
Honduras: The reasons for defending the forest

In Honduras, every year between 80,000 and 120,000 hectares are deforested.

Our forests are multi-diverse: pine forests, with a variety of seven species; broad-leafed forests, with 200 species of trees and rich biodiversity, particularly in the lowlands; broad-leafed cloud forests: pine or mixed forests in the highlands; broad-leafed in dry climatic areas; and mangroves.

Forestry policy in Honduras is not formulated by civil society or by citizen power but by the dictates of multinational capital through the World Bank and the Free Trade Agreements linked with the local oligarchy who, through their representatives in Congress and in other State powers, adopt laws and policies aimed at forest exploitation on the basis of imperial and globalizing capital.

In order to implement these policies they have the military forces that are given the power to “look after” the forest. Is it possible that those who destroy the forest during armed confrontations, by art of magic turn into environmental heroes? Furthermore, the “sicariato” – hired murderers – is a concealed way of aggression towards the indigenous, peasant and garifuna* communities.

In our country, timber exploitation has always been related to corruption, violation of human rights and impunity. The persecution of Father Tamayo and other leaders and the murder on 20 December 2006 of Heraldo Zuñiga and Roger Ivan Cartagena, members of the Olancho Environmentalist Movement by the security apparatus of the State of Honduras, are a reflection of the terror involved in the struggle to defend the forest in Honduras. A recent event is the murder of Mario Guifarro in the community of Parawasito, Municipality of Dulce Nombre de Culmí, in the Patuca Medio, while he was carrying out tasks for the ICADE project for forest demarcation, following the mandate of the Honduran Indigenous Tawahka Federation (FITH).

The governments and most of their technical personnel have always blamed poor people for forest destruction. However, they have never mentioned deforestation caused by mining, shrimp farming, pineapple and banana agro-industries, large sugar-cane plantations, transgenic corn and African oil-palm, (the latter two intended for the new agro-fuel super-business). To these are added accidental forest fires or arson, particularly to justify the exploitations of timber and extensive cattle ranching aimed at beef exports to make hamburgers.

Forestry policies are geared to turn trees into simple merchandise, without considering that, due to deforestation of the river basins and micro-basins, erosion, cave-ins and land slides are on the rise and for this reason the consequences of tropical storms and hurricanes and climatic distortions are more serious and the damage irreparable.

Unfair trade treaties and the immoral and unjust capital rationale promote the promulgation of laws and the application of forestry policies divorced from water and energy policies and from those foreseen regarding climate change. These are the laws that impose privatization of forests, energy, water, education and health. The National Congress shamefully allocates over one third of the national territory to the mining industry which destroys the forest and affects animal, plant and human

health.

The loss of biodiversity due to deforestation and heavy metal pollution caused by mining and pesticides from agro-industries favour dengue, malaria, parasitic and mental disorders which, in addition to producing disease and death, cause multimillionaire losses to the country.

The development of human, comprehensive and planetary policies is an urgent challenge for each and every Honduran. The linking of the forest, health and human rights in an educational programme for young people is an important strategy in the training of leaders to create awareness about deforestation in the country and to set up forest protection laws.

Consequently, at the level of the Mother Earth Movement (a member of Friends of the Earth International) and the organizations Central America is Not for Sale, Oilwatch International and the Honduran Committee Action for Peace (Comité Hondureño Acción Por la Paz - COHAPAZ), we are suggesting that one million trees should be planted and continuously tended in Honduras. Our urgent task is to unite the whole social and environmental movement against predatory policies and companies. Let us incorporate all our awareness to this splendid task in defence of the life, dignity and health of our people!

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*Black-Carib culture