WRM BULLETIN

World Rainforest Movement

Issue 122 - September 2007

OUR VIEWPOINT

- Indigenous Peoples on the road to justice

Indigenous Peoples have achieved a major victory at the United Nations level. After more than 20 years of negotiations, on September 13 the United Nations General Assembly finally adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The vote won with an overwhelming majority of 143, and it is important to name –and shame- the governments of the only four countries that voted against: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. These governments, that pretend to be promoting human rights worldwide, have thereby shown that they are unwilling to even acknowledge those of indigenous peoples in their own countries.

Although not a legally-binding instrument, the Declaration constitutes a very important step forward, that sets out the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples –numbering some 370 million people- as well as their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education and other issues.

There are of course major obstacles for the implementation of this instrument and, as UN General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa herself warned “even with this progress, indigenous peoples still face marginalization, extreme poverty and other human rights violations.”

Which brings us to the second victory that we would like to share: that of the indigenous Tupinikim and Guarani peoples against giant pulp producer Aracruz Cellulose in Brazil. For over 40 years, their lands had been in the hands of Aracruz –a Norwegian-Brazilian company- that destroyed their villages, evicted them from their territories, cut down the forest and converted the land to eucalyptus plantations. After decades of struggle, on August 27 the Minister of Justice finally recognized these lands (14,277 hectares) as belonging to the indigenous peoples.

It is important to underscore that Aracruz’s occupation of those lands had been illegal and in violation of the Brazilian Constitution regarding indigenous peoples’ rights to their territories. However, the economic and political power of the company managed for years to make the state ignore this. Only the long struggle of the Tupinikim and Guarani, supported by a large number of organizations in Brazil and abroad finally forced the state to comply with its own legislation.

The details of their struggle are summarized in the articles below, as a means of sharing their experience with the many other peoples fighting for their rights. A the same time, it is useful to highlight -in the context of the recently approved UN Declaration- that even the most legally-binding instrument –the National Constitution- was in this case only adhered to as a result of the peoples’ struggle.

This means that Indigenous Peoples still face enormous challenges to ensure that their rights are fully respected and that governments comply with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But these two victories –one at the international and the other at the local level- prove that victory is possible. It is time for celebrating!

-- Full text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
http://www.bmf.ch/files/news/UN_Declaration_Rights_of_Indigenous_Peoples.pdf --

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BRAZIL: HISTORIC INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ VICTORY

- The Tupinikim and Guarani peoples reconquer their lands

Introduction

On 27 August 2007, Tarso Genro, the Brazilian Minister of Justice, signed the ministerial resolutions delimiting the Tupinikim (14,227 hectares) and Comboios (3,800 hectares) Indigenous Lands, totalizing 18,027 hectares.

According to the resolutions, the Brazilian Government recognizes that the lands have traditionally been occupied by the Tupinikim and Guarani peoples and that, over the past 40 years, they had been illegally occupied by Aracruz Cellulose.

It was a victory of indigenous resistance against the economic and political power of the company and its many allies. A victory of life and a defeat, although localized, of monoculture plantations and the green desert. It was also a victory of national and international solidarity encouraging and filling with hope all those who are struggling for their rights and who believe in the construction of a fairer and more equal society.

Over these past 40 years, neither the successive Governments nor the company were able to break down this

resistance. The use of police force, unlawful agreements and financial compensations could not prevent the communities from continuing their struggle to recover their lands and to guarantee an autonomous territory without the economic dependency that the company has always tried to impose on them.

The resistance struggle

The process of occupation of indigenous lands by Aracruz Cellulose started at the end of the sixties and very quickly caused a profound breaking down of social, economic and cultural forms, particularly in the case of the Tupinikim, almost leading to their extinction. Their lands were immediately expropriated and almost all their villages destroyed (of some 40 villages only Caieiras Velhas, Pau Brasil and Comboios were left). The replacement of native forests by eucalyptus made their traditional subsistence practices unviable. Rivers and streams dried up and the few left were contaminated by agrochemicals used by the company.

Fenced in by the eucalyptus trees and with few alternatives for economic survival the Tupinikim and Guarani decided to act. In 1980, while the military dictatorship was in full swing, they carried out the first self-demarcation of their lands and recovered 6,500 hectares. The following year, an agreement between the military government and the company reduced this area to 4,491 hectares.

In 1993, the indigenous peoples claimed an extension of their lands from FUNAI (the state agency for indigenous issues). Studies by this organization carried out between 1994 and 1997 recognized their rights and the need to extend the land by some 13,579 hectares. However, in 1998 the Brazilian Government yielded once again to the company's interests and agreed to the demarcation of some scant 2,571 hectares.

Rising up against this Governmental decision, the indigenous peoples carried out their second self-demarcation. When they were about to conclude the demarcation of 13,579 hectares, the federal government ordered the Federal Police to intervene. The villages were occupied by the police, the defenders of the indigenous cause were arrested and brought to trial and the indigenous leaders were taken to Brasilia and obliged to sign an unlawful agreement with the company. In exchange for the reduction of their lands they received monetary compensation.

Seven years later, the Tupinikim and Guarani decided to breach this agreement. On 19 February 2005, some 350 indigenous people, gathered in a General Assembly, with the slogan of "Our Land, Our Freedom", resolved to recover the 11,009 hectares in the hands of Aracruz Cellulose.

On 17 May they started their 3rd self-demarcation. A few days later they rebuilt the villages of Olho D´Água and Córrego do Ouro, two of the almost 40 villages destroyed by the company at the end of the sixties.

At the same time, the Federal Public Ministry of Espirito Santo (MPF-ES) launched a public civil investigation, during which various unlawful actions undertaken in the 1998 demarcation came to light. The Ministry immediately sent recommendations to the President of the Republic and to the Ministry of Justice to proceed with demarcation of the remaining 11,009 hectares.

Since then the indigenous people carried out a number of actions to have the Ministry of Justice enforce the MPF-ES recommendations.

In 2005 they occupied Aracruz Cellulose's factories for 2 days. This action was coordinated by the Chiefs' Commission and had wide international repercussions.

In January 2006 the indigenous people were surprised by a violent Federal Police operation, enforcing a legal decision to return ownership to the company. This action, considered to be unlawful by the MPF-ES caused the destruction of the villages of Olho D´Água and Córrego do Ouro, during which 13 indigenous people were injured. One

of the main irregularities noted was the active participation of Aracruz Cellulose, originator of the legal action and consequently benefitting from its enforcement.

The police operation turned out to be a blunder made by the federal government and the company, due to its international repercussions and to the action launched by MPF-ES against the federal government because of the existence of countless irregularities. The federal government quickly attempted to correct its mistake. During a public meeting of the Espirito Santo Legislative Assembly, the then minister of Justice, Marcio Thomaz Bastos, promised to conclude demarcation of the 11,009 hectares before the end of 2006.

However, the administrative process continued at a slow pace. The indigenous people then decided to carry out further actions having a high impact. In September 2006, over a period of 15 days, they slashed and burnt 100 hectares of eucalyptus trees to show that, contrary to accusations, they were not interested in the trees and that the struggle was to recover their lands. The company's reaction was immediate. A defamatory and racist campaign against the indigenous people invaded the streets, the schools and the shops in the city of Aracruz, and even involved other companies in the region. Posters were put up in the main streets of the city publicizing racist and offensive slogans against the indigenous people. Two important demonstrations took place, one in Aracruz and the other in the state capital, Vitoria. An action brought by MPF-ES, and backed by Justice, condemned the company for the crimes of racism and defamation, obliging it to retreat. In spite of this, the campaign had succeeded in putting part of the Aracruz population against the indigenous people.

Weakened but not intimidated, the indigenous people occupied the port from where the company's pulp is exported (Portocel) to step up pressure on the Minister of Justice. However the company managed to mobilize some 1500 company and outsourced workers, removing the indigenous people by force, which almost led to their massacre.

In January 2007 the former Minister of Justice, although he had all the necessary elements to sign the ministerial resolutions for delimitation of indigenous lands, returned the files to FUNAI for this organization to seek an understanding (agreement) between the parties. In turn, FUNAI, refused to do so, but the Federal Justice of the city of Linhares (ES) decided to take on the task and ordered the parties to come to an agreement over the lands. Following two attempts, frustrated by the firm position of the indigenous people, the negotiation process was concluded and the decision on the dispute again sent to the executive.

On 5 July this year, FUNAI sent the proceedings to the Ministry of Justice and on this occasion, the minister, in an act of great steadfastness and political skill, signed the resolutions guaranteeing the Tupinikim and Guarani people the rights over the 11,009 hectares of land, thus putting an end to an almost 40 year old dispute. A few days later the indigenous people had again reconstructed the villages of Olho D´Água and Areal as further proof of their resistance, courage and determination.

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- "... And we are against this progress of death"

-Werá Kwarai

At the celebration of the recognition of indigenous lands, Djagwareté, coordinator of the Commission of Tupinikim y Guaraní Chiefs, emotionally declared, "Two years ago we gathered right here, in the village of Pau Brasil, to celebrate the completion of the self-demarcation of our lands. On that day the people played drums, sang, danced and ate…Today we are here again, in the village of Pau Brasil, eating, dancing, singing and playing drums, this time to

celebrate the Brazilian government's confirmation that the land we have fought for so hard, for more than 30 years, belongs to us in fact and by law."

He added, "The signing of the demarcation resolution by Justice Minister Tarso Genro, confirming that these 11,000 hectares are indigenous land, marks the end of a cycle of 40 years of struggle… Now another battle is beginning, for the recovery of our land taken over by the eucalyptus trees of Aracruz Celulose."

The indigenous people have fought tirelessly to win back the "Land Without Evils", a place of "many animals, much hunting, much water and many forests." They are fully aware, however, that "the fight is not over yet." They will undoubtedly face continued confrontations with the pulp giant Aracruz Celulose, which holds tenaciously to its claim that its monoculture of eucalyptus has benefited indigenous communities by bringing progress to the state where they live.

Guaraní chief Werá Kwarai criticizes this conception of "progress", explaining, "They often call us lazy and inept. They accuse us of obstructing development. We are in favour of the progress of life and against this progress of death… If the company wants to make 'good paper', as it says in its advertising, it cannot continue buying off the judicial, executive and legislative branches of power. You cannot do anything 'good' on the basis of chlorine – which gives the pulp the whiteness demanded by the market. The only way to do good is on the basis of justice and the law."

When the struggle to take back the land began, questions arose over what they would do with the 11,009 hectares being reclaimed. What could be done with land covered with eucalyptus? Over the last two years, in the midst of the land conflict, the indigenous communities have discussed reconversion strategies and exchanged experiences with quilombolas (communities of descendants of African slaves), small farmers and other indigenous groups about how to fight the "green desert". Now they have an answer to the question: "We have many plans for our land, including reforestation and the recovery of springs, but the most fundamental is the rebuilding of a number of villages that used to exist before the arrival of the company… We are going to take our grandparents to see the place that belongs to them, because we are now the third generation of this struggle… Our grandparents fought, they were the first to resist and to remain on their land," declared Vilma, a member of the Tupinikim community and granddaughter of one of those pioneers in the struggle.

The Tupinikim and Guaraní peoples are already rebuilding the villages and have begun to reforest their land with native species, and plan to repopulate the forests with the animals that used to live there. They want to live in harmony with nature, something that has been denied to them up until now by the destruction of their forests and rivers, and by "the pollution of the air and of minds," as some derisively comment.

Tupinikim chief Sezenando stresses that they still need to discuss the "Termo de Ajuste de Conduta" (TAC), an instrument that will make the land demarcation legally binding. This discussion, he says, "will determine the initiation and the conditions of the removal of the wood, since the federal government has declared that it does not have the money to compensate Aracruz Celulose." The indigenous communities do not want to end up once again as those hardest hit by this dispute, because "the natural resources of our territory were destroyed by the company."

Both the Tupinikim and Guaraní recognize that starting over "will not be an easy process, since we, the indigenous peoples, will not be compensated, and we are already suffering from a lack of resources and a lack of specific public policies for indigenous areas."

"We want our land so that we don't have to be dependent on the 'family basket' programme, handouts, or some little job in the city," they stress, while speaking enthusiastically about the prospects for projects in the area. By uniting together, "the communities can revive their traditions on the recovered lands," they believe.

At the same time, they are convinced that this victory "is a symbol of the power of social movements against

transnational companies like Aracruz Celulose, which cause countless negative impacts on local populations," as Tupinikim leader Vilmar declared. And we of the Alert Against the Green Desert Network would add: This victory was a victory of justice, the fruit of the organization and the forceful and persistent struggle of movements, both indigenous and non-indigenous. The indigenous peoples set an example for all of Brazilian society and delivered a message to the big multinationals, showing them that they are not invincible capital. As one of the supporters of their struggle maintained, "We could say that they, the indigenous peoples, are the new civilizers."

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(Testimonials gathered at the victory party held by the indigenous communities on 7 September 2007 in the village of Pau Brasil)

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- Next steps in the indigenous struggle: Territorial reoccupation and reconversion of eucalyptus plantations

Although the struggle for 11,009 hectares of Tupinikim and Guarani land in the hands of the greatest eucalyptus pulp exporter in the world, Aracruz Cellulose, was a major challenge, the reoccupation of this territory and reconversion of eucalyptus in the zone to other land uses is perhaps an even greater one. Over the past 40 years, more than 90% of the area has been occupied and exploited by monoculture eucalyptus plantations, causing degradation of countless streams and rivers, killing the fish and contaminating the scant water left for the indigenous people to drink, bathe and wash their clothes. The tree felling preceding the plantation of the eucalyptus trees destroyed the indigenous peoples' great wealth: the Atlantic forest, with its numerous kinds of wood, medicinal plants, game, fruit, raw material for traditional crafts, among other products.

The conditions for territorial reoccupation depend, in the first place, on the terms of an agreement known as TAC – Document for the Adjustment of Behaviour – that is to be drawn up by the Federal Public Ministry with the participation of the company, the indigenous peoples, the 6th Chamber and the Ministry of Justice. This TAC is aimed at "improvements" in the area, mainly the eucalyptus plantations. The signature of this TAC is important to avoid the company launching legal proceedings – as it constantly threatens – as this could make the conclusion of indigenous land demarcation unfeasible. If the government were to consider that Aracruz planted the eucalyptus trees in good faith, the company would have the lawful right to compensation – although this does not correspond to what happened at the time, as can be vouched for by the indigenous people who were present during Aracruz's invasion of the area. Aracruz has estimated the value of the "improvements" in the area at US$ 53 million. However, for its part the federal government has declared that it does not have the resources to compensate the company, and for this reason suggests that the eucalyptus planted be part of the negotiation. Other improvements and items under negotiation include power transmission cables, a railway branch and part of the hydraulic complex.

The company will surely demand that all the eucalyptus trees be removed from the area, leaving a literally devastated landscape for the Tupinikim and Guarani people, while these want to ensure conditions that will enable them to work in the conquered lands. These conditions will be defined in the final draft of the TAC. Once the TAC is agreed upon, the demarcation process could be concluded. This process also consists of the physical demarcation of the area – placing signs – homologation of the area by the President of the Republic and legal registry of the lands, declaring that they belong to the federal government and that the Tupinikim and Guarani people have the right to their exclusive use.

So far, the Tupinikim and Guarani people have submitted the following proposals to establish territorial reoccupation:

- In the first place the Tupinikim and Guarani people want to rebuild the villages destroyed by the invasion of Aracruz in the area, as was the case twice in the past when they recovered their lands after 2005. Four Guarani families are

already living in the recently rebuilt village of Olho D'Água. The Guarani people are cleaning the areas surrounding the straw-roofed wood and mud houses, built in the middle of the eucalyptus plantation, to start growing foodstuffs. The presence in the area of one of the few springs that survived the environmental disaster of the monoculture eucalyptus plantation has encouraged the Guarani people to start living in this place and restore the old village. Another village that will be lived in shortly is Areal. Certainly other villages will start being populated and thus the indigenous people will be able to recover their traditional occupation of the region – with sufficient villages, each with a few families – thus freeing the existing villages that are suffering from overpopulation problems.

- Secondly, the communities want to reforest part of the area with native trees from the Atlantic forest, giving priority to the banks of rivers and streams, in addition to springs. They know that this work is important to guarantee water and thus life for future generations of the Tupinikim and Guarani people. Since 2005, the communities are discussing proposals for reforestation and a large meeting of the villages was organized under the name of "Replanting our Hopes." A pilot project was launched in 2006 for a nursery to produce native tree saplings in the village of Pau Brasil, guided by a list of over 100 species prepared by the older indigenous people. They are species that have traditionally been used by the indigenous people for crafts, home-made remedies and domestic utensils. This year two reforestations have already taken place, including an area previously planted with eucalyptus trees. From now on the proposal is to encourage this restoration work.

- In the third place, the communities are seeking economic alternatives for the indigenous lands, using different kinds of crops that can generate employment and income. Various proposals are being studied, but no fully defined plan exists as yet. What does exist is an enormous will to ensure the communities' economic autonomy, with a place where the children can live and in the future, work, enjoying the freedom that Aracruz took away from them in the past. A place where, even with all the changes frequently imposed on the indigenous people, the basic elements of their tradition and culture are preserved. In the future, this will enable the Tupinikim and Guarani people to continue developing their way of life.

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WORKING CONDITIONS AND HEALTH IMPACTS ON TREE PLANTATIONS

- Working conditions on tree plantations: A health issue

Very few studies have been undertaken on the health and safety of tree plantation workers around the world. In addition, this sector generally tends to be addressed as part of the larger sector of the forestry industry, which also encompasses logging and wood harvesting activities in natural forests.

Nevertheless, a chapter on the forestry industry in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety includes some noteworthy data that it is well worth presenting here, focussing on information related to the sector we are particularly concerned with.

The ILO recognizes that forestry work, including work on industrial tree plantations, is strenuous and dangerous. Because they work outdoors, workers are exposed to extreme weather conditions: cold, heat, snow, rain and ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Work often continues even in bad weather, and night-time work is becoming increasingly frequent in mechanized operations. Worksites are usually remote and have poor communications, which makes the rescue and evacuation of workers difficult in emergency situations. In many countries it is still common for workers to live for long periods in camps, isolated from their families and friends.

The difficulties are aggravated by the nature of the work, which involves the use of dangerous tools and heavy

physical effort. Bad weather, noise and vibration are common physical risk factors in forestry work in general. Exposure to physical risks largely varies in accordance with the type of work and the equipment used. Other factors like work organization, employment patterns and training also play an important role in increasing or decreasing the hazards involved in forestry work.

Manual forestry work typically implies a heavy physical workload, which in turn leads to a high energy expenditure, depending on the specific task done and the pace at which it is carried out. Forestry workers need to consume a much greater quantity of food than “ordinary” office workers in order to cope with the demands of their jobs.

Different studies have revealed that forestry workers are exposed to high rates of illness in addition to injuries and accidents.

Although few in number and conducted with small numbers of workers, studies of physiological indicators of physical strain (heart rate, haematological parameters, elevated blood enzyme activity) have all concluded that tree planting is an extremely strenuous occupation in terms of both cardiovascular and musculoskeletal strain.

Musculoskeletal and physiological load

Although there is no epidemiological literature that specifically links tree plantation work with musculoskeletal problems, the forceful movements involved in carrying loads, in addition to the range of postures and muscular work involved in the planting cycle, undoubtedly constitute risk factors that are heightened by the repetitive nature of the work.

Repetitive strain injuries continue to be a significant problem. Studies have shown that between 50% and 80% of machine operators suffer from neck or shoulder problems. Comparisons of figures tend to be difficult because injuries develop gradually over long periods of time.

Tree planters also face numerous biomechanical hazards to the upper limbs, including extreme flexing and bending of the wrists – such as when grabbing seedlings from trays – and the sudden impact on hands and arms when the planting tool hits a hidden rock.

Meanwhile, the manual piling of logs involves the repeated lifting of heavy weights. If the proper working technique is not used and the pace is too fast, there is a very high risk of suffering musculoskeletal injuries. Carrying heavy loads over long periods of time, as when harvesting and transporting wood for pulp production, has similar effects. The total weight carried, the frequency of lifting and the physical and repetitive nature of the work are factors that contribute to the muscular strain exerted on the upper limbs.

On the other hand, working with portable machines such as chainsaws may require an even greater energy expenditure than manual work, due to their considerable weight. In fact, the chainsaws used tend to be too large for the task being carried out. Highly specialized motor-manual tasks entail a very high risk of musculoskeletal injuries because the work cycles are short and the specific movements are repeated many times over.

Working in awkward positions can result in problems such as lower back pain. One example of this is the use of an axe to delimb trees that are lying on the ground, which involves working bent over for long periods of time, leading to great strain on the lower back area and static work for the back muscles.

Another potential risk for those who work planting trees is posed by the unloading of trays of seedlings from delivery trucks, since these can weigh between 3 and 4.1 kg each when full. Carrying loads with harnesses can also lead to back pain, especially if the weight is not well distributed on the shoulders and around the waist.

It is also important to point out the muscular load on the lower limbs: walking several kilometres a day carrying loads over irregular terrain, sometimes uphill, can rapidly become exhausting work. In addition, this task implies frequent flexions of the knees and the constant use of the feet. Most tree planters use their feet to clear away detritus with a lateral movement before making a hole, and also to apply weight on the tool's footrest to plunge it into the soil and to compact the soil around the seedling once it has been inserted.

In the case of motor-manual forestry work, workers are also subjected to specific risks due to the machinery they use. Noise represents a problem when working with chainsaws or similar equipment. The noise level of the majority of chainsaws used in normal forestry work is over 100 decibels. Operators are exposed to this noise level for two to five hours a day, which can result in hearing loss.

Continuous work in the outdoors, exposed to the rigours of climate, often without proper protection against the sun (sunglasses, hats and sunblock) and against insects, can result in dehydration, sunburn and heat stroke. Working in a hot climate puts pressure on forest workers who carry out heavy work. Among other effects, the heart rate increases to keep body temperature down. Sweating leads to the loss of body fluids, and heavy work in high temperatures means workers may need to drink a litre of water an hour to maintain the balance of these fluids.

In cold climates, the muscles do not function well, and this increases the risk of suffering musculoskeletal injuries and accidents. Furthermore, energy expenditure increases considerably, since it takes a great deal of energy simply to stay warm.

One of the illnesses specific to this sector is "tree-planter burnout", a disorder provoked by haematological deficiency and characterized by lethargy, weakness and dizziness, similar to the "sport anaemia" developed by athletes in training.

There is a high incidence of premature loss of working capacity and consequently of early retirement among forestry workers. Chainsaw operators and workers who manually load logs are prone to hearing loss and back injuries. A disorder that traditionally affects chainsaw operators is so-called "white finger" disease, a painful condition provoked by the vibration of the saw which can leave them unable to work: the fingers turn white and become numb, making it impossible to carry out more delicate tasks. The disorder can also cause tingling and pain in both arms, especially at night.

On the other hand, the long work days, commuting and strict quality control to which tree planters are subjected, together with the demands posed by piece work (a widespread practice among tree plantation subcontractors) can affect the worker's physiological and psychological equilibrium and result in chronic fatigue and stress.

Accidents and injuries

The setting in which tree plantation work is done makes workers particularly prone to trips and falls. Forestry work can result in injuries to almost every part of the body, but injuries tend to be concentrated in the legs, feet, back and hands, roughly in that order. Cuts and open wounds are the most common type of injury among chainsaw operators, while bruises tend to predominate in other work areas, although there is also the risk of fractures and dislocations as well as injuries associated with forceful movements or caused by cutting scraps or debris.

Ranking of the most frequent tree-planting accidents grouped by body parts affected (percentages based on 122 reports by 48 subjects in Québec, Canada)

Rank	Body part	% total	Related causes

2	Skin	12	Equipment contact, biting and stinging insects, sunburn, cha
3	Eyes	11	Insects, insect repellent, twigs
4	Back	10	Frequent bending, load carrying
4	Feet	10	Soil compaction, blisters
5	Hands	8	Chapping, scratches from contact with soil
6	Legs	7	Falls, contact with tool
7	Wrists	6	Hidden rocks
8	Ankles	4	Trips and falls, hidden obstacles, contact with tool
9	Other	18	

Another study on occupational safety on tree plantations in Nigeria revealed that on average, workers suffered two accidents a year, while in a given year, between one in four and one in ten workers suffered a serious accident.

Two situations which further heighten the already high risk of serious accidents during the harvesting stage on tree plantations are “hung-up” trees and wind-blown timber. Wind-blow tends to produce timber under tension, which requires specially adapted cutting techniques. Hung-up trees are those that have been severed at the stump but do not fall to the ground because their crowns have become entangled with other trees. Hung-up trees are so dangerous that in some countries they are referred to as “widow-makers” due to the large number of deaths they cause. Bringing these trees safely down to the ground requires the use of tools like winches and turning hooks. However, a highly dangerous practice known as “driving” is used in some countries, through which other trees are felled so as to fall onto the hung-up tree and thereby bring it down.

In many countries, manual workers work together with or close to chainsaw or machine operators. Machine operators are seated in cabins or use hearing protection and good protective equipment, but in most cases, manual workers wear no protective gear whatsoever. They also do not maintain a safe distance from the machines, which results in an extremely high risk of accidents and hearing loss for unprotected workers.

The other side of the coin with regard to mechanization is the emerging problem of neck and shoulder strain injuries among machine operators, which can be as incapacitating as serious accidents.

The risk of an accident varies not only in accordance with the technology used and the degree of exposure involved in the job, but with other factors as well. In almost all cases for which data are available, there is a very significant difference between segments of the workforce. Full-time, professional forestry workers directly employed by a forest enterprise are far less affected than those who are self-employed or employed by contractors.

Transportation on highways also accounts for a large number of serious accidents, especially in tropical countries.

Chemical hazards

The trend towards mechanization of forestry work is increasing. During maintenance and repair operations, the hands of machine operators are exposed to lubricants, hydraulic oils and fuel oils, which can cause irritant dermatitis.

The portable machines used in the forestry industry are powered by two-stroke engines, in which lubricating oil is mixed with gasoline. Generally, around 30% of the gasoline consumed by a chainsaw engine is emitted unburned. The main components of exhaust emissions are hydrocarbons, which are typical components of gasoline, as well as additives like organic lead compounds, alcohols and ethers. Some of the exhaust gases are formed during combustion, and the main toxic product among them is carbon monoxide. Fuels also represent a fire hazard.

Forestry workers are also exposed to chemical products like pesticides, insecticides and herbicides. On tree plantations, pesticides are used to control fungi, insects and rodents. Products used include phenoxy herbicides, glyphosate or triazines, as well as insecticides such as organophosphorus compounds, organochlorine compounds or synthetic pyredroids. In nurseries, dithiocarbamates are used regularly to protect softwood seedlings against pine fungus.

The methods used to apply pesticides include aerial spraying, application from tractor-driven equipment, knapsack spraying, ultra low volume (ULV) spraying and the use of sprayers connected to brush saws. The risk of exposure is similar to that in other pesticide applications. The symptoms caused by excessive exposure to pesticides vary greatly depending on the compound applied, but occupational exposure to pesticides most often causes skin disorders. Personal protection equipment tends to be very hot and to cause excessive sweating.

Biological hazards

People who work outdoors, as in the case of tree plantation workers, are exposed to health hazards from animals, plants, bacteria, viruses, etc. to a greater degree than the rest of the population. Allergic reactions to plants and wood products, especially pollen, are very common. There is also the possibility of injuries during processing operations (for example, from thorns, spines, bark) and from secondary infections, which cannot always be avoided and can cause additional complications.

Another potential hazard is being bitten by poisonous snakes, as well as the possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction to the antidote used in such cases.

Social and psychological factors

The health and safety situation in tree plantation work depends on a range of factors such as stand and terrain conditions, infrastructure, climate, technology, work methods, work organization, economic situation, contracting arrangements, worker accommodation, and education and training. But social and psychological factors also have an impact. In the context of forestry work, these factors include job satisfaction and security, the mental workload, susceptibility and response to stress, the capacity to cope with perceived risks, work pressure, overtime and fatigue, the need to endure adverse environmental conditions, social isolation in work camps with separation from families, work organization, and teamwork.

Traditionally, forestry workers have come from rural areas and have felt a sense of identification with the independent, outdoors nature of the work. However, modern forestry operations no longer fit such expectations. Those who are unable to adapt to mechanization, subcontracting and the rapid technological and structural changes in forestry work since the early 1980s are often marginalized. Many new entrants still come ill-prepared to the job.

Social and psychological factors are likely to play a major role in determining the impact of risk and stress. A German study revealed that around 11% of forestry industry accidents were attributed to stress, and another third to fatigue, routine, risk taking and lack of experience.

Forestry workers generally consider risk-taking to be part of their job. Where this tendency is pronounced, risk compensation can undermine efforts to improve work safety. In these situations, workers adjust their behaviour and return to what they perceive as an acceptable level of risk. For example, this may be part of the explanation for the limited effectiveness of personal protective equipment (PPE). Knowing that they are protected by cut-proof trousers and boots, workers go faster, work with the machine closer to their body and take short cuts, thereby violating safety regulations because they “take too long to follow”. Normally, risk compensation seems to be partial. There are probably differences among individuals and groups of workers, and reward factors are probably important to trigger risk compensation. Such rewards could include reduced discomfort (such as when not wearing warm protective

clothing in a hot climate) or financial benefits (such as in piece-rate systems), but social recognition in a “macho” culture is also a conceivable motive.

Among the most common stress factors in the forestry industry are high work speed, repetitive and boring work, heat, an overload or underload of work in unbalanced work crews, young or old workers trying to achieve sufficient earnings on low piece-work rates, isolation from workmates, family and friends, and a lack of privacy in camps.

The transformation of forestry work that has drastically increased productivity has also increased stress levels and reduced overall welfare in the sector.

Two types of workers are especially prone to stress: harvester operators and contractors. Operators of sophisticated harvesters are in a multiple-stress situation, due to the short work cycles, the quantity of information they need to absorb and the large number of quick decisions they need to make. Harvesters are significantly more demanding than more traditional machines like skidders, loaders and forwarders. In addition to machine handling, the operator is usually also responsible for machine maintenance, planning and skid track design as well as bucking, scaling and other quality aspects that are closely monitored by the company and that have a direct impact on pay.

Quite commonly, the operators of these machines are also their owners and work as small contractors, which can lead to added strain. This is particularly due to the financial risk entailed, which can involve loans of up to USD 1 million in a highly volatile and competitive market. Among this group, working weeks often exceed 60 hours.

There are significant differences between the various segments of the forestry workforce in terms of the form of employment, which have a direct impact on workers’ exposure to safety and health hazards. The share of forestry workers directly employed by forestry companies has been declining. More and more work is done through contractors (that is, relatively small, geographically mobile service firms employed for a particular job), which may be owner-operators (either single-person firms or family businesses) or may have a number of employees. Both the contractors and their employees often have very unstable employment. Because contractors are under pressure to cut costs in a very competitive market, they sometimes resort to illegal practices such as moonlighting and hiring undocumented immigrants. Accidents and health complaints tend to be more frequent among workers employed by contractors.

Contract labour has also contributed to increasing the high rate of turnover in the forestry workforce, further exacerbating the lack of qualified workers. The lack of structured training and short periods of experience due to high turnover or seasonal work are decisive factors in the significant health and safety problems facing the forestry sector.

The dominant wage system in forestry continues to be piece-rates (in other words, payment based exclusively on output). This payment system tends to lead to a faster pace of work, which is believed to contribute to increasing the number of accidents. An undeniable side effect is that earnings decrease once workers reach a certain age, because their physical abilities decline.

Wages in the forestry sector are usually much lower than the industrial average in the same country. Employees, the self-employed and contractors often try to compensate for this fact by working 50 or even 60 hours a week, which increases strain on the body and the risk of accidents because of fatigue. Organized labour and trade unions are rather rare in this sector. The traditional problems of organizing geographically dispersed, mobile, sometimes seasonal workers have been compounded by the fragmentation of the workforce into small contractor firms.

Labour inspections are rarely carried out in most countries. In the absence of institutions to protect workers’ rights, forestry workers typically have little knowledge of their rights, including those stipulated in existing health and safety regulations, and therefore face great difficulties in exercising them.

The information presented in this article was extracted from the ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, Fourth Edition, Volume III, Part X, Industries Based On Biological Resources, Forestry.
http://www.ilo.org/encyclopaedia/?d&nd=857200345&prevDoc=857000002

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- Uruguay: The sad situation of tree plantation workers

In Uruguay we have entered the 21st century as witnesses to the transformation of the landscape throughout the length and breadth of the country. Plantations of eucalyptus and pine trees seem to have invaded every type of terrain. This geographical transformation has also had a direct social impact, affecting numerous aspects of life.

The influx of capital invested in forestry operations (primarily foreign-owned) and the immediate establishment of monoculture tree plantations marked the inception of a new pyramid of social and work categories: contractors, sub-contractors and a wide base of plantation workers, who have participated in these enterprises from the first stages of ant eradication and nursery building through to the harvesting of the wood lured by dreams of a better future.

Vacant fields and abandoned farm buildings, storage sheds and vehicles were rapidly transformed into makeshift “rooming houses”. And in areas where there was simply no infrastructure at all, flimsy tents or shelters built from branches and plastic sheeting, easily confused with livestock pens, become the living quarters of the work crews.

For many workers, employment on tree plantations has meant overcrowding, promiscuity and dismal working conditions, the most outstanding and widespread characteristic of an industry that was hailed as promising economic well-being and prosperity for large sectors of the population. At the same time, a series of other factors emerged that have combined to create labour conditions that are far from encouraging: the occurrence of serious work-related accidents, the appearance of diseases associated with poor nutrition and lack of hygiene, low salaries or unpaid wages, and cattle rustling and bitter mate tea as the only means of survival.

The Uruguayan government has failed to implement any plans for monitoring and controlling working conditions in this sector through the pertinent state agency. The justification used for this is that there have been no complaints received from the workers. Nevertheless, the general tone of the policy followed is essentially to intervene as little as possible; this is made clear by the official statistics themselves. Aside from this basic lack of oversight policies, the most obvious obstacle is the complete lack of four-wheel drive vehicles that would make it possible for inspectors to reach the different worksites, a situation that has remained unchanged for several years. The decrease in the number of labour inspections carried out on tree plantations is inversely related to the continuous increase in the area of land planted and the volume of wood harvested.

The subjection to the worst imaginable labour conditions suffered by part of the workforce in the sector has not led to an increase in complaints to the competent authorities. The number of complaints registered has been slight. There are a number of reasons for this. One is the lack of awareness of the labour rights that protect workers as the weakest party in labour relations. Another reason, and perhaps the most important, is the fact that workers are afraid of being identified as the person responsible for lodging a complaint and consequently losing any possibility of finding employment in the future.

Thousands of workers are transported daily from cities and towns like Rivera and Tranqueras to different worksites. Other workers migrate to towns and villages like Perseverano, Castillos, Greco, Punta del Chileno, Aguas Blancas, Villa del Carmen, Piedra Colorada, and many others, in search of employment opportunities regardless of the working conditions entailed. Many of them spend days or even weeks sleeping outdoors or in makeshift shelters hoping that they will be able to work and make enough money to return home.

Paso de La Cruz is a town that abandoned its traditional activities of cattle and citrus fruit farming to devote itself entirely to the tree plantation industry. It is located in the department (province) of Río Negro, a few kilometres from National Highway No. 25.

Rows of houses that stretch along a gravel road are home to a permanent population of approximately 400 residents. The town has several stores, a multi-purpose community hall, a police detachment and a doctor who visits the area on a fairly regular basis. Communication by mobile phone is largely a matter of luck. As you walk down the main street, the chainsaws, hard hats and other equipment you see in almost every front yard very clearly reflect the main activity of the townspeople. During the day, dozens of logging trucks pass through loaded down with timber, while heavy machinery owned by the local government struggles to maintain the only route in and out of town in usable condition.

The forestry companies operating here prohibit work crews from spending the night on their lands. As a result, during the harvesting season, more than 200 workers commute many kilometres to set up their camps in town. Some manage to rent abandoned houses, but the majority are forced to bunk down in open fields, vacant lots or along the roadside. During the night, the fires that workers build to sit around and share mate tea are the only form of street lighting.

While some of the local residents interviewed highlighted the positive aspect of the fact that there is no unemployment in the town, they did not hide their discomfort and concern over such problems as alcoholism, prostitution, cattle rustling, broken promises with regard to salaries, and the payment of wages with vouchers that can only be redeemed in certain stores. The local police detachment is overwhelmed by the high demand for police intervention and the complexity of the social problems that have developed. Troubled by the situation that is emerging in the town, a complaint has been lodged with the departmental government.

There is a great deal that still needs to be done with regard to the social situation. As has been stressed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), it is not enough to create new employment opportunities; what is really needed is the creation of decent jobs.

By the Association of Labour Inspectors of Uruguay (AITU), “For work with rights”. E-mail: inspectoresdetrabajo@adinet.com.uy, http://www.aitu.org/

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- South Africa: Working conditions and the contract labour system in timber plantations

Since the mid 1980's there has been a global trend towards the outsourcing of labour-intensive aspects of the plantation timber production model. In South Africa, the timber industry has openly admitted that its main motive for replacing permanent employment of workers with contract outsourcing was to cut costs. This has resulted in a number of negative consequences for plantation workers and their families: loss of job security, together with all the normal benefits of direct permanent employment -medical assistance schemes, insurance, pensions, housing, education bursaries, and opportunities for in-house training and career development. This has led to considerable disadvantages and economic losses to worker communities, while timber companies have benefited exponentially.

Another reason for the move to contract employment / labour outsourcing was clearly the desire on the timber industry's part to avoid having to deal with any worker union action that could threaten productivity and therefore profitability. Outsourcing jobs under the contract labour system effectively passes responsibility for worker health and safety down to often poorly resourced sub-contractors that cannot afford to provide even basic protective clothing like gloves and face-masks to their workers. The sub-contracting system is usually very poorly monitored by the timber companies, and because main contractors often sub-contract the work to other contractors at a profit, without actually having to get involved in the actual work, it becomes even more difficult to keep track of whether the conditions of

contract in terms of things like training, minimum wages and protective clothing are adhered to.

Even before this transition took place, considerable effort had already been made by the larger timber companies to eliminate or reduce the use of labour in the field through the use of expensive mechanical technology that could replace hundreds of workers with single machines. Using toxic herbicides to control alien plants and weeds in plantation areas was also a cost-effective alternative to manual weeding methods that had previously provided work for many people. In spite of this the plantation industry has stuck to its dubious claims that timber plantations create new employment and uplift rural communities, although this is clearly far from the truth. It is well known that other agricultural activities, even sugarcane growing, provide employment for many more people than timber plantations do. Most job-losses have been experienced when individually owned and managed mixed farming enterprises are replaced with timber plantations, and this loss of jobs is compounded by the reduction in worker wages and benefits that inevitably results.

The prevailing timber plantation model used in South Africa and in many other lesser-developed countries is responsible for a wide range of negative impacts that can contribute to workplace injuries and poor worker health. Harmful impacts often extend beyond the workplace into the homes and communities of workers through linkages that evolved as a part of colonial governance and as an effect of the prevailing corporate 'profit at any price' mentality, where many of the direct costs associated with timber production in plantations are avoided and transferred to worker communities and the environment. The United Nations International Labour Organisation (ILO) has rated forest and timber plantation work as being one of the most dangerous, but in combination with the effects of the poor social conditions caused by the contract labour system used in the timber industry, it becomes even more harmful. Without going into great detail, it can be seen that many damaging effects on ecosystems and people are largely hidden from or ignored by society, with government also seemingly unwilling to remove its blinkers.

The disruption of community life caused by plantations both through displacement and evictions, and particularly worker migration driven by the contract labour system, is responsible for family breakdown; increased alcoholism, drug use and crime. The proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV AIDS, can be linked directly to the demands placed on workers, especially truck drivers, who must of necessity be away from their homes to find work. Overall, timber plantations perpetuate a cycle of poverty that entrenches poor nutrition, inadequate education, and poor health. Displaced families often end up living in slum shack settlements where they become exposed to disease, crime and the constant threat of losing all their possessions to the fires that frequently raze their insubstantial homes.

Women make up a large part of the workforce employed in timber plantations, but their involvement is usually confined to menial physical tasks like weeding, pesticide application, or bark stripping. At the same time these women have to take responsibility for home management, child rearing, and numerous related tasks. In the case of out-grower schemes, especially when the male household head is absent, women must bear the additional burden of responsibility for protecting and managing the woodlot. They often receive little reward as the money from the sale of the wood often goes directly to the man, especially when he is the legal beneficiary of the out-grower agreement with the timber company.

The South African timber industry boasts that its (more than 80%) certification by FSC is proof that these industrial timber plantations are responsibly managed in accordance with the FSC principles, criteria and standards for forest management. Why then is there so little tangible evidence to support these claims? Why too are so many of the problems experienced in South Africa also found in other developing countries where large-scale monoculture timber plantations have been established? Brasil, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, Swaziland, Uganda, India, Indonesia, and Thailand are examples.

The answer to these questions should be plain to see, but unfortunately those who control the propaganda machine of the global pulp and paper industry prefer to keep themselves deluded and in denial. It has been said that if a lie is repeated often enough it will eventually be accepted as the truth and even the liar will start to believe it to be true,

unless it is persistently challenged by the truth. In this case the plantation certification lie is being challenged by more people across the globe every day.

Article based on part of the recent report written for GFC on Agrofuels and certification titled “The Social Impacts of Certified Timber Plantations in South Africa and the Implications Thereof for Agrofuel Crops”.

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- Malaysia: “Cheap” Paraquat at the expense of the workers’ health

An article from Jennifer Mourin, deputy executive director of Pesticide Action Network’s regional office for Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), referred to a situation which is hardly unique in the Malaysian oil palm sector: “Rajam worked as a pesticide sprayer on an estate earning a daily wage of RM18. The main pesticide she sprayed was paraquat [herbicide]. She was not provided any protective clothing such as boots, masks, gloves, goggles or apron.

On 1 April 1998, Rajam was spraying Gramoxone (paraquat) when she slipped and fell. Due to rain the previous night, the ground was wet and slippery. The impact of the fall caused the nozzle of the pump to spray the pesticide directly into her eyes. She immediately felt an intense burning sensation on her face, lips and eyes. Unfortunately, there was no water supply for her to wash her face. She then started to walk back from her work area to the estate clinic, where she arrived more than two hours later. By the time she reached the clinic, her eyes had reddened and swelled drastically. The hospital attendant washed her eyes and asked her to go to the government hospital. They admitted her in the hospital for one week. One year after the incident, she is blind in her left eye. As for the other eye, she stills feels pain and a burning sensation and experiences excessive tearing all the time.”

In August 27, 2002, a ban on paraquat use was put into effect and the Pesticides Board had held firm to the decision despite strong pressure from the industry, including Syngenta, the world’s largest producer of paraquat. According to PAN AP, “Soon after the decision was made public, Syngenta Malaysia Ltd. representatives had made visits to government officials about the ban. Articles then appeared in major papers supporting paraquat as ‘Safe to Use in Agriculture’ and calling for a lifting of the ban and phaseout.”

The Malaysian government decided to temporarily lift the ban on the dangerous paraquat herbicide from 1 Nov 2006 to allow “a comprehensive study on its many uses”. That’s bad news, especially for oil palm plantation workers. As noted by PAN AP, “Paraquat is a ‘mainstay’ within the plantation sector, especially in palm oil production. It is considered by many in the palm oil sector as the ‘cheapest’ form of control for weeds.”

It may be “cheap” for the industry because it is the workers who pay the costs. PAN AP explains that “In Malaysia, paraquat has been a major cause of concern due to continued poisonings suffered by plantation workers —especially pesticides sprayers who are mostly women. Workers on estates are frequently employed as sprayers for six days a week, ten months a year or more, and therefore have a high degree of exposure to the chemical. The greatest risks to workers of fatal and serious incidents are during mixing and loading of spray equipment, where contact with the chemical concentrate occurs. Fatal accidents have also been described due to prolonged contact with the diluted paraquat spray during application.”

The joint report by Berne Declaration, Pesticide Action Network (PAN UK) and PAN AP, “Paraquat – Unacceptable Health Risks for Users”, reveals that “Paraquat is applied before sowing or planting the crop, in pre-emergence application (following planting) and as a defoliant before harvest. On plantations, workers are given virtually no choice about whether or not to use toxic pesticides.”

“Paraquat, together with organophosphates and endosulfan, has accounted for numerous cases of acute poisoning and a number of occupational deaths.”

“Hot and humid weather, low income, lack of knowledge and control over the workplace, put a large proportion of farmers and workers at risk. Even when protective clothing is worn, there may still be unacceptable risk to workers’ health from paraquat. Inadequate working conditions - including insufficient protection of workers - occur on a large scale in many countries, both developing and developed. For most workers it is not possible to use sufficient personal protective equipment - this is not available, too expensive or uncomfortable in hot and humid climates. Even when used it does not always provide sufficient protection. The burden of responsibility cannot therefore be placed on workers, as there is compelling evidence of the high risks to workers’ health from paraquat exposures during everyday use. Workers’ exposure to pesticides is greater where no water is available for washing skin that has been contaminated with pesticides.”

Quoting PAN AP we agree with its view that: “The recent reconsideration of the ban on one of the most dangerous poisons in the world has serious implications on the protection of workers’ and farmers’ health and their right to a safe working environment. The ban, which should have taken effect in July 2005, would have been an exemplary act of caring leadership on the part of the Malaysian government that would have placed the health and well being of thousands of agricultural workers (mostly women) and farmers above other considerations. The government’s current action, however, would seem to imply that in Malaysia the industries’ profits override the health considerations of the people.”

Article based on information from: “Lifting the paraquat ban - in whose interest?”, February 2007, Jennifer Mourin, Pesticide Action Network’s regional office for Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), Aliran, http://www.aliran.com/content/view/197/10/; “Paraquat – Unacceptable Health Risks for Users”, September 2006, Berne Declaration, Pesticide Action Network (PAN UK) and PAN Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), http://www.evb.ch/cm_data/Paraquat_Report_final_rev2.pdf

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GE TREES IN FSC CERTIFICATION

- Clear as mud: FSC's position on GM trees

Three years ago, in response to an article I wrote about the pulp industry's involvement in research into genetically modified (GM) trees, I received an email from the FSC Secretariat in Oaxaca, Mexico.

"I assume you are aware," read the email, "that the only forest certification scheme that has a clear position against GM trees is the FSC scheme, and that this issue is particularly relevant to large plantation companies that have the resources to invest in this kind of research and development."

Without FSC, the email continued, activists opposing the development of GM trees would be "left looking for some other practical way of heading off the use of GM trees."

But does FSC really have "a clear position against GM trees"?

Criterion 6.8 of FSC's Principles and Criteria is clear: "Use of genetically modified organisms shall be prohibited." Strictly interpreted this would mean that a company carrying out laboratory research into GM trees (and/or financing such research) should not be certified under the FSC system, because that would involve the use of genetically modified organisms.

But rather than upholding this clear position on GM trees, FSC's policies and standards weaken Criterion 6.8.

In June 1999, FSC's General Assembly approved a motion to complete an FSC Policy on GMOs. "This policy should address among other things the Precautionary Principle. A draft of such clarification and policy should be submitted to the membership for review and comment within 6 months," the motion stated.

In 2000, FSC duly produced an "Interpretation on GMOs", which states that "The use of GMOs is prohibited in certified forests, and would normally constitute a major failure of Principle 6." But the Interpretation does not exclude GM trees planted by the company outside the area to be certified. And why does the word "normally" appear? Under what circumstances could the use of GMOs not constitute a major failure of Principle 6?

FSC's "Interpretation on GMOs" was approved by FSC's Board in May 2000. Yet the interpretation includes the following statement: "This draft has been prepared by secretariat staff. It does not have official status as an FSC position. . . . Please send your comments to the secretariat."

FSC, it seems, does not have a Policy on GMOs, more than eight years after the general assembly passed a motion in favour of one.

In 2000, FSC produced a "Partial Certification Policy" which explains that FSC has no objection to a certified company planting GM trees, as long as they are not in the plantation area to be certified, and as long as there are not too many of them. I'm not joking. Read this extract from the "Partial Certification Policy":

"For example, a company decides to submit its Unit A for certification assessment. The certifier obtains information indicating that the same company does research regarding genetically modified organisms in another area, Unit B, and that this research covers a limited area of Unit B. In this case, the certifier may determine that, although management of Unit B does not comply with FSC requirements, this lack of compliance does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of commitment on the part of the applicant with the FSC Principles and Criteria, or does not represent a major failure at the level of Principle 1. Nonetheless, if the information obtained were to indicate that the other forestry units of the same company (B, C, etc.) exclusively use genetically modified organisms, the certifier faces a situation which -due to its magnitude and frequency- indicates a clear lack of will on the part of the applicant to comply with FSC Criteria 6.8.

"In this case the certifier must establish whether such lack of commitment represents a major failure at the level of Principle 1, which may have an effect over certification of Unit A."

Meanwhile, FSC's 2004 "Controlled Wood Standard" excludes "wood harvested from genetically modified (GM) trees". According to this, then, it seems that research into and planting of GE trees is allowed provided the wood does not end up in a product carrying the FSC label. But FSC's "controlled wood" relies on company information which is not independently assessed.

I wrote to Andre de Freitas, FSC's Head of Policy and Standards, on 23 August 2007, requesting a clarification of FSC's position on GM trees. De Freitas has not replied to my questions.

So much for FSC's "clear position" on GMOs.

By Chris Lang, http://chrislang.org

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

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