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OUR VIEWPOINT

- The human right to water

On 28 July, the United Nations General Assembly declared “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.” (1)

This comes as a surprise; not because the resolution was adopted, but because it means that until now access to safe and clean drinking water had NOT been recognized as one of the most basic rights of every single human being!

Having said the above, we of course welcome this declaration, that we consider an important milestone for addressing the problems currently being faced by almost 900 million people worldwide, that do not have access to clean water –and many more that might be facing the same fate in the near future.

We also welcome the fact that the resolution calls upon States and international organizations “to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, **accessible** and **affordable** drinking water and sanitation for all.”

A third reason for welcoming this declaration is because it opens up the doors for a much needed debate on a series of crucial issues, ranging from property over water to measures for ensuring that water remains safe, clean, accessible and affordable.

Regarding property over water, the most obvious issue appears to be that of the incompatibility of water as a basic human right and its appropriation by private companies for making profits. For most people, the struggle is therefore focused against the privatization of drinking water and for its devolution to or maintenance in state-owned companies.

Although we agree with the above, there are other less visible forms of appropriation that we would like to focus on, that are linked with several of our areas of work.

The first issue is that of the major role that forests play in the conservation of the water cycle. When large areas of forests are destroyed through industrial logging or conversion to large-scale agriculture/cattle raising, this impacts on the entire water regime –from changes in rainfall patterns to siltation of water courses- which results in diminished water availability and quality. Forest destruction can therefore be also seen as a means of appropriation -through destruction- of water.

Another hidden means of appropriation of water is that of activities that pollute water resources such as mining, oil exploitation and industrial agriculture. The chemicals used in or released by those activities deprive local communities of their until then safe and clean drinking water. For them, their water has been appropriated by those polluters.

A more direct form of appropriation is that of large-scale fast-growth tree plantations, that consume millions of litres of water on a daily basis, depriving local and downriver users of their water requirements.

The above few examples show that scaling up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water is not only a matter of providing “financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer, through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries” (as expressed in the UN resolution’s article 2). Though necessary, such actions are not sufficient.

In the long run, what matters most is to address the causes of water depletion and pollution and to prioritize water conservation –in quantity and quality- in all economic investments. Which means that any activity that either depletes or pollutes water resources should no longer be acceptable.

Given that the right to safe and clean drinking water has at last been recognized as a

“human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights,” citizens now have the right and governments the obligation to make it come true.

(1) The resolution received 122 votes in favour and zero votes against, while 41 countries abstained from voting. Those that abstained were: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Greece, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, United States, Zambia.

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Central African Republic ratified ILO Convention 169

Last April, the Central African Republic ratified ILO's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples thus becoming the first African country to ratify this convention.

ILO Convention No. 169, adopted in 1989, is a legally binding instrument that attaches specific obligations to governments. Together with the UN declaration on indigenous peoples, it is the main international human rights instrument to deal specifically with the rights of indigenous peoples, and provides wide ranging protection for the rights of indigenous peoples. This convention is based on recognising cultural and ethnic diversity and emphasises principles of consultation and self-government.

In CAR, the ratification of the Convention commits the government to a systematic action to protect the rights of the hunter-gatherer peoples of the tropical rainforests and the nomadic herdsmen Mbororo and to guarantee respect for their integrity as well as establish appropriate and effective mechanisms that enable their consultation and participation regarding matters that concern them.

The indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples of the tropical rainforests, commonly known as “Pygmies” live a seminomadic life in the heart of the forest, inextricably linked to it, covering the 3.8 million hectares of dense forest in the south-west of the CAR (Ombella-M’Poko, Lobaye, Sangha-Mbaéré and Mambere-Kadei).

A thorough field work produced by The Rainforest Foundation UK (1) depicts their life as hunters and their agricultural and livestock rearing activities that provide them food. They hunt with nets, spears, bows and arrows, or through smoking out holes. They practise slash-and-burn - whereby an area of forest is cleared for planting, and the resulting biomass gathered together and burnt - where they grow cassava, bananas, taro, yam, maize, groundnut, palm oil, coffee, and fruit trees such as mango and mandarin.

“The forest is our home (ndima)”; “We are the masters and preserve the forest,” say the indigenous peoples of the CAR’s forests. For them, the notion of individual property does not exist; the forest belongs to all communities.

However, almost all of the 3.8 million hectares of dense forest in the south-west of the country legally belong to the state, which is the sole owner of the land. The state cedes portions of forest and it has allocated them for forestry exploitation, “for a period of time equal to the life of the company”, or to conservation organisations and projects, thus restricting the indigenous peoples’ ability to access large areas of their ancestral lands and resources.

The indigenous peoples generally state, for example, that, “The felling of caterpillar trees and the opening of roads on the part of forestry company workers, which encourages poaching, along with the increasing demand for forest products, all have an impact on the availability of the wild game and products that we gather.”
“Caterpillars are now becoming rare in the same way as game.”

At Bayanga, the indigenous peoples of Mossapoula, living 1 km from the Dsangha-Sangha National Park, stated that they were experiencing difficulties in obtaining supplies of wild meat.

In the context of customary law, which continues to play an important role, the lands on which the indigenous peoples live are often the fallow lands of the Bantu, which causes conflict because fallow land belongs to the person who cleared it (“right of the axe”).

For the indigenous people of CAR who have been long suffering marginalisation from Central African society, the ratification of the ILO Convention 169 may well be a platform from where they can claim the ability to exercise their rights, above all with regard to accessing the land and natural resources on which they depend but also their civic, social and economic rights.

Article based on “The Situation Of The Forest Peoples Of The Central African Republic”, January 2009, The Rainforest Foundation UK, <http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/files/The%20Situation%20of%20Forest%20Peoples%20of%20CAR.pdf>; and “ILO Convention No. 169 ratified by the Central African Republic”, The Rainforest Foundation UK, http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/CAR_ILO_Convention

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- Ecuador: First steps towards leaving the oil under the ground in Yasuni

On 3 August the Ecuadorian Government and the United Nations Development Programme signed the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) Trust Fund agreement. The signing of this financial instrument is the first concrete step towards implementing the project launched 3 years ago which set out to keep 846 million barrels of crude oil under the ground in the Yasuni national park – one of the planet’s most bio-diverse places and home to the Waorani indigenous people and of indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation.

In this way, Ecuador, which bases a major part of its income on the export of crude oil, will avoid the emission of 410 million tons of carbon dioxide in exchange for

international monetary compensation equivalent to a minimum of 50 percent of the benefits it would have obtained in the event it had exploited these oil fields (estimated at some 3,500 million dollars).

UNDP as trustee will be responsible for receiving and managing the funds from the countries participating in this Initiative. It will hand over these funds to the Ecuadorian Government, guaranteeing that they are used for stipulated purposes and that the crude oil remains underground. For Ecuador, this measure is in accordance with the new Constitution, which incorporates the concept of Sumak Kawsai or “the good life” as an economic rationale which, according to Ecuadorian economist and university professor, Pablo Dávalos, “is the possibility of linking human beings with nature from the standpoint of respect because it is a way of restoring ethics to human beings living in harmony, because a new social contract is necessary making it possible to live in unity with diversity, because it is an opportunity to oppose the violence of the system.” (1)

The signing of the Trust-Fund agreement is important because it implies the implementation of the long-drawn out Yasuni project, a strategic initiative with several fronts: it is a national option to obtain funds without further destruction of the Amazon; it is a way to genuinely curb climate change; and it may open the door for the construction of a post-oil, post-extractivist economy.

Although signing the Trust Fund agreement has given visibility to the Initiative and has consolidated positions favourable to it, Alberto Acosta, former president of the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly considers that regarding international contributions, although some European governments have shown some positive signs, a more solid stand by civil society is needed: “The governments of industrialized countries regard the project in the framework of development aid. They do not accept the co-responsibility of their countries being the world’s greatest predators,” he declared during an interview (1).

Furthermore, and regarding Ecuador, Acosta denounced contradictions: “this Initiative cannot be used as a pretext for the government of President Correa to boast that they are already doing a lot for Nature and the lives of the peoples in voluntary isolation, while simultaneously expanding the oil frontier in the southern centre of the Amazon and while encouraging large-scale open cast metal mining.” He warned that the Trust Fund is not enough; the government “should not tolerate oil-related activities in the surroundings of ITT, which includes unrestricted respect for the peoples in voluntary isolation in any area of the Amazon.” Acosta recalled that “oil and mining activities lead to high environmental costs. Costs which, additionally, are never included in profitability calculations made by companies and even by governments. Costs that later, one way or another, are brutally transferred to society.” He pointed out that the government should curb “the other threats that are hanging over Yasuni, such as deforestation and illegal timber extraction, uncontrolled settlements, illegal tourism, and the multi-modal Manta-Manaos axis in the framework of IIRSA, inherited from neoliberal times. The activities taking place in neighbouring oil blocs and in the highways opened up for nearby oil projects will also have to be controlled.”

Other considerations made by Esperanza Martínez, from the Ecuadorian organization Acción Ecológica, aim at “local, national and international actions that are still

pending:

- 1) On a local level, communities must be supported in defence of territories, forests and water; without these communities and their struggles, there never would have been a Yasuni initiative. It is intolerable that they should be repressed or discredited; this is the equivalent of turning the initiative into an orphan.
- 2) The Yasuni Initiative can and must prepare the ground for a post-oil Ecuador. In fact it has made it possible to counter the classical idea of prioritizing exploitation by that of heritage preservation. It is necessary to overcome the measures and policies for more prospecting, more consumption that tie us to the oil model, and even worse when they affect central and southern Amazon. It is necessary to close the wound represented by bloc 31 with minimum amounts of oil and Bloc 16 which is still artificially alive, as the contract should expire in two years time, and Armadillo camp which affects peoples in voluntary isolation.
- 3) Although the Yasuni proposal showed up the shameful carbon trade negotiations promoted by the Kyoto Protocol and inspired other peoples and countries to replicate the initiative of leaving crude oil in the ground and encouraged the discussion on the existence of an ecological debt owed by the North to the South, official positions must be unified as in some cases they are contradictory. In this respect, it is necessary to separate the Yasuni funds from carbon trade funds and REDD projects, which lead to complicity between the contaminators and a loss of local and national sovereignty, or in megaproject investments sustaining the extractivist model.”

However, now is the time for congratulations on progress made. And, as stated by Esperanza Martínez, “it is a time to acknowledge and congratulate those who have worked towards this Initiative: the Waorani indigenous people who have been denouncing the impacts of oil operations on their territories for the past twenty years; the peoples and communities that, with their resistance inspired the Yasuni proposal; the CONAIE leaders who have maintained and promoted the protection of Yasuni; those oil workers who provided valuable technical information and who have supported the Initiative from their positions; the plaintiffs in the court case against Texaco that have enabled us to have information on the impacts of oil-drilling activities; the young people from the Amazonia For Life campaign that have promoted the defence of Yasuni in schools, colleges and neighbourhoods all over the country; the artists, journalists, academics who have kept the Initiative alive. And of course, the State officials and former officials who have promoted action to consolidate the so-called first option for Yasuni.”

(1) “El ‘Sumak Kawsay’ (‘Buen vivir’) y las cesuras del desarrollo”, Pablo Dávalos, ALAI, <http://alainet.org/active/23920>

(2) “Pensando alternativas. Entre la crisis europea y el Yasuni”, Franck Gaudichaud, interview with Alberto Acosta, former president of the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly

<http://www.cadtm.org/Pensando-alternativas-Entre-la>

(2) “¿Qué celebramos con la firma del fideicomiso de la iniciativa Yasuni?”, Esperanza Martínez, Acción Ecológica, <http://www.amazoniaporlavidayla.org/es/>

- India: POSCO mining project halted by people's opposition but forest clearance still stands

The Korean company POSCO arrived to India for business and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Orissa on 22 June 2005. Its projects include a steel plant and a port as well as mining prospection in the Eastern State of Orissa (see WRM Bulletins N° 147 and 155).

The project has been largely opposed by local people who see that they not only won't reap any benefit from the project but will be severely impacted. Resistance started in 2005 in the area where the company intends to set up its steel plant, when a people's blockade was declared in three potentially impacted areas - continuing to date in one of the areas.

Of the 4,004 acres of land sought by POSCO-India Corporation for the proposed steel plant area, about 3,100 are forest land though largely under cultivation by people who have been there for several decades and even have lived in the area for over a century.

It is estimated that the steel plant in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa will displace some 4,000 families, many of whom lack land title; as a result, only 270 odd are officially entitled to compensation.

Leading forest rights movement groups such as the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) and the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) along with many other civil and democratic rights groups and individuals have denounced that POSCO is getting a huge amount of land, water and mineral. Massive land, water and iron ore will be grabbed. The scale of grabbing will be as follows:

- land: 4,000 acres for the plant, 2,000 acres for a "township", 25 acres in Bhubaneshwar for their office, plus an unknown amount in the mining and port areas;
- water: an estimated 120 billion litres from the river Mahanadi, threatening the water supply of the Bhubaneshwar and Cuttack cities;
- iron ore: 600 million tonnes in the form of captive mines [meaning the iron ore will be "sold" to the same company for steel production], and a further 400 million tonnes will be 'allocated'.

All these resources are given to POSCO almost on a platter with no return to either the state or to the people who would face adverse implications if the project is implemented. The arrangements are as follows:

- pay essentially nothing for the water and the land;
- pay a pittance as royalty, allowing huge profits just by the difference between market prices and extraction costs;
- practically no income and other direct taxes, as it is seeking Special Economic Zone status;
- provide 13,000 jobs – by their own estimates, which in the case of all industrial projects have proven to be gross overestimates – while displacing around 40,000 people in the plant and port sites alone (not including the mines). More than 20,000

people will lose employment in the plant site alone.

“In sum, no tax revenue, net loss of employment, no royalties, loss of 15% of India's proven ore reserves, environmental devastation and the forced displacement of 40,000 people.”

No wonder the protest has continued even enduring harsh suppression with violation of human rights leaving a toll of many dozens of injured people and destroyed houses and shops.

On December 29, 2009, the Environment Ministry has anyway gone ahead and granted forest clearance, i.e. the diversion of forest land for non forestry activities. The civil and democratic rights groups have challenged the forest clearance as illegal on the grounds that it violates the Forest Rights Act of 2006 as long as there are people who have not given their consent to the project.

Notwithstanding the illegality of the forest clearance was proven repeatedly by local actors, the lands of a number of people have already been taken over by the Orissa government and demarcation of the land has also begun.

The government claims that it has taken forest lands from "willing sellers" to whom it has paid "compensation cheques". However, takeover of the land has been illegal as long as at least one person returned the cheque and another attempted suicide after his crops were destroyed.

The bold defense of local people of their lands and livelihoods with peaceful demonstrations was confronted by a brutal attack by the Orissa police who opened fire leaving at least 50 people injured and burning markets and protest camps in May 2010.

However, resistance has not been in vain. On August 6, the Environment Ministry issued a "stop work" order to the Orissa government on the POSCO project, directing the Orissa government to stop the illegal process of forest land takeovers that is taking place.

Yet, people on the ground as well as several groups including NFFPFW and CSD have warned that though the order gives some immediate relief, it "is silent on the basic issue: the illegal forest clearance granted by the Ministry on December 29, 2009".

That is why resistance continues and it is demanded the Central and Orissa governments to withdraw the illegal forest clearance, to cancel the POSCO project and to respect the individual and community rights of the forest dwellers of the POSCO area.

The struggle continues.

Article based on the letter sent to the Ministry of Environment and Forest by a range of people and groups and the "Environment Ministry's Order on POSCO", press release by Campaign for Survival and Dignity, e-mail forestcampaignnews@gmail.com, www.forestrightsact.com

- Boom in dam-building for hydropower devastates tribal peoples' lives

To mark the UN Day of Indigenous People, Survival International has released a new report highlighting the devastating impact on tribal people of a massive boom in dam-building for hydropower.

Drawing on examples from Asia, Africa and the Americas, Survival's report "Serious Damage" exposes the untold cost of obtaining 'green' electricity from large hydroelectric dams.

A rapid increase in global dam-building is currently under way. The World Bank alone is pouring \$11bn into 211 hydropower projects worldwide.

The impact on tribal people is profound. One Amazonian tribe, the Enawene Nawe, has learnt that Brazilian authorities plan to build 29 dams on its rivers. Across the Amazon, the territories of five uncontacted tribes will be affected.

The Penan tribe in Sarawak face eviction to make way for a dam, and tribes in Ethiopia could be forced to rely on food aid if a dam being built on the famous Omo River is not halted. One man from the Omo Valley's Kwegu tribe, said, 'Our land has become bad. They closed the water off tight and now we know hunger. Open the dam and let the water flow.'

Hundreds of Brazilian tribespeople will gather this week to speak out about the controversial Belo Monte dam, which threatens several tribes' land and vital food supplies.

Survival International's report can be downloaded at http://assets.survivalinternational.org/documents/373/Serious_Damage_final.pdf

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Indonesia: Giant eucalyptus plantation company destroys Benzoin forest gardens

Kemenyan or locally known *haminjon* is a fragrant resin of benzoin. It has been cultivated and traded from Batak highlands of Indonesia's province of North Sumatra for centuries. Benzoin is produced from benzoin trees (*Styrax benzoin*) and is highly valued as ingredient in incense for burning in rituals ceremonies, for traditional and modern medicinal purposes, perfumery and for fragrant cigarettes.

On Batak highlands, the farmers have been collecting benzoin from natural forest for at least 10 centuries and started planting and growing benzoin trees at least for more than two centuries. The large blocks of hundreds or thousands of hectares of

Benzoin trees extending between the village's open farmlands and natural forests have evolved into complex and biologically-diverse forest gardens. These Benzoin forest gardens are socially defined by bundles of rights and are the foundation of local economy and identity of people in the plateau of the Toba Batak highlands.

However, many foresters, forestry companies and the government elite have systematically ignored this community-based management system. The dominant forestry ideology and economic systems have excluded these farmers from the management of forestland and resources. Instead, they promote logging and the artificial simplification of the ecosystem structure, such as monoculture tree plantations.

Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) Tbk or formerly known as PT. Inti Indorayon Utama (IIU) is the owner of viscose staple fibre (rayon) mill with production capacity about 165,000 tonnes yearly operating in Porsea, near Toba Lake in North Sumatra. In November 2009, this company announced that they were to expand the capacity of eucalyptus pulp production up to 300.000 tonnes per annum in 2011. This company is also expanding its plantation despite the land conflicts and the resistance from local people.

TPL is notoriously known as a troublesome company who is facing fierce resistance from local communities since the mill started operating in late 1980. The resistance from Porsea communities who live surrounding the mill resulted in the closing down of the mill in 1998. However the then President Megawati reopened the mill operation in 2005.

In order to maintain the supply of raw material, TPL is now expanding its eucalyptus plantation. This expansion has destroyed natural forest around the district of Humbang Hasundutan and is now cutting down thousands of hectares of the productive and community-based managed benzoin forest gardens around Pandumaan and Sipituhuta villages to replace them with monoculture eucalyptus.

Since last year communities in Pandumaan and Sipituhuta villages have mobilised and managed to stop the clearing operation near their villages. Since then resistance has sparkled and struggle has arisen from these villages with lots of action and seeking solidarity locally and nationally.

Benzoin trees are grown with many other diverse trees – since the Benzoin tree produces a good resin as long as it is naturally surrounded by other trees and vegetation. These forest gardens have evolved into a delicate system that needs lots of work and preservation. The benzoin farmers are highly skilled in maintaining a balance between high light and low temperature in the micro management of the benzoin trees and the other trees.

Benzoin trees can be tapped after eight years and resin can be extracted for 60 years. As long as benzoin trees are tapped for resin, the trees are carefully managed with a skillful practice developed along centuries with almost no impact to nature. The benzoin farmers have been safeguarding and maintaining these forest gardens for centuries. They have been climate heroes!

Despite the evidence of thousands of benzoin trees which have been felled by TPL, the company denied their action and claimed that they have never destroyed the benzoin trees. A community map made by benzoin farmers shows that more than 5000 ha of benzoin gardens in Pandumaan and Sipituhuta have been clearcut by TPL. TPL also proclaimed that they preserve the benzoin forest gardens, and said that they have planted more than 55,000 benzoin trees. However, the benzoin farmers think that this is a big joke since the monoculture benzoin trees may grow but they will never produce the resin like the one grown in the benzoin forest garden which is maintained by local communities.

By: Longgena Ginting, [WALHI of North Sumatra]. For more information, contact the author at longgenaginting@gmail.com

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- Tree plantations challenged at Climate Change Convention meeting

A new negotiation round on climate change under the UN Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) ended in Bonn on August 6.

The protracted UNFCCC process which is crucial for the future of Humankind has become a very complex scenario full of technicisms and rather difficult to follow by non “experts”. The main danger of such a tangled structure is that it hides vested interests, powerful lobbies, bullying attitudes and unilateral decisions from the more powerful sectors and countries.

The process allegedly advances towards an agreement that should be reached by the end of the year in Cancun containing the guidelines that the world countries would adopt to deal with climate change. Two main tracks of this negotiation processes are:

- the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties [terminology for Northern rich countries mainly responsible for climate change] under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) that deals with the future commitments for industrialized countries, and
- the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) to enable the implementation of the Convention.

Whether we can remember such long names or not, it is important to know that in those areas of negotiation crucial things are being pushed, including the expansion of monoculture tree plantations under the guise of “forests” or under the so-called “Clean Development Mechanism”, namely projects in the South that generate windfalls for major polluters in the North. Another controversial issue is the inclusion of forests in the carbon market under the concept of “reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation”, named REDD, which by no means would be a solution to climate change as long as it allows polluter countries to “offset” their carbon emissions thus evading the responsibility of cutting them at source.

Those negotiations are also considering that under what is called REDD+ large scale tree plantations may well be a form of “enhancement of forest carbon stocks” and so

could receive funding. And, on the top of that, tree plantations are being treated as “forests.”

Though the UNFCCC provides very narrow and restricted space for intervention of social groups, in the last Bonn round some voices managed to raise their challenging views regarding the trend of negotiations.

The UNFCCC Women and Gender Constituency delivered a press release (1) where they upheld the need of a paradigm change which “requires a better understanding of the gender aspects of the issues. This includes an analysis of power relations within societies and institutions at all levels; local, regional and global. An example is the definition of forests that is currently being discussed in the negotiations. The on-going destruction of forests creates CO2 emissions, and mechanisms to avoid deforestation are currently under debate. The way that forests are defined and treated through such mechanisms will affect women and their communities. In a statement read at the closing session, women groups expressed their strong concerns that the current definition of forests includes large-scale monoculture tree plantations that have devastating impacts on women's livelihoods and communities in general. Women and gender organizations reject incentive schemes that reduce ecosystems to their carbon value alone, ignoring the important socio-economic, cultural, spiritual and ecological values of forests, which are of essential importance to women and their communities.”

Also some members of Climate Justice Now!, and members of the women and gender constituency submitted a statement (2) objecting attempts that would allow countries to increase their emissions instead of reducing them. “We would like to reiterate our strong concern in this respect that the forest definition that is currently used for LULUCF [land use, land-use change and forestry activities] includes the good, the bad, and the ugly. That is, it includes real, biologically diverse forests, which are an essential source of livelihood for women and their families, but it also includes monoculture tree plantations, including large-scale monoculture tree plantations that have a devastating impact on women's livelihoods and communities in general. These plantations destroy ecosystems and subsistence agriculture, cause rural unemployment and depopulation, deplete soils and water resources and violate Indigenous Peoples' rights. That is why we insist that the definition of ‘forests’ is revised jointly with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) so as to exclude monoculture tree plantations. Moreover, it should be ensured that forest degradation is fully taken into account in any scheme to conserve forest.”

The strong claim that Tree Plantations Are Not Forests is getting into the UNFCCC corridors.

By Raquel Núñez, World Rainforest Movement, e-mail: raquelnu@wrm.org.uy

(1) “Climate negotiations more effective if guided by long-term vision – this must include social and gender justice,” Women & Gender Constituency @ UNFCCC Press release, Bonn, August 6, 2010, <http://www.gendercc.net/metanavigation/press.html>,

(2) Submitted to the Forest management accounting pre-sessional workshop, Land

use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), Ad Hoc Working Group on Further commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP), http://unfccc.int/meetings/ad_hoc_working_groups/kp/items/4907.php

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- How FAO helps greenwash the timber industry's greenhouse gas emissions

Faced with greenhouse gas emissions at every stage of the production chain, the timber industry has a choice. It could look at reducing emissions. Or it could attempt to greenwash its operations, in effect attempting to evade responsibility. Perhaps not surprisingly, given its record, the industry is opting for the latter.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has long served as an apologist (1) for the timber industry, in particular for the pulp and paper industry and industrial tree plantations. Two years ago, the FAO and the International Council of Forest and Paper Associations (ICFPA) commissioned a study aiming to "raise the industry's profile in international negotiations on global warming". That would be a worthwhile aim if it meant attempting to reduce the emissions caused by the timber industry.

The report was released earlier this year and is titled, "Impact of the global forest industry on atmospheric greenhouse gases." The report does not look at how the timber industry can reduce its emissions. Instead it attempts to spin the timber industry as part of the solution to climate change, rather than part of the problem. "We think [the report] is an important attempt to present the climate profile of modern forest management and industries impartially, based on solid facts and figures," writes FAO's Michael Martin in the introduction. But the report is neither impartial, nor is it based on solid facts and figures.

The author of the report, Reid Miner, works for the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI), which was established more than 60 years ago by the pulp industry. Contributors and reviewers of the report include representatives of ICFPA, the Confederation of European Paper Industries, FAO, the Advisory Committee on Pulp and Wood Products and NCASI.

Perhaps the industry's close involvement would not matter if the report was actually based on "solid facts and figures". But it isn't. A look at Miner's discussion of the emissions caused by industrial tree plantations illustrates the point. (Miner, of course, talks about "planted forests" when he means industrial tree plantations.)

"Few recent data are available for characterizing accurately the types of land converted to planted or assisted semi-natural forest," Miner writes. Given this lack of data, Miner concludes that the "carbon-related impacts" of establishing plantations "cannot be calculated with certainty at the global level." He then "calculates" that the carbon-related impacts of establishing plantations is zero.

Miner's argument is simple. Establishing plantations on non-forested land results in an increase in carbon absorbed, while clearing forest to make way for plantations

results in increased emissions. The 1.6 million hectares a year of plantations established on non-forested land would “approximately offset the losses associated with forest conversion of 1.5 million hectares per year.” This focus on carbon sidelines the social and environmental impacts of converting biodiversity rich grasslands to monocultures, as has happened over vast areas of South Africa. But Miner’s figure for emissions caused by establishing plantations is not based on any facts or figures – solid or otherwise.

Miner’s source is a report that he co-authored in 2007: “The Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Profile of the Global Forest Products Industry.” (Which, coincidentally, sounds remarkably similar to his latest report for FAO.) In 2007 he wrote that “This finding, however, is subject to considerable uncertainty.” It could, in fact, be “several hundred million tonnes of CO2 equivalents above or below this ‘net zero’ finding”. So, Miner’s solid figure is zero... plus or minus several hundred million.

The timber industry uses lots of biomass (otherwise known as waste products) to produce energy in the manufacturing process. Miner explains that “the CO2 released when wood is burned is part of a natural cycle and is offset by growing trees”. According to Miner, and the Kyoto Protocol, biomass therefore results in no emissions. The problem is that burning biomass does result in greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions may be subsequently absorbed by growing trees, but that could take decades. And some biomass does result in huge additional emissions – when plantations are established on peat swamps, for example.

A paper published in *Science* magazine last year argues that this biomass accounting error should be corrected. Needless to say, Miner does not mention this paper in his report for FAO.

All industries have their own organisations to promote their point of view. The various organisations that helped produce Miner’s report fall into this category in the case of the timber industry. But the FAO describes itself as “a knowledge network” to “collect, analyse and disseminate data that aid development”. It is funded by tax payers.

So why is it helping to promote the timber industry’s greenwash?

By Chris Lang

Note: The report "Impact of the global forest industry on atmospheric greenhouse gases" can be downloaded here: <http://bit.ly/dpzVuH>

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CRIMINALISING THE PROTEST

- Climate activists facing trials in Denmark

During the climate summit held in Copenhagen (COP 15) in December 2009, thousands of people from around the world gathered there to challenge the farcical political negotiations at the UNFCCC Bella Center. They demanded just solutions to the climate crises. They demanded climate justice.

The Danish government replied with a massive police repression followed by thousands of preventive arrests, month-long surveillance of telephone and raids of private homes and accommodations.

In August and October, Natasha Verco, Noah Weiss, Stine Gry Jonassen and Tannie Nyboe face trials that can potentially result in years in prison while a prosecution case against the Danish state about the preventive arrests was initiated and will take place on the 23th and 30th of August and the 1st of September.

In solidarity, demonstrations have been organised and everyone is urged to demonstrate support and solidarity with the accused and make the criticism of the ongoing processes visible.

The coming trials are not just about the fact that innocent people might be convicted, but about everybody's fundamental right to demonstrate, protest, take action and organize politically. It is important that we do not sign away these rights, but continue the fight.

In these circumstances, we should remember this well-known poem:

*They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist;
And then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist;
And then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew;
And then . . . they came for me . . . and by that time there was no one left to speak up.*

For more information: The Climate Collective, www.cop15repression.info or www.climatecollective.org; email: cop15repression@climatecollective.org
