reports, articles or videos documenting the social and environmental impact of industrial tree plantations. Instead, they cherry pick their evidence from industry-friendly sources.

"Planted forests have an important role," Carle and Holmgren write, "in providing economic and social benefits in eradicating poverty in developing countries and in industrialized countries where marginalized groups and indigenous peoples have previously been excluded from the benefits of development processes." Their source for this statement is a book published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in 2005.

A year previously, IIED produced a report about industrial tree plantations in South Africa, which came to a very different conclusion: "jobs provided by forestry contracting are not able to lift the vast majority of forestry workers, mainly women, out of chronic poverty, or prevent them from falling further into poverty." Carle and Holmgren are aware of this report, or at least they should be. I sent it to them in June 2008 asking for a comment. As they did not reply, I sent it again in September 2008. But Carle and Holmgren have a simple strategy for dealing with anything that contradicts their predetermined conclusions: ignore it.

One of the sources cited in their report is a 2003 report, "Fast- Wood Forestry: Myths and Realities", published by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). This report notes that while it is often claimed that industrial tree plantations take pressure off natural forests, "This claim is highly tendentious." CIFOR's report explains that "It may be true for a small number of countries - New Zealand and Sri Lanka are often cited - but there is little evidence to suggest that fast-wood plantations have taken pressure off natural forests elsewhere."

If he has read this, Carle has not understood it. "Planted forests can take, to some degree, pressure off indigenous forests," he says on a video on FAO's website. "Certainly there are many examples of countries who have had a targeted planted forests development programme which now something like 90 to 100 per cent of their production of industrial round wood is now from the planted forests. And they've set aside their indigenous forests primarily for conservation, protected area management, national parks, reserves, recreational use."

Carle does not say which countries he is talking about. Neither does he explain that the current expansion of industrial tree plantations is in the global South, to meet the over-consumption of the North. He does not describe the massive destruction of forests in Indonesia to feed pulp and paper mills. In recent years, Brazil's industrial tree plantations have expanded faster than in most countries. Yet Brazil also has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. That does not mean that plantations are the cause of deforestation, rather that plantations have not relieved pressure on natural forests. When forests are cleared to make way for agricultural crops, as is the case in Brazil, it is difficult to see how tree plantations could possibly reduce

deforestation. Surely, someone working for an organisation whose name includes the words "Food" and "Agriculture" should be able to grasp this?

In September 2008, World Rainforest Movement's Raquel Nuñez met FAO officials Jim Carle, Peter Holmgren and José Antonio Prado and handed them a statement titled "Monoculture tree plantations are not forests". The statement, signed by more than 100 forestry professionals and students from 29 countries, notes some of the impacts that plantations have on local communities, including loss of biodiversity, changes in the water cycle, decreased food production, soil degradation, loss of indigenous and traditional cultures, conflicts with forestry companies, decreased employment, expulsion of rural populations and destruction of the natural landscape. Carle and Holmgren are nothing if not consistent. They ignored the statement.

On its website, FAO illustrates its press release about the "Wood from planted forests" report with a photograph of Veracel's monoculture eucalyptus plantations in Brazil. The caption reads: "Industrial roundwood production from planted forests, Brazil". We are left in no doubt that the "planted forests" that the FAO is talking about are in fact industrial tree plantations. But the FAO is silent on the impacts of Veracel's plantations.

A recent publication by the Brazilian NGO CEPEDES documents the impact of Veracel's plantations on water, the environment, workers and rural communities. CEPEDES quotes a rural worker: "I feel attacked by having to live every day in front of that 'sea of eucalyptus'. Every day, we see that our streams, ponds and springs are drying. . . . And now what is left is that we can only miss the beauty of the place, the smell, colour and the flock of birds."

Rather than continuing to ignore the evidence, FAO should listen to the people living with the impacts of plantations. FAO's wilful ignorance must stop.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

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- FSC: Increasingly alone in the path of tree plantation certification

Up to last year, the Forest Stewardship Council had certified 8.6 million hectares of industrial tree plantations despite ample evidence regarding the social and environmental unsustainability of large scale monoculture tree plantations.

Aware that the FSC-seal might serve mostly for corporate greenwashing, one by one NGOs have been withdrawing from the international certification organization, which has increasingly lost credibility regarding this issue.

Now it has been the German environmental organization Robin Wood which left FSC International after having been a member for over twelve years. The reason for this move, as they explain it, "is above all, that industrial monocultures like eucalyptus plantations also receive the FSC-seal." "ROBIN WOOD doesn't feel it is justifiable that huge eucalyptus and pine cultures in countries of the global south like Brazil, South Africa or Uruguay should carry the FSC-seal. The expansion of these plantations often

displaces the local population from its traditional living spaces, which in turn leads to significant social conflicts. Moreover, these monocultures are cultivated with agrochemicals and chemical fertilizer. Therefore they are from the point of view of ROBIN WOOD neither ecologically compatible nor socially just”, states a press release of the organization.

“We no longer want to bear the joint responsibility for the fact that industrial monocultures receive a ‘green fig leaf’ by the FSC”, explains Peter Gerhardt, responsible for tropical forests with ROBIN WOOD.

Source: “ROBIN WOOD leaves FSC-International”, ROBIN WOOD Press Release, Hamburg, 16 March 2009. For further information: Peter Gerhardt, tropical forests, tropenwald@robinwood.de, Rudolf Fenner, wald@robinwood.de

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- New WRM Information tools

WRM has produced four new briefings intended to serve as tools for action. The briefing **“Ethanol from cellulose: A technology that could spell disaster”** refers to the emerging technology that intends to convert the cellulose contained in plants into different types of fuels among which liquid ethanol, that could be used in transport as an alternative to gasoline. The research looks at the actors involved including the pulp and paper industry as well as the main threats: more and intensified deforestation, further expansion of monoculture tree plantations, genetically engineered trees, more power to large corporations leading to larger scale and concentration.

Eucalyptus, oil palm, rubber and jatropha monoculture plantations are expanding onto local communities’ lands and forests in the Mekong region’s countries –Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. **“Regional perspectives on plantations: An overview on the Mekong Basin”** depicts the severe social and environmental impacts of those plantations in a place whose people have seen rivers and forests as places to hunt, fish and gather and the land produces rice, a variety of crops and provides a home to local peoples. Now, eager investors are rushing into the area to exploit their land to make their own wealth to take back home. However, local peoples’ resistance makes its way despite difficult political scenarios.

Timber plantations in southern Africa are concentrated in South Africa and Swaziland and also expanding in Mozambique. **“Regional perspectives on plantations: An overview on Southern Africa”** refers to the monoculture tree plantation industry in the region, dominated by two large South African pulp and paper companies -Mondi and Sappi- and provides a country by country overview of opposition to tree plantations.

Social and environmental impacts of oil palm and rubber plantations in tropical Africa are very similar in many respects including that both take over large areas of land which have hitherto been in the hands of indigenous or peasant populations and have provided for their livelihoods. **“Regional perspectives on plantations: An overview**

on Western and Central Africa” looks into something that differentiates both plantations: while rubber is clearly an alien species brought in by the Colonial powers, oil palm is a native species in many West African countries and part of the culture of local communities. This makes it difficult for local people to understand why this species –when planted on an industrial scale- can result in negative impacts. However, there are many forms of “anonymous”, spontaneous and individual forms of resistance carried out by people living in the vicinity of these plantations.

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Monthly Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement
This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese
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