
[Brazil: Highway is blocked against expansion of eucalyptus plantations](#)

On 8 March, a major mobilization took place on Route BR-101 North in the Brazilian State of Espírito Santo, in the locality of São Mateus. Coinciding with International Women's Day, and with numerous women participants, close on 600 Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous people, representatives of the Quilombos (Afro-Brazilian communities) and members of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (the well-known MST) and of the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA, a member of the Via Campesina), occupied the highway and halted traffic.

The choice of this highway was not random. Every hour some 39 lorries pass along it, transporting eucalyptus logs to the Aracruz Cellulose company factories, as well as pulp from the Bahia Sul company.

The demonstrators are members of the Alert against the Green Desert Movement, struggling against large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the country. The main objective of this demonstration was to protest against the Federal Government's National Forestry Plan, which shortly intends to extend the area of tree plantations by 2 million more hectares (from the present 5 to 7 million hectares).

One of the companies benefiting from this extension will be Aracruz Cellulose. This company, which was established with Federal Government resources during the military dictatorship, presently has 220,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in the State of Espírito Santo. A large part of these lands belonged to the Quilombo and Indigenous communities and were taken by force by the company, or purchased at prices much below their value. Evicted from their lands, the Afro-descendent and Indigenous peoples joined the belt around the city of San Mateus, and it is calculated that 60 of its surrounding neighbourhoods are basically formed by people evicted from their lands by Aracruz Cellulose. It was also denounced that in the municipality of Conceição da Barra, 47% of the land is devoted to monoculture eucalyptus plantations.

Vast amounts of agro-toxic chemicals are used in eucalyptus plantations that destroy biodiversity and contaminate people, water and soil. It is thus that good agricultural land is lost and not used to produce food but pulp to be exported to Europe and the United States, where it is mainly turned into toilet paper. Those benefiting from this model are a small sector in Brazil and in particular, European industry producing the machinery and technology for the pulp and paper sector.

Last year the company's environmental crimes were denounced before the Federal Government, but so far no measures have been adopted to halt the abuse. For this reason, with the highway demonstration, the participants expressed their protest against the Federal Government and the State Government's omission regarding the complaints, in addition to seeking community support in their struggle for land.

Tens of placards made it clear that the demonstrators want an agrarian reform, the production of healthy food and the devolution of Indigenous and Quilombo lands, today occupied by the mega-company Aracruz Cellulose. Some of the slogans read: "Aracruz Cellulose: invader of Indigenous and Quilombo lands," "MST and MPA are taking action against eucalyptus trees and sugar cane

monoculture plantations.”

The demonstrators announced that if their claims are not addressed, there will be further demonstrations. They consider that this struggle should be the priority of a people’s government and that it is unacceptable that President Lula’s government is giving privileges to the small sector of large-scale eucalyptus plantations and production of pulp for export, with a production chain consuming vast sums of public money but generating very few jobs. For example the construction of Veracel Cellulose’s new pulp mill in the State of Bahia, will cost over 1,000 million dollars and will only generate some 400 permanent jobs. Those who suffer most from this type of “development” are women, who lose their lands and with them, their means of survival.

Article based on information from: “Índios, quilombolas, sem terra e pequenos produtores param carretas da Aracruz e Bahia Sul Celulose em protesto contra a política do Governo Federal de apoio à expansão do plantio de eucalipto”, Vitória, 8 March 2004, statement by MPA, MST, FASE/ES; “Manifestação pára carretas da Aracruz Celulose na BR-101” and “Polícia Rodoviária tenta liberar carretas da Aracruz Celulose na BR-101”, Ubervalter Coimbra e Apoena, seculodiario.com - 08/03/2004, material sent by FASE, e-mail: geise.fase@terra.com.br