
[Brazil: NGOs request wide debate on the expansion of tree plantations](#)

In a letter sent to President Lula on 20 March, numerous institutions warn on possible socio-environmental risks involved in increasing the area of tree plantations recently demanded by the sector, unless appropriate planning is established.

The Working Group on Forests of the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development sent a letter to President Lula on 20 March, stating their concern over the proposal to extend the area of tree plantations in the country, recently submitted to the government by companies in this sector. The document was sent with copy to the Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva and to the Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Rodrigues.

Mainly composed of alien species such as pine and eucalyptus, tree plantations supply, inter alia, the paper and cellulose and building markets. The companies propose increasing the area covered by tree plantations from the present 5 million hectares, to 11 million hectares. Additionally, the sector, presently subordinated to the Ministry of the Environment, is claiming links with the Ministry of Agriculture, through the establishment of a Secretariat for Planted Forests.

In the letter sent to Lula (which is reproduced integrally here below), the NGOs request that the proposal for increasing the sector should be analysed and planned with extreme caution, and that the preparation of a policy for the sector should take into consideration the precepts of effectively sustainable development, later going on to quote the socio-environmental and economic consequences of this activity, particularly for the Mata Atlântica and the Cerrado ecosystems.

For the coordinator of the Working Group on Forests, Adriana Ramos of the Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA), it is necessary to discuss the bases for the expansion of the sector with discernment to prevent undesirable impacts occurring, such as land concentration and hydrological alterations. The Group hopes that the government will establish an agenda for discussions on the issue with the broad participation of civil society.

In a report published on 25 February in the newspaper "Valor Econômico" and reproduced in the Brazilian Association of Renewable Forests (Abracave) site, reference is made to the fact that although the companies know that the sector's proposals are supported by the Vice-President, José de Alencar and the Minister of Agriculture, they are aware that they must demolish the opposition of the Minister of the Environment, who at the beginning of the month had already defended the proposal that sectors such as paper and cellulose and the iron and steel industry will have to modify their form of producing timber from plantations, switching from the plantation of large areas to dispersed plantations, with family agriculture characteristics, guaranteeing sources of employment for small rural farmers.

On 19 March, the request by the Deputy Luis Carlos Heinze (PPB/RS) asking for a joint public audience of the Agriculture and Rural Policy and Consumer Defence, Environment and Minority Commissions of the Chamber of Deputies, was approved at a date to be defined.

Letter from the Working Group on Forests of the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development, addressed to President Lula:

His Excellency, Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil
Brasilia, 20 March 2003

Your Excellency,

The Working Group on Forests of the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development, gathering the country's main non-governmental institutions interested in the subject, met in Brasilia on 12 and 13 March. On this occasion, it agreed to transmit to Your Excellency its disagreement with the "Proposal for an Agenda for the Brazilian Sector of Planted Forests" submitted by the companies of this sector to Your Excellency.

The agenda presents requests that do not take into consideration the need to prepare a specific policy for the sector, linked to environmental, agrarian, credit, generation of employment and income and struggle against hunger policies.

The activities of the "planted forests" sector, fundamentally based on the plantation of alien species such as pine and eucalyptus, have serious consequences on social, economic and environmental dynamics, particularly in the region of the Mata Atlântica and the Cerrado, where most of these monocultures are concentrated in Brazil. Considering that these biomes conserve a scant 7% and 30% respectively of their original cover, the mass expansion of those plantations, from five to eleven million hectares, must be analysed and planned with extreme caution, in the framework of a government policy that is in harmony with the precepts of effectively sustainable development. There is much to be included in the equation of economic benefits and social-environmental liabilities of this activity, as shown, for example, by the many labour-related proceedings involving companies from this sector.

At a time when the Brazilian government, through its National Forestry Programme of the Ministry of the Environment, is carrying out negotiations with the World Bank on a loan for the forestry sector, it is critical to establish a process of discussion of a policy regarding tree plantations.

It would be a great risk for the country to follow up on the demands for "planted forests" without previously defining a government policy for the sector, ensuring that the activity will be carried out in an environmentally sustainable and socially just way, effectively benefiting the local population and guaranteeing the precautionary principle. We emphasize that any policy for the expansion of "planted forests" must avoid increasing the concentration of land, the elimination of native vegetation, hydrological alterations and occupation of food-producing lands. In addition, planning of the activity must be based on technical and scientific information, proven and widely discussed with society.

We are sure that the government of Your Excellency is willing to promote the necessary debate to channel this issue in the best way possible and remain at your disposal to participate in the relevant discussion process.

Yours sincerely,

Grupo de Trabalho Florestas do Fórum Brasileiro de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais para o Meio Ambiente e o Desenvolvimento, Amigos da Terra Amazônia Brasileira, Associação de Preservação do Meio Ambiente do Vale do Itajaí (Apremavi), Central Única dos Trabalhadores

(CUT/RJ), Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas para o Desenvolvimento do Extremo Sul da Bahia (Cepedes), Centro de Trabalhadores da Amazônia CTA / AC, Federação de Órgãos para a Assistência Social e Educacional (FASE), Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica, Fundo Mundial para a Natureza (WWF), Grupo Ambientalista da Bahia (GAMBÁ), Grupo de Trabalho Amazônico (GTA), Instituto de Estudos Sócio-Econômicos (INESC), Instituto de Manejo e Certificação Florestal e Agrícola (Imaflora), Instituto do Homem e do Meio Ambiente da Amazônia (Imazon), Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), Rede de ONGs da Mata Atlântica, Rede Deserto Verde, Os Verdes, Vitae Civilis-Instituto para o Desenvolvimento, Meio Ambiente e Paz.

Cc: Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva, Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Rodrigues

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<http://www.socioambiental.org/website/noticias/noticia.asp?File=Brasil\2003-03-20-18-01.html>