
Brazil: Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples take back their lands occupied by Aracruz

What is happening in Brazil is a historic event, not only for Brazil, but for all of us who are struggling against the advance of large scale monoculture tree plantations.

In February this year, the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples decided to put an end to the truce (see WRM Bulletin No. 94) with the Aracruz Celulose Company and take back their lands. Thus, in May approximately 500 Tupinikim and Guarani started the self-demarcation of 11,008 hectares of land belonging to them and encroached on by the company. Self-demarcation of the land ended 4 days later and presently the indigenous peoples are demanding recognition of these lands and are mainly carrying out activities for the reconstruction of their means of survival.

Within this framework during the first days of June the Fourth National Meeting of the Red Alerta contra el Desierto Verde (*) (Alert against the Green Desert Network) was held. This Network is struggling against the expansion of monoculture tree plantations in Brazil. Two hundred and fifty people took part in this meeting, among them the Pataxo, Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples, quilombolas** (Afro-Brazilian communities), peasants, rural landless workers, fisher-people, trade-unionists, biologists, geographers, forestry experts, lawyers, artists and NGO representatives from the States of Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Para, in addition to international representatives from Ecuador, Costa Rica and Uruguay.

The meeting started with a demonstration in the streets of Vitoria, the State Capital, where hundreds of people marched in support of the indigenous peoples' struggle, under the slogan of "Federal Government: do not plant eucalyptus, demarcate indigenous lands" ("Governo Federal: não plante eucalipto, demarque as terras indígenas!"). The demonstrators walked over 8 kilometres carrying banners with captions such as: "To Lula's Government: the future of the indigenous peoples is more important than exporting pulp," accompanied by indigenous songs and music. Subsequently, during the two-day meeting the participants exchanged information on the advance of monoculture tree plantations in the various Brazilian states and the resulting impacts and on the situation in other Latin American countries. They also discussed the impact of carbon sinks in the South and certification of tree plantations, the politics of Lula's government and the alternatives to this "development model". The resolutions adopted during this event were summarized in a letter (available on our web site – in Portuguese- at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Jacaraipe.html>) calling for reflection on the serious social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of large-scale monoculture tree plantations.

Among the participants to this Meeting, was an Ecuadorian delegation in representation of the following organizations: the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE - Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador); the Kichua Peoples Nations of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI - Nacionalidades de Los Pueblos Kichua del Ecuador), Acción Ecológica and the Foundation for Ecological Defence (FUNDECOL - Fundación de Defensa Ecológica). Their presence at the event, in addition to expressing their solidarity and support to the indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilian communities and peasant organizations of Brazil in their struggle, was also aimed at

learning and at exchanging information with the local communities on the impacts of tree plantations and how to face them. Large areas of tree monocultures are now being planted in Ecuador and, as in many other countries of the South, they are being supported and promoted by the Government.

The meeting ended with a moving visit to the lands that the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples have taken back. These lands –that up till now had been in the hands of Aracruz Celulose– are planted with eucalyptus. As a first step, demarcation consisted of marking the perimeters of their territory by felling the eucalyptus trees. At the time of our visit they had already opened up the first clearing in the plantation. The location chosen to start the rebuilding of their villages was the Tupinikim's old village of Arariba, from where they were evicted when the company arrived there some 40 years ago. Today, to reach the location you have to walk along paths among monstrous eucalyptus plantations. During our visit the indigenous peoples were starting to build their dwellings, plant foodstuffs and native trees.

The Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples are showing the world that it is not only possible to fight for their rights against such powerful companies as Aracruz, but also that the way to true development is not that of transnational investment aimed at export, but that of local models based on social justice and respect for nature. To them, and to all those who for many years have been supporting this struggle, go our sincere thanks for the message of hope that this historic event means to the world.

(*) The Alert against the Green Desert Network has a website (in Portuguese and in English) with updated information on the Tupinikim and Guarani struggle, among other issues. All those who wish to have more information or see photos of the demarcation process should visit the following web page: <http://www.desertoverde.org>

** Quilombolas (descendents of escaped slaves)