
[Colombia: “Green washed” palm increases threats to food sovereignty and human rights](#)

It seems like a slap in the face. The oil palm agro-industry has chosen precisely 16 October, World Food Sovereignty Day, and the Latin American country most hit by oil palm – Colombia – to hold the first Latin American meeting of the “Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil.”

This is an attempt by palm grower groups – presently on the rise because of the possibility of their oil being used to produce agrofuels – to acquire certification from the Roundtable. They are seeking a “greenwash” that will enable them to overcome the negative publicity received by agrofuels regarding the food crisis and because of their harvest of pain and blood with the terrible violations of the Colombian communities’ human rights.

The Colombian social and environmental organizations’ emphatic rejection of the attempts to expand monoculture oil palm plantations states that, far from solving the climate crisis, they lead to “the land no longer being allocated to food production and therefore creating peoples’ greater food dependency on large multinational corporations. Vast stretches of land are given over to plantations for agrofuel; tropical forests are being cleared to plant thousands of hectares of oil palm, sugar cane and other crops.” “In many cases, palm plantations are expanding over the territories of displaced communities” through repression, death and misery. (see full statement at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Declaration_Social_Organizations_Communities_Regarding_RTSP0.html)

However, it is not only in Colombia that there is proof of the serious negative impacts of monoculture oil palm plantations. Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, Uganda, Côte d’Ivoire, Cambodia, Thailand, Ecuador and other countries can give evidence of what they involve: violation of the right to food and food sovereignty, violation of human rights, illegal appropriation of territories, deforestation of tropical forests, stepping up of climate change, the threat they imply for millions of Indigenous people, conflicts over land tenure, increased use of agrochemicals, just to name a few impacts mentioned in an international declaration promoted by the Network for Alternatives to Market Impunity and Globalization against the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and in support of Colombian organizations (http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/International_Declaration_RTSP0.pdf). The international declaration originated at the Territory and Life Meeting held in Udine, Italy last September, where work was carried out around several issues with the common denominator of the imposition of social and economic models that destroy peoples, deeply affect the environment, convert territories of life into territories of death, torture, the negation of rights and the transformation of human beings into a merchandise. Monoculture oil palm plantations have been denounced as one of the expressions of this ransacking by market interests exploiting ecosystems and natural resources to feed the consumer and social welfare of a very small part of humanity – basically in the North – and to deprive a considerable part of humanity of the minimum conditions of survival.

You are invited to support the International declaration by sending a message with the name and country of the organization to the following e-mail address: unsustainablepalmoil@gmail.com

The declaration denounces that the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil “is an instrument for the expansion of the palm business and not an authentic strategy to contain its negative environmental and social impacts. Many of the member companies of RSPO continue to destroy vast areas of the rainforest and to violate human rights, as in the case of Wilmar International on the Isle of Bugala (Uganda), PT SMART, Agro Group and IOI Group in Indonesia, FEDEPALMA in Colombia, Unilever in Indonesia, Malaysia and Côte d’Ivoire.” At the same time, “the serious crimes, irregularities and paramilitary control related with the palm oil agribusiness” are silenced.

The main argument for rejecting the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil is that the principles and criteria it proposes for the definition of sustainability include large-scale plantations and it is well known that monoculture oil palm plantations “like all agro-industrial monoculture plantations ARE NOT and NEVER can be sustainable.”

What is needed is a change, a radical change in the way of “producing, transforming, marketing and consuming farm products.” For this to be possible it is necessary to halt the industrial production of food contributing to climate change and to the destruction of small rural communities; to end the privatization of natural resources; to dismantle agribusiness companies, financial speculation over raw material and the economic and market policies responsible for the food crisis (and emergency); to replace industrialized agriculture by sustainable peasant and family agriculture, supported by true agrarian reform programmes; to consume less energy and produce solar and wind energy and biogas locally instead of promoting large-scale agrofuels; to implement agricultural and trade policies on local, national and international levels supporting sustainable peasant agriculture and the consumption of local and ecological food. This includes the total abolition of subventions that lead to unfair competition through subsidized food.

For their part, the Colombian organizations are demanding “a halt in the expansion of palm plantations and the processing of raw material for agrofuels on the lands of local communities, aimed at supplying markets for unsustainable consumption, at the expense of sacrificing our heritage and territories.” They ask, in exchange “for a rural policy enabling local communities to remain in their territories and strengthen their traditional ways of production and food sovereignty.” For this to be possible it is necessary to “recognize and respect the rights of the local communities over their territories and heritage and give reparation to the country’s victims of the oil palm agro-industrial model.”

At the moment of publishing this bulletin we receive the sad news of yet another victim: on October 14, a communal leader from the Curvarado area, WALBERTO HOYOS RIVAS, was shot dead by the paramilitary who serve agroindustry interests encroaching on communal lands for the expansion of oil palm plantations in the area.

By Raquel Nuñez, WRM, e-mail: raquelnu@wrm.org.uy, based on both declarations.