
Brazil: Asking explanations from FSC, Imaflora/Smartwood and Aracruz

On June 1st, 2006, the Seminar on “The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Advance of Agribusiness: issues and challenges” took place in the town of Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil. The Seminar gathered the Tupinikim and Guarani communities and also other communities affected by large-scale monoculture tree plantations, in addition to various sectors of civil society in the State of Espírito Santo, for a thorough reflection on the subject.

They discussed the complete lack of suitability of the present development model which follows the expansion in Brazilian rural areas of large-scale monoculture plantations, such as eucalyptus, pine, soya and sugarcane. The reform of this model is urgent –they claimed- beginning with the financing of productive activities on totally different bases, giving priority to life, to diversity and to the people and communities affected by large-scale monoculture tree plantations, especially women who are those who most suffer from these impacts.

At the meeting, the case of Aracruz Celulose, that tried to get the FSC certificate in 1999 for its eucalyptus plantations in the state of Bahia, was highlighted. At that time a strong and massive mobilization of organizations, communities, movements and citizens prevented Aracruz from succeeding in obtaining the certificate. The company then ‘purchased’ this certificate when, in 2003, it acquired about 40,000 hectares from the Riocell company in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, which had its plantations certified by the FSC in 2001. However, action by the Tupinikim and Guarani before the International Secretariat of the FSC led the company to announce that they had ‘demanded the canceling of the FSC-certificate’ themselves.

Aracruz, though, went unpunished and local communities question how it was possible that for around two years the company succeeded in maintaining in the region where it operates a certificate that demands respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and their lands, while in another region where it is active it violates these same rights.

They now demand “a necessary explanation about what happened on the part of the involved parties:

1. FSC – Why did FSC allow Aracruz to bear the FSC-certificate since 2003 while it was occupying indigenous lands? Why was it that FSC did not act after the indigenous communities self-demarcated their lands in May 2005, and after they were violently evicted from two villages in January 2006, when the Guest House of Aracruz was used as Federal Police Headquarters and as a police station where two Indians were kept prisoners for several hours? Does FSC believe that such a company deserves this certificate for even one day?

2. Aracruz Celulose – if the company is publishing the news that there had never been Indians on their lands, if it affirms, with such conviction that it legally bought its lands in Espírito Santo, including those which are indigenous, why did the company decided to desist from the FSC-certificate?

3. Imaflora/Smartwood – Why is it that Imaflora/Smartwood did not study the Aracruz Celulose

Company when it bought up the Riocell company? Why did it allow Aracruz to hold the certificate for about two years while occupying indigenous lands in Espírito Santo, even though there was much public information about the issue on the Internet?

We expect public explanations from the three actors involved in this issue. And we hope that in future FSC will no longer give permission for the certification of forest management units of companies which violate human rights and/or jeopardize local communities, be these indigenous, quilombolas, fisherfolk or peasant communities. The time has come for FSC to promote good diversified forest management with benefits for all. For this purpose FSC has an excellent opportunity at its disposal with the current international review process on the certification of tree plantations.”

Excerpted from the open letter “The harshness of capital against life --but Aracruz Celulose lost the FSC-certificate!”, issued by the Alert Against The Green Desert Movement”, on 4th July 2006 (at http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Open_Letter_Aracruz.html). For more information on Brazilian’s FSC Review Process, see “Documento para o Grupo Internacional de Revisão dos Princípios e Critérios do FSC para plantações de árvores” (in Portuguese, at http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Carta_Revisao_FSC.pdf)