
Nicaragua: transnational logging company files suit against NGO

Last February in the village of Rosita, on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, representatives of the indigenous peoples Sumus and Miskitos, local and regional authorities, NGOs, community and religious leaders, met to consider the illegal activities of the Korean transnational company Kimyung, which operated through the subsidiary SOLCARSA, responsible for invading communal lands and destroying the forests and livelihoods of local people. The meeting approved a declaration demanding the immediate suspension of the concession awarded to the company (see WRM Bulletin nr. 11). The environmental NGO Centro Humboldt, present at the event, was entrusted with evaluating the environmental impact provoked by the activities of SOLCARSA.

In the meantime, a new logging company named PRADA S.A. was formed, including some former SOLCARSA share holders and Nicaraguan businessman Blandon Moreno.

Centro Humboldt considers that operations reinitiated by this new company in August are illegal for the following reasons:

1. That the sentence of the Supreme Court of Justice, that orders the suspension of the SOLCARSA concession --which includes SOLCARSA's plywood plant-- is still in force.
2. That to date the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) has not given a favourable Environmental Impact Document to the plant. For this reason, SOLCARSA was fined by MARENA after completing the construction of the plant without the corresponding Environmental Impact Assessment.
3. That the new company lacks the approval of the Regional Autonomous Council of the Northern Atlantic Coast, a requirement established by the Autonomy Law for any investment in the region.
4. That PRADA S.A. has initiated operations using an environmental permission issued by the Municipal Council of Rosita. However, such resolution is illegal in that local authorities are not legally authorized to grant this permission, since this is a matter for the MARENA.

In light of these considerations, Centro Humboldt asked the MARENA to apply the law and that operations of PRADA S.A. be immediately suspended. The company reacted by filing suit for injuries against Victor Campos, representative of Centro Humboldt. On September 10th, when the accused environmentalist appeared in court for the first time, representatives of environmental and indigenous organizations demonstrated in the streets outside the court, holding placards that read: "No to the destruction of tropical forests, no to the violation of human rights" "In Nicaragua 150,000 hectares of forest are lost annually, by the year 2025 it will all be lost." Passers-by signed a petition in support of the environmentalists.

According to the Forest Network of Nicaragua, the authorities are maintaining an administrative silence and the company has continued to work illegally for over a month. The presentation of an appeal to the suit against Centro Humboldt was rejected by the judge and environmentalists say: "We

do not doubt now how the power of money is working in this case. We have also been victims of slander by the company in paid spots in the press, and by persecution against colleagues of our organization.

The MARENA invited environmental organizations to a meeting and proposed them to complete an environmental audit. However, many environmentalists opposed the idea, considering that it might legitimize the illegal actions of the Korean company. They instead demanded the closure of the company. At the meeting, Centro Humboldt handed over a document with the signatures of solidarity and the messages of support received from all accross the world.

The judge's decission is expected in the next few days. In the meantime, the situation remains still unsolved.

Source: Centro Humboldt, Nicaragua.