
[Brazil: Open letter of social organisations rejecting the certification of Aracruz Celulose](#)

In an open letter signed by several social organisations and personalities from Brazil, the Rede Alerta contra o Deserto Verde (Alert Against the Green Desert Network) denounces and rejects the certification of the huge plantation company and one of the biggest producers of bleached eucalyptus pulp in the State of Espírito Santo, Aracruz Celulose, through the Brazilian government programme CERFLOR.

The Alert Against the Green Desert Network feels indignation about the CERFLOR process of certification of “forest management” of Aracruz Celulose. Such company owns 146 thousand hectares of land in the State of Espírito Santo, 93 thousand hectares of which are planted with eucalyptus monocultures.

Once again we state that an industrial monoculture, in large scale, may not be certified for being unsustainable. Eucalyptus plantations are “sustainable” only in the opinion of Aracruz, that increases its productivity, at the expense of high consumption and pollution of water resources, death of fish and animals, and many other socio environmental impacts, involving indigenous and quilombola (African slave descendants) communities and small farmers that used to live in the region that has turned to be known as Green Desert. The way of life of such communities has changed only for the benefit of Aracruz, that has ruined the Atlantic Forest, thus destroying the source of a real sustainability for such communities.

We think that CERFLOR does not deserve to be relied upon by the organizations, movements, communities and citizens of the civil society. The civil society has been expressly excluded from the discussion about objectives, principles and criteria of this certification system. At present, we do not even know which are the principles and criteria that the certifying company, BVQI is going to use in this process of certification, and to learn about it, we have to buy the documents referred to the procedure of certification established by CERFLOR, and this makes it non transparent. Apart from that, there are no minimum social or environmental requirements regarding the CERFLOR certificate. It basically makes reference to Brazilian laws.

In the case of Aracruz Celulose, the attempt to certify its areas in the State of Espírito Santo seems even provocative for all those who know closely the behaviour and position of the company's executives towards local communities and their environment, along the last 35 years. We list some examples of conflicts below, some of which are more recent than others:

* Aracruz Celulose continues to occupy around 10,500 hectares of Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous lands in the municipality of Aracruz. These are lands that have already been recognized as indigenous lands by the federal government; however, they were excluded from the last demarcation in 1998. At that time, the federal government itself, pressed by Aracruz Celulose, committed an illegal act when reducing the area of land to be demarcated. Therefore, there remains the question: how can a company that occupies and exploits indigenous lands be certified?

* Aracruz Celulose invaded the lands of quilombolas (African slave descendants) in Northern Espírito Santo, evicting thousands of people and planting eucalyptus. In recent years, 34 quilombola communities are in a process of rearticulation and reorganization to guarantee their recognition, the return and demarcation of their lands, with the support of Fundação Palmares, INCRA (Agrarian Reform Institute) and of the organized civil society. However, CERFLOR intends to grant a certificate to a company that occupies and exploits lands of quilombola communities.

* Furnaces of inhabitants of Vila do Riacho, who used to make coal with the remains of eucalyptus of Aracruz, were destroyed in an action articulated between the Municipal Government of Aracruz, the company, policemen and the “armed militia” of Aracruz: Visel. The remains of eucalyptus –remains of branches and logs- are the only source of income for communities that were deprived of their livelihoods. At present, such company is considered as environmentally sound because it has a machine that crushes such remains so that the organic material is reincorporated to the soil. It would be incredible that Aracruz be awarded an environmental prize for that... Now, how to certify a company that deprives landless families, quilombola and indigenous communities of their only source of income, pushing them into starvation?

* In October this year, Aracruz destroyed four houses of inhabitants in an area of Barra do Riacho, near their industrial complex. This inhuman and criminal act took place in accordance with a preliminary judgment issued by a Judge of the Aracruz municipality. The lawyers of the company claimed that the families were “intruders” in the land of Aracruz. Upon destruction of the houses, it was evidenced in Court that the families had been living in the area for more than 10 years. In a barbaric action, Aracruz destroyed the houses and uprooted all the crops of banana, manioc and pineapple. Pursuant to an appeal, filed by the counsel for the families, the judge considered that she had been deceived by the multinational Aracruz and demanded that Aracruz should rebuild the houses within 10 days. Aracruz still has to indemnify the families for the emotional distress and damages. Is this a company that deserves to receive a certificate of forest management while it continues to commit violent acts against local inhabitants, as well as indigenous and quilombola communities and small farmers along the last 35 years, even with the support of the military dictatorship?

* In Northern Espírito Santo, hundreds of families continue camping and wait for a plot of land, while the major landowner of the State, Aracruz, is able to continue purchasing and leasing lands, at prices above the standards of the market and planting eucalyptus. How to certify a company that hinders even more the agrarian reform?

These are only some examples of the violence applied by Aracruz with the support of governments, against fundamental rights of local communities, rights that are guaranteed to such communities by the Brazilian Constitution and by international agreements about Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights, signed and ratified by Brazil. Examples show that, if CERFLOR takes at least Brazilian laws seriously, Aracruz should never receive such seal.

And lastly, it is not worthwhile to discuss conditions for so much unsustainability. Local communities are tired from the impacts of eucalyptus monocultures. They want alternatives based on the production of food in the land through an ample agrarian reform, they want reforestation with species that improve local environment and offer multiple options of use; indigenous and quilombola communities want their lands back and, above all, they want their most fundamental rights to be respected.

By: Alert Against the Green Desert Network, December 2004, sent by Winfridus Overbeek, FASE –

