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### OUR VIEWPOINT

#### **- Climate change: A gross violation of human rights**

What is elegantly termed as "climate change" is in reality one of the most gross violations of human rights ever committed in history. It is a crime to Humanity as a whole.

People are already dying, or becoming homeless, or suffering from hunger and malnutrition as a result of changes in weather patterns. Entire countries –particularly small island states- are witnessing the impacts of rising sea levels that may make them disappear underwater in few years' time. People living in lowland areas close

to the oceans are facing the same threat. Communities living in mountain areas are witnessing the melting of the ice and snow that ensures their water supply and productive activities throughout the year.

Climate change is not just “happening”; it is the result of a socially unjust and environmentally destructive economic model imposed by a corporate-led minority on the entire planet. Climate change is a crime being committed by an extremely powerful group of corporations in alliance with also very powerful governments that provide them with impunity.

What makes the issue more dramatic is that even if those responsible would agree to immediately adopt the necessary measures to avoid further climate change, the basic human rights of millions of people will continue being violated as a result of the already changed weather patterns. To name but a few:

- The right to food and water: the increased occurrence of catastrophic droughts, floods and extreme temperatures will destroy people’s agricultural production and limit access to sufficient and clean drinking water.
- The right to health: malnourishment, heat waves, extreme cold, new illnesses related to environmental change, will impact on people’s health, in many cases leading to death.
- The right to live in your own homeland: millions of people will be pushed away from their homelands by climate-related impacts, and will become environmental refugees.
- The right to life: the increasing occurrence of catastrophic climate events such as cyclones, hurricanes, tornados and floods will result in millions of deaths.
- The right to peace: desperate situations resulting from climate change will result in civil strife, repression and even war.

Within the many millions of people whose rights will be violated as a result of climate change, most of the suffering will be borne by those who lack the resources to protect themselves against climate-related events. Although the majority of these live in the South, the impacts will disproportionately affect vulnerable groups in every single country of the world.

Instead of changing course to avoid further increasing climate change and its related human suffering, the climate criminals are promoting “solutions” that will violate the rights of many more people while at the same time enabling them to continue business –and climate destruction- as usual. The following examples can illustrate this:

- Promotion of agrofuels as a substitute to fossil fuels. This “solution” implies the appropriation of vast areas of forest and agricultural lands to dedicate them to sugar cane, soya, oil palm, jatropha, eucalyptus and other crops for producing agrodiesel and ethanol to be used as fuels. As a result, a number of human rights are violated, such as the right to food, water, health, medicines, biodiversity, territory, culture.

- Promotion of hydropower as a substitute to fossil fuels. This approach results in the building of large hydroelectric dams that flood extensive areas of forests and agricultural lands and that impact heavily on fish populations. Local people not only lose their means of livelihoods but are also forced to migrate as their lands become submerged under the dams' reservoirs. Thus those rights -to livelihoods and to live in their territories- are violated, together with a larger number of basic human rights.

- Promotion of carbon reservoirs and carbon sinks for trapping carbon dioxide emitted from fossil fuels. This means either the takeover of peoples' forests –defined as carbon reservoirs that need to be preserved- or the appropriation of their lands for planting trees to act as so-called carbon sinks. Needless to say that the result is the violation of a large number of human rights.

Everything expressed above gives only a very partial picture of climate-related violation of human rights. The full picture is far worse and can become even more dramatic if climate criminals are allowed to continue to destroy the Earth's climate. This is not a matter that can be left in the hands of "experts", many of which have been and continue being accomplices of those responsible for the crime.

In this context, women have an important role to play. Although it is true that women are the most affected by climate change, it is equally true that they are also key catalysts for positive change. Their knowledge and experience is fundamental for a successful mitigation of climate change, as well as for climate change adaptation.

What is at stake is nothing less than the right of this and future generations to a livable planet. This very basic human right –on which many other rights depend on- needs to be imposed by organized peoples –women and men- worldwide.

Climate needs to be taken back into peoples' hands before it is too late.

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## CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### **- Colombia: oil-palm plantations, violation of human rights and Afro-descendent communities' quest for true dignity**

When you talk about the violation of human rights, you must talk about Colombia. When you talk about the huge expansion of oil-palm plantations, you must talk about Colombia. Both issues go hand in hand in that country

One of the solutions put forward to face the climate change crisis is the promotion of agrofuels, including oil-palm. This proposal not only does not address the unsustainable production, marketing and consumption models that have landed us in this critical situation but also conceals the fact that the oil palm, far from being a "green" fuel, is a "red" one, tainted with blood.

In 1959 the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó basins in the Colombian Choco biogeographical region were designated as Natural Reserves. However, in 1996 the army and paramilitary forces launched an attack in the area and enabled oil palm growers, cattle ranchers and loggers to expand their agribusiness.

Oil palm plantations and cattle ranching took over 23 thousand hectares of collective territory belonging to Afro-descendent communities. Either through direct actions of the regular army or indirectly through paramilitary strategies, hundreds of crimes were committed: the massacre or forced disappearance of over 140 people, in addition to the ransacking and destruction of property, community members being persecuted, threatened and forced to abandon their land.

Human Rights organizations and families of forcibly disappeared people have provided figures for the whole of Colombia, amounting to more than 4 million people displaced from their lands by armed operations over the past 15 years together with over 15 thousand forced disappearances. Close on 7 million hectares of land have been illegally appropriated by paramilitary forces or drug traffickers over the same period, in most cases after forcing displacement of the inhabitants.

These State and paramilitary terrorist actions are all part of a strategy seeking not only to seize territories, but also to use them to establish destructive commercial processes. In the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó basins, dispossession of land was accompanied by vigorous felling of primary forests in an area covering over 10 thousand hectares, the drying up of five rivers, pollution of water courses from agrochemicals used in the oil palm plantations that also caused severe health problems, particularly in the case of women and children.

Over 120 years ago, the abolition of slavery led to a diaspora to what is known as the Bio Pacific Choco. People settled in tropical forests, places of great beauty hosting an enormous variety of species, plants, birds, butterflies, flowers, wild animals, primary tree vegetation and insects. These places became truly free spaces where the settlers mingled with the indigenous peoples and later with Mestizos. Finally they became a tribal people, recognized as such because their “social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.” (1) They are acknowledged as members of a “Black community” and “Afro-Colombians” or “Afro-descendents.”

This identity embraces issues related with a sense of belonging to the community, which is linked by the river and rooted in an ancestral territory with which they have an almost umbilical relationship: the territory is their mother and father because it nourishes them. They understand it as a comprehensive web, not only involving the land but also the human beings, the social network, the community organization, ways of subsistence, of internal conflict solving, of mobility when facing events that threaten their lives, and their own relationship with biodiversity. Their territory guarantees their customs and ways of living, communal property and environmental protection.

Enforced displacement is therefore a violation of the integrity of these communities' existence and has caused injury in personal, family and collective terms. It has

damaged social and cultural practices, ways of living and of territorial occupation, ways of relating with the earth, animals, water, cooking, organization and their interaction with the outside world.

Though facing innumerable violations of their human rights, even in the midst of an internal armed conflict and the implementation of illegal major works and agribusiness, in the Humanitarian and Biodiversity Zones Afro-descendent communities have developed innovative civil resistance processes.

Humanitarian Zones are places inhabited by a human group affirming their rights as part of the civilian population. These places, specifically intended for the protection of human and collective life as well as of ecosystems, are a means of returning to the territory and of confronting the criminal structure's claims. Humanitarian Zones' members freely share a Life Project to defend themselves from institutional militarization and from becoming victims of potential armed conflicts.

Biodiversity Zones are areas for the protection and rehabilitation of collective or private territory ecosystems and for the assertion of family groups' right to food when their lands have been devastated or are at risk of being destroyed by the agribusiness, major works or exploitation of natural resources.

In these places, the communities practice freedom of expression, democratic discussion involving women and children, and production methods that ensure food sovereignty. They repossess and heal their territories.

While at the Climate Summit all kinds of devices are being contrived – REDD, agrofuels, geo-engineering and others – to put off the real measure that sooner or later will have to be taken: that of halting the extraction of fossil fuels, with the recovery of their territories from the hands of agribusiness and mega-enterprises, these communities are truly contributing to curbing climate change.

At a time of large scale violations of human rights, of ecocide, starting by climate change itself, these criminalized, outcast, stigmatized Colombian communities bear witness to their rights in an autonomous and liberating practice of true dignity.

1. Article 1.1 of ILO Convention 169 and Convention Number 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples: a manual, Project to promote ILO policy on indigenous and tribal peoples. Geneva 2003, page 7.

Extracted and adapted from the reports: "Resiliencias colectivas. Se mata con hambre, se mata con balas, y se quiere matar el alma", (Collective resiliences. They kill by hunger, they kill with bullets and they want to kill the soul." Danilo Rueda, Comisión de Justicia y Paz, <http://tiny.cc/rbqAT>; and "Derechos Humanos y Palma Aceitera Curvaradó y Jiguamiandó" (Human Rights and the Oil Palm Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó). From Ver 236, <http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2006/02/37083.php>

## **- Congo: Tar sands and palm oil projects threaten local communities and undermine efforts to tackle climate change**

The Italian oil company Eni is one of the top ten energy companies in the world and now the biggest in Africa. The company is also currently ranked as the world's most "sustainable" oil and gas company. In September, at the UN Leadership Forum on Climate Change in New York, the head of Eni, Paolo Scaroni announced: "Gone are the days when we could afford to think about oil as a cheap input to economic and social growth, discounting the impact on the environment and on generations to come".

However, Eni's keenness to promote its new sustainability credentials at international meetings sits uneasily alongside the company's plans to spend billions of dollars developing tar sands and oil palm for food and bio-diesel in the central African country of Republic of Congo (also called Congo Brazzaville). Local civil society groups and their partner organizations believe that Eni's investments in tar sands and oil palm are intrinsically high-risk, in terms of their potential to cause social and environmental damage in Congo and globally, given the context in Congo and the experience of such projects elsewhere.

This would be the first tar sands project in Africa and the agro-fuels project, on 70,000 hectares of "unfarmed" land, would also be one of the largest in the continent.

Tar sands have been called the "dirtiest" form of oil. Extraction of tar or bitumen and its processing into synthetic crude is a costly process and extremely intensive in water and energy use. Production of a barrel of oil from bitumen is around 3-5 times more intensive in terms of greenhouse gas emissions than production of a barrel of conventional oil. In Alberta, Canada, the only place where tar sands are currently being developed, it has led to deforestation of Canada's Boreal forest, to water depletion and pollution, and concerns about health impacts on indigenous communities living near the developments, such as increased cancer rates. Canada now has the highest emissions per capita of any G8 country and is being increasingly criticized for blocking action on climate change. Many civil society groups, local residents and scientists are now calling for a moratorium on new tar sands investment in Canada.

Investment in monoculture plantations of oil palm and other crops to produce agro-fuels are another major source of the deforestation that accounts for around 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Targets introduced by national governments and by the European Union have encouraged their expansion. By replacing tropical forests and other ecosystems, monoculture plantations lead to serious deforestation and loss of biodiversity. The land-use changes they entail are also linked to increased food insecurity, and to land conflicts, human rights abuses and threats to indigenous populations.

Congo's ecological sensitivity and its very poor governance heighten the risks of Eni's investments. Forests cover two thirds of the country, which is part of the Congo Basin, and are both a key resource for local people, and a giant carbon sink that plays a vital role in protecting our climate. Yet Congo's own record on environmental and human rights protection and on transparent management of the country's natural

resources is also extremely poor. Despite decades of oil wealth, the country still has very low levels of human development, and high levels of repression and corruption. There is no functioning environmental law and local communities affected by conventional oil production have long complained about inaction by companies and the Government to address its impacts on them and their livelihoods, such as extremely high levels of gas flaring.

Eni has said publicly that none of the investments will take place on rainforest or other areas of high biodiversity, and will not involve resettlement of people. Yet a leaked internal report by Eni shows that the company estimates the tar sands exploration zone as comprising 50-70% primary forest and other highly sensitive areas of the bio-sphere. There is also no clarity as to what technologies Eni would use to extract and process the bitumen, and so it is impossible to predict the project's full impacts on the country's water and energy resources. Similar uncertainties apply to the oil palm project, whose exact location is unknown.

None of the agreements signed between Eni and the Congolese government are publicly available, while research by Congolese human rights organizations has revealed an almost total lack of public awareness of the investments. There has been no meaningful engagement by Eni or by the government with local communities about the projects' potential social and environmental impacts. This contradicts the company's own environmental and human rights policies, and violates the government's duty to protect its citizens.

This investment puts into question both Eni and the Congolese governments' claims to be promoting Congo's sustainable development. The Italian government is Eni's key shareholder and thus also has a responsibility to ensure that any investment by the company takes into account the potential developmental, human rights and environmental impacts. Congolese and international civil society groups are now calling for a halt to the tar sands and palm oil projects and for Eni to overhaul its environmental management processes and its community engagement in Congo.

This project also raises the wider issue of the real costs of pursuing high-carbon energy projects in Southern countries with minimal transparency and environmental and human rights protection. This question becomes even more important given the need to tackle run-away climate change. As oil runs out, there will be increasing interest in developing unconventional oil resources – many of which are located in the South - and in so-called “renewables” such as monoculture agro-fuels. As in the case of Eni's Congo project, such investments should be challenged because of their potential to cause irreversible harm to the local environment and communities, and to our climate.

This article is a summary from Energy Futures? Eni's investments in tar sands and palm oil in the Congo Basin, a report produced by Congolese and international civil society organisations in November 2009, available in English at <http://www.boell.de/ecology/climate-energy-7775.html> or [www.foeeurope.org/corporates/Extractives/Energy\\_Futures\\_eng.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/corporates/Extractives/Energy_Futures_eng.pdf)

## **- Food Sovereignty: A positive approach to climate change**

While the planet is already suffering the effects of climate change, civil society groups try to raise the alarm on the fact that the present system of production, trade and consumption is at the root of the problem.

In order to contribute to the process, the international peasant movement La Via Campesina attended the Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen, coming “from all five corners of the world, leaving our farmland, our animals, our forest, and also our families in the hamlets and villages to join you all.” (1)

They stress that the industrial and agribusiness model of agriculture has caused deforestation and conversion of natural forests into monoculture plantations. They state that the current globalised agricultural system contributes to more than half of the total global greenhouse gas emissions, providing the following figures:

- o (i) Agricultural activities are responsible for 11 to 15%,
- o (ii) Land clearing and deforestation cause an additional 15 to 18%,
- o (iii) Food processing, packing and transportation cause 15 to 20%, and
- o (iv) Decomposition of organic waste causes another 3 to 4%.

However, governments present at Copenhagen are not talking about changing such system. On the contrary, agribusiness corporations have a privileged seat at climate meetings and their proposals have been going into the negotiations as carbon trade mechanisms, like large scale tree plantations in afforestation programs.

“Carbon trade mechanisms will only serve polluting countries and companies, and bring disaster to small farmers and indigenous peoples in developing countries. The REDD initiative (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) has already kicked off their land many indigenous peoples and small farmers in developing countries. And more and more agricultural land is being converted into tree plantations in order to attract carbon credits”, warns La Via Campesina.

They also denounce that “the large emissions of methane by industrial agriculture are also due to the use of urea as a petrochemical fertilizer through the green revolution, very much supported by the World Bank. At the same time, agricultural trade liberalization promoted by free trade agreements (FTA) and by the World Trade Organization (WTO) is contributing to the greenhouse gases emissions due to food processing and food transportation around the world.” In spite of that, FAO continues “selling” the green revolution without being challenged by the UNFCCC.

Industrial agriculture is not only a major contributor to climate change but also violates human rights: “Millions of [farmers] suffer violence every year because of land conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Small farmers and landless farmers make up the majority of the more than 1 billion hungry people in the world. And because of free trade, many small farmers commit suicide in South Asia. So putting an end to industrial agriculture is the only way we can go”, says La Via Campesina.

Governments which are not being able or willing to really tackle the necessary



measures to stop climate change are confronted by landless and small farmers who do have a proposal to climate change which they put forward at COP 13 in Bali 2007, and brought up again at COP 15 in Copenhagen: "small scale sustainable farmers are cooling down the earth". The proposal is backed by figures that prove that "it could reduce more than half of the global greenhouse gas emissions. This figure comes from:

- (I) Recuperating organic matter in the soil would reduce emissions by 20 to 35%.
- (II) Reversing the concentration of meat production in factory farms and reintegrating joint animal and crop production would reduce them by 5 to 9%
- (III) Putting local markets and fresh food back at the center of the food system would reduce a further 10 to 12%.
- (IV) Halting land clearing and deforestation would stop 15 to 18% of emissions. In short, by taking agriculture away from the big agribusiness corporations and putting it back into the hands of small farmers, we can reduce half of the global emissions of greenhouse gases.

This is what we propose, and we call it Food Sovereignty."

Such proposal would not only help to "cool down the earth", but would also contribute strongly to the well-being of millions of human beings whose rights are being violated on a daily basis by corporate industrial agriculture worldwide. And even more importantly, it would also contribute to the right of the present and future generations to live in a liveable planet.

(1) "Why we left our farms to come to Copenhagen", Speech of Henry Saragih, general coordinator of Via Campesina at the opening session of Klimaforum, December 2009, [http://www.viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=833&Itemid=1](http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=833&Itemid=1)

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### **- Indonesia: Plantations, human rights and REDD**

Before the plantations came, villagers in Teluk Kabung in Riau province in Sumatra, grew coconuts. A few years ago, thousands of hectares of forest surrounding the village were clearcut and replaced by acacia monocultures to supply Asia Pulp and Paper's massive operations. "As soon as they cut down the trees in the forest, the pests swarmed in, and ate our coconut trees," a villager told Mitra Taj, a radio journalist from Living on Earth. Dozens of dead coconut trees lie on the ground near the village. Many of those still standing are just trunks, with no palm fronds and no coconuts.

Industrial deforestation has destroyed the habitat of the Sumatran tiger to the point where there are only about 250 remaining. And these have so little forest left that they stray into plantations, villages and logging camps. Tigers that used to live in the forest now come into the village. At least ten people have been killed this year.

“It makes me want to cry,” one of the villagers told Living on Earth. “The only reason I'm not crying is because I'm holding back. We have nothing else. Sometimes I can't even look at this land, because I have no hope.”

Villagers are trying to find a solution and have sent letters to parliament, the regent and the governor, but have received no reply. First, villagers want compensation. Then they want money to buy pesticides. But there's another problem. The plantations have left the villagers with no land for the next generation.

Villagers are now considering growing oil palm, which they hope will be resistant to the pests. They asked Living on Earth's reporter to contact APP and ask them to help them. In Jakarta, Living on Earth met Aida Greenbury, APP's director of sustainability and stakeholder engagement. “Yes of course, we are always interested to help the community,” she said. Greenbury talked about the importance of leaving forest corridors, to provide habitat and to stop pest and disease outbreaks. And that, apparently, was that.

APRIL is the other pulp and paper giant operating in Riau province. Between them, APP and APRIL own about a quarter of the remaining forest in the province. APRIL's activities on the Kampar Peninsular reveal another impact of industrial tree plantations. APRIL's wood is shipped in vast barges to the company's pulp mill, PT Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP).

“Before the RAPP pulp and paper company entered our land, our group of fishermen worked peacefully, nothing disturbed us while we were fishing,” Pak Akiat a fisherman from Penyengat told film makers from LifeMosaic. “Now fishing with nets is very hard. Many of our nets are torn away by ships. Many in our group have stopped fishing, because we are afraid.”

Pak Akiat's fishing net was destroyed about one year ago. “I still want compensation from RAPP, my fishing net is broken,” he said. “I want to fish again. This is my livelihood, my only hope.”

The Kampar Peninsula is home to the Akit and Melayu indigenous peoples. They now have to rely on government food aid. “With so many companies left, right and centre, why are 95 per cent of our people poor?” asks Anjianoro, a community leader in Penyengat, in LifeMosaic's film. “Companies like RAPP recruit thousands of workers. If we benefited from any of this there wouldn't be poverty here.”

A new solution to all these problems is being touted in international meetings such as the recent UN climate negotiations in Copenhagen: Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). “We have been looking for an opportunity like this for decades,” Joe Leitmann at the World Bank in Jakarta told Living on Earth. “We think that with REDD it's a potential game changer.” Of course, Leitmann says nothing about the role the World Bank has played in financing forest destruction in Indonesia.

Certainly, the problems are serious. In Riau province alone, an area of 1.6 million hectares of peat and forests are likely to burn this year. But how, exactly, will REDD, this “game changer”, actually change anything? APP and APRIL hope to get REDD

payments for not cutting forest in areas where they already have permission to cut. No doubt APP will want payment for its “forest corridors”. APRIL plans to plant a ring of 150,000 hectares of acacia plantations around the Kampar Peninsular and put in place a moratorium on clearing the 300,000 hectare “core” on the peninsular. APRIL anticipates large sums of carbon money. But APRIL is silent on local people's livelihoods. The company did not even bother telling local communities on the Kampar Peninsular about its plans.

The people who have lost their livelihoods to industrial tree plantations have some of the smallest carbon footprints in the world. APP and APRIL are responsible for huge greenhouse gas emissions from forest destruction and draining of peat swamps. Yet REDD would reward APP and APRIL and do nothing to stop the trampling of villagers' basic human rights.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

Living on Earth's radio programme “Where the Forest Ends”, is available here:

<http://bit.ly/7hLN0j>

LifeMosaic's film “Eyes on the Kampar Peninsular”, is available here:

<http://bit.ly/5BWH01>

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### **- Kenya: Ogiek's rights violated by climate change and by measures to stop it**

The Mau Complex – the largest forest of Kenya – has been the ancestral home of the Ogiek Community. Although extremely important in terms of water catchment, micro-climate regulation and biological diversity, the Mau forest has been regularly cleared for settlement and private agriculture supported by official policies. Destruction of the forest has undermined Ogiek's rights to livelihood, culture and even a future.

But they still had to suffer more. Some years ago, cancellation by the government of all title deeds issued in the Mau forest aimed at the eviction of more than 100,000 Ogiek people living in the forest (see WRM Bulletins N° 94, 113) under the argument that of all people it was them who destroyed the forest.

The grabbing trend continues. A recent Survival International report (1), exposes how “the world's indigenous people, who have done the least to cause climate change and are most affected by it are now having their rights violated and land devastated in the name of attempts to stop it.”

The report denounces the case of Kenya, a country that this year has suffered severe droughts. While the government tries to evict Ogiek hunter-gatherers, who have lived sustainably in the Mau forest for hundreds of years, it appeals to the international community for funding to save the Mau forest citing climate change as “a key motivation”.

Prime Minister Raila Odinga blamed ‘rampant excess in the global and local mismanagement of our environment’ for the melting of ice caps on Mt Kenya and the

destruction of forests. He also announced that they were willing to 'reverse the ravages' of global warming, for example, with the government's effort to save the Mau Forest –evicting its ancestral inhabitants and guardians, the Ogiek, who will be left homeless!

The report quotes Kiplangat Cheruyot, of the Ogiek People's Development Program saying: "Everyone has been living in fear for the last month... People are crying about the eviction. The government said it would spare no one."

Eventually, the Ogiek, who have proved to live in harmony with the forest for thousands of years, who are the most affected by their forest homeland's destruction and who have not been responsible at all for climate change, will be the one who will suffer most from measures that are allegedly undertaken to stop climate change.

The case of the Ogiek in Kenya is a clear showcase of how climate change and even the measures to stop it are a matter of human rights. Along those lines the demand of Climate Justice stands out as a necessary ingredient of any true measure that deals with climate change.

(1) "The Most Inconvenient Truth of All. Climate change and indigenous people", 2009, Survival International, <http://tiny.cc/4HL7Y>

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### **- Hydropower on the Mekong: Where dams may block the future of millions**

Hydropower is often portrayed as "clean" or "green" energy and as part of the solution for preventing fossil fuel-related climate change. However, government-sponsored and corporate-promoted hydropower implies building huge dams that result in environmental destruction and widespread violation of human rights, ranging from loss of livelihoods to forced evictions and related cases of repression.

The hydropower business is particularly active in the Mekong river basin. Since March 2006, hydropower companies from Thailand, China, Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia and Russia have proposed eleven big hydropower dams for the Mekong River's lower mainstream. Seven of the dam sites are in Laos, two are in Cambodia, and two are on the Thai-Lao border.

There is already wide-spread concern amongst riverbank communities and the general public about the severe consequences these dams will have.

The Mekong River is host to the world's largest inland fishery. The commercial fish catch is currently worth US\$3 billion annually. Not only are these fisheries an important source of income for local fishers, which include many of the region's poorest people, but they are also vital in ensuring regional food security. Between half and four fifths of the animal protein consumed by the 60 million people in the lower Mekong basin come from the river's fisheries.

This situation will dramatically change if these dams are implemented, because

building dams on the river's mainstream will block the major fish migrations that accounts for up to 70% of the commercial catch. Scientific opinion is agreed on the importance of the Mekong's migratory fisheries, the impact of the dams on them, and that there is no way to mitigate these impacts.

In response to the growing public concern about the impacts of these dams, the Save the Mekong coalition was formed. As part of its activities, the coalition collected signatures and personal messages from concerned citizens, which express the people's feelings very clearly:

- "Don't let hydropower dams block our children's future!" Wang Dezhi, Yunnan, China
- "Don't build the Mekong dams. The existing dams in Thailand already make brothers and sisters fight against each other!" Mak Vangdokmai, Roi et, Thailand
- "I love my country. I don't want to see some people destroy my home country for greed. So I would like to do my best to protect our Mekong!" Sneampay, Vientiane, Laos
- "If the dams happen, where will all of us go to live?" Villager, Stung Treng province, Cambodia.
- "Saving us, saving our resources! Electricity is not everything!" Nguyen Thanh Hang, Hanoi, Vietnam

Given the strong government backing for dam building on the Mekong River, over 23,000 people from within the Mekong region and around the world signed a petition addressed to the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, urging them to keep the river flowing freely and to pursue less damaging electricity options. The petition was signed by fishers and farmers living along the river's mainstream and tributaries, as well as by monks, students, city-folk and even some of the region's well-known celebrities.

Within the climate change process, it is important to note that in spite of their well-documented social and environmental impacts, hydropower projects are still eligible for receiving funding from the Climate Change Convention's so-called Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Although none of the Mekong mainstream dams have yet applied for CDM funding, it is possible that they might do so in the near future, following the path of similar projects in the region and globally.

For instance, the Kamchay dam in Cambodia has applied for CDM funding, in spite of the fact that it is located wholly within the Bokor National Park and will flood 2,000 hectares of protected forest. A similar case is that of the Buon Kuop dam in Vietnam, that has impacted on the livelihoods of 11,000 downstream communities in Cambodia who rely on the Srepok River for their fishing and subsistence agriculture.

It is obvious that none of these dams –or those now planned for the Mekong's lower mainstream- can be considered neither "Clean" nor as a means for "Development". This means that they should not be eligible for receiving "Clean Development Mechanism" funding.

The millions of people that would be dramatically affected by the planned hydropower projects –who already have the Mekong River as their clean mechanism for development- are more important than electricity. Dams must not be allowed to

block the future of millions!

Article based on information from Save the Mekong Coalition  
<http://www.savethemekong.org/> and from Carl Middleton (International Rivers),  
[carl@internationalrivers.org](mailto:carl@internationalrivers.org)

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### **- Mexico: Opposition to Blackfire mining operations ends in murder**

A full 41% of the Sierra Madre region in the Mexican state of Chiapas – 227,000 square kilometres of land, equivalent to one half of the whole of Central America – has been turned over to Mexican and foreign corporations through mining concessions. Mining companies from Canada, the United States and Australia extract gold and silver from this mineral-rich region with the consent and protection of governments and the backing of free trade agreements.

Mining companies have expanded their operations throughout the country, invading cooperatively and communally owned lands, subjugating local and state authorities, and violating the rights of indigenous and peasant communities on a daily basis, as well as regulations governing public land, protected natural areas and areas with deep significance in terms of religious traditions and cultural heritage. The environmental, social and cultural consequences of open-pit mining are drastic. The destruction of mountains permanently scars the once majestic landscape, while the basins of the region's most important rivers are severely contaminated.

The high toxicity of metal mining derives not only from the metals themselves, but also the methods used to extract them (see WRM Bulletin N° 71). In the first place, the thousands of kilograms of dynamite used daily to demolish the mountains result in large amounts of ammonium nitrate and diesel fuel dust being spewed into the atmosphere. In the meantime, sodium cyanide, used to "leach" or dissolve metals from the rock containing them, washes into rivers and aquifers, causing fatal diseases like leukaemia and other forms of cancer.

The escalation in mining operations and the resulting environmental impacts has also brought about an escalation in opposition to these activities. In June of 2008, hundreds of individuals representing social, indigenous, peasant, community-based, human rights, education, communications, students' and academic organizations from 12 states throughout the country joined together to form the Mexican Anti-Mining Network (REMA).

REMA works to expose and denounce the consequences of mining: the displacement of millions of tons of soil and rock with heavy machinery; the contamination of springs, rivers and basins with toxic chemicals; and the destruction of farmland and displacement of local communities. Wherever the mining industry goes, it leaves in its wake a devastating legacy of mountains of waste, barren land, contaminated water, disease and desolation.

The militarization of the region, stepped up in the framework of the so-called “Merida Plan” – technically, a security initiative for which the United States released millions of dollars in equipment, computer technology and training in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean to fight drug trafficking and organized crime – has proven highly beneficial to mining companies. Large contingents of hooded and heavily armed soldiers and federal and state police officers who set up roadblocks and force people out of their vehicles for interrogation provide the mining companies with greater freedom to seize land and keep protestors at bay. Ongoing surveillance and control of local communities serve to uncover members of any type of opposition organization.

Against this backdrop, the Canadian mining company Blackfire Exploration, which holds 10 concessions for open-pit barite, gold and antimony mining in the region, has been the target of fierce protests by the inhabitants of the Grecia farming cooperative, who accuse it of polluting the area and illegally seizing land. Numerous members of REMA, including Mariano Abarca Roblero, staged a sit-in at the company’s local headquarters, followed by another in front of the Canadian embassy in Mexico City, to demand the transnational’s withdrawal from the state of Chiapas. Following these protests, Mariano Abarca began receiving threats, until finally, this past 27 November, he was murdered, presumably by a hired killer.

REMA blames this crime on the governor of Chiapas, for failing to take the necessary measures to prevent Abarca’s murder. It also places responsibility on “Blackfire, its general director Artemio Ávila Cervera, its public relations manager Luis Antonio Flores Villatoro, and the government of the state for the acts of violence against those involved in the struggle to defend the water, land, territory and environment.”

REMA further demands, in addition to immediate justice and punishment for those who ordered and carried out Abarca’s murder, the immediate withdrawal of Blackfire and its mining concessions from Chiapas, under the slogan:

“Canada and Canadian transnationals out of Chiapas and Mexico!”

Based on the following sources: Nace la Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería (REMA) <http://www.otrosmundoschiapas.org/analisis/REMA1.pdf>, Asesinaron a Mariano Abarca Roblero, líder opositor contra la minera canadiense Blackfire en Chiapas, <http://rema.codigosur.net>

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### **- Nigeria: Oil-in-soil and much more**

In November 2009, 117 Nigerian organisations signed on to a statement to the government with a challenging message: leave oil in the ground. They expressed they were “united in our opposition to new oil blocs and call on all progressive-minded peoples and organizations to support our call that new oil finds be left in the ground and bitumen left in the soil.”

In the last fifty years Nigeria became the largest producer of crude oil. It has based its economy on oil extraction mainly by foreign big corporations in the Niger Delta. However, the crucial question is: has the country seen any positive impacts from it?

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Environment organised in Rivers State the Second National Consultation on the Environment under the theme “Envisioning a post-Petroleum Nigeria”.

The aim of the event was to stimulate broad-based national discourse on the state of the environment. The urgency of “a wakeup call to all stakeholders in the Nigerian project, to address the devastating effects of crude oil on the economy and environment as well as the central need of planning for a post-oil economy” is quite timely in the current era of climate change.

Civil leaders, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, development experts, members of the academia, legal practitioners, the media and representatives of government agencies gathered to discuss and examine “the growing impact of fossil fuel extraction on the climate and issues around oil as a sustainable economic backbone for Nigeria”.

The conclusions agreed on the fact that the many years of oil extraction in Nigeria “have not impacted positively on the citizenry and particularly the people of the Niger Delta, whose livelihoods have been eroded because of regular pollution of farmlands and rivers.”

An appalling low life expectancy in the Niger Delta – 41 years – is the result of environmental pollution, matched with severe human rights abuse of women, children and other persons who have been made vulnerable due to resource conflicts. The event concluded that “massive land grabs promoted by agribusinesses and oil corporations erode traditional farming practices on the African continent”, thus undermining Nigerian’s Food Sovereignty.

Death, abuse, hunger: that is what you find when you follow the oil’s trail in Nigeria. And more. Corruption goes hand in hand with the oil industry’s operations leading to violent conflicts and criminality. “Nigeria’s oil industry is still rife with oil theft and inaccuracy in volumes of oil extracted and what is actually made public, and makes a nonsense of governments touted policy on transparency and accountability”, says the declaration.

The report “Building a Post Petroleum Nigeria” by ERA stresses that “Throughout 50 years of oil production, this ecologically productive region has suffered extensive habitat degradation, forest clearing, toxic discharges, dredging and filling, and significant alteration by extensive road and pipeline construction from the petroleum industry. Of particular concern in the Niger Delta are the frequent and extensive oil spills that have occurred. Spills are under-reported, but independent estimates are that at least 115,000 barrels (15,000 tons) of oil are spilled into the Delta each year, making the Niger Delta one of the most oil-impacted 2 ecosystems in the world.”

At the top of all of it stands global warming as a result of oil extraction. Continuing gas



flaring in the Niger Delta – an illegal activity with a deadly aftermath of leukaemia, bronchitis, asthma, cancers and other diseases – demonstrates “lack of preparedness to committing to reduce the effects of climate change”, denounced the participants.

As a conclusion of the meeting, participants address the Nigerian Federal government strongly recommending that:

“\* All new oil finds must be left in the ground. The planned exploitation of bitumen should be halted as the extraction will inflict unmitigated disaster on communities and raise new levels of conflicts.

\* The Leave Oil in the Ground message should be popularized.

\* Gas flaring is a violation of the rights of Nigerians to life as is enshrined in the constitution and must end today

\* The Federal Government must take steps to ascertain and publish the volumes of oil extracted daily in the nation. As a follow up to this, it must take immediate steps to stop all forms of oil theft.

\* A need exists for mass awareness and mobilization of local communities to resist gas flaring and other unfriendly environmental practices in the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria where resource conflicts are a growing reality.

\* The authentic Petroleum Industry Bill must address genuine concerns of the oil-bearing communities by seeking their endorsement on environmental management plans. It must also proffer sufficient penalties for infringement of the provisions.

\* Any provision in the Petroleum Industry Bill that is aimed at expropriating land and resources from the people must be abrogated.

\* Political leadership of the Niger Delta must judiciously use the resources of the region for development.

\* The amnesty programme of the Federal Government should address the real issues of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta and open channels for genuine reconciliation of all aggrieved people of the region.

\* The Nigerian state must fund qualitative education and indigenous research to address challenges of development.

\* Women and the vulnerable in the society must be protected from the fallouts of resource conflicts while identified cases of violation of their rights must be adequately redressed.

\* All stakeholders-communities, civil society groups, government agencies, the media, among others, must work collaboratively to expose unsound environmental practices and mobilize for laws that will reverse the trend.”

Oil has become the main source of energy of the present globalised world -at the

expense of climate and human rights. It's high time for the world to look for new paths of energy, development and ways of living together. The Nigerian demand goes in that direction and we feel it should be strongly backed and replicated all over the world as a true basis for a real solution to climate change. No more tricks, no more delays, no more future cuts. Stop extracting oil or else we won't have any future.

Article based on information from: Communiqué issued at the end of the Second National Consultation on the Environment held in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 25 - 26 November 2009m, disseminated by Climate Justice Now!

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### **- Paraguay: Deforestation violates human rights of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation**

The situation of the Ayoreo people of the Chaco region of Paraguay serves as an excellent illustration of the fact that forest conservation is a human rights issue. It also very clearly demonstrates that the protection of forests should be placed in the hands of those who have the greatest stake in their preservation: the indigenous peoples who depend on them for their survival.

Just like back in the days of the Spanish Conquest, it was missionaries who paved the way for the theft and destruction of the forests that had been used sustainably for centuries by the Ayoreo people. In the words of Mateo Sobode Chiquenoi, president of the Union of Ayoreo Natives of Paraguay (UNAP):

“It was the missionaries who made it impossible for us to continue living in our territory. Beginning in the late 1950s, Mennonite missionaries, evangelical missionaries from the United States and Catholic missionaries moved all of the Ayoreo out of the lands where we used to live. It was as if the missionaries used their evangelization to clear the territory that belonged to the Ayoreo people. That made it easy for the cattle ranchers to buy up almost all of our land, and a few powerful white men took over our territory just like that.”

For the Ayoreo, like their indigenous sisters and brothers throughout the Americas, contact with “civilization” resulted in death from diseases to which they had never before been exposed, which meant they had developed no immune defences against them. Mateo Sobode recalls that “when my father went to where the white people were, that was the end of him. Another 85 Ayoreo died of measles along with my father just after the first contact.”

But in addition to “dropping like flies” from contagious diseases after contact, those who managed to survive were faced with the fate of “living without freedom and without respect, living like paupers.”

Perhaps for this reason, a number of groups of Ayoreo people refused to be “civilized” by the missionaries and chose to continue their centuries-old way of life in voluntary isolation.

“There are still Ayoreo who shun all contact with the outside world. They live in the territories where all of us used to live. You white people call them ‘forest dwellers’ or ‘Indians in voluntary isolation’. They have maintained the same way of life that they have always followed, which is our traditional culture. We know that there are at least six uncontacted groups of Ayoreo living in Paraguay,” stated Mateo Sobode.

However, “civilization” continues to advance relentlessly, destroying the forests that lie in its path, whether to clear the land for cattle ranching or to explore for the highly coveted resource of oil.

Viewed from a purely climate change-related perspective, this is an environmental crime. Deforestation implies releasing into the atmosphere all of the carbon dioxide stored in the forest biomass. The introduction of cattle farming means the emission of huge amounts of another greenhouse gas: methane. And of course, if oil is discovered, it will signify a new source of fossil fuel to be burned, further increasing the total amount of carbon dioxide in the biosphere.

But viewed from the wider perspective of human rights, the advance of deforestation implies the violation of the right to life of the last uncontacted members of the Ayoreo ethnic group – who depend entirely on the forest for their physical and cultural survival – and the violation of the land rights of this whole region’s aboriginal peoples.

“These groups are in great danger. Ever larger areas of forest are being cleared for cattle ranching throughout the northern Chaco,” warned Mateo Sobode. Those responsible for this destruction, he said, are “Brazilians, Dutch, Uruguayans, Mennonites and also Paraguayans who are buying up all of our territory, with no consideration whatsoever for our sisters and brothers in the forests.”

Added to this is the destruction caused by oil prospecting. The forests have already been divided into grids for seismic testing, causing drastic alterations for the Ayoreo living in voluntary isolation. Even worse, after completing the first phase of exploration in the region, the UK company CDS Energy announced in May of this year that it had discovered oil and gas reserves in the Paraguayan Chaco. Unless immediate and effective measures are taken, this could result in the total extermination of the remaining uncontacted groups.

As Mateo Sobode rightly maintains, “These groups have the right to legal ownership of the territories where they are living. The right to self-determination of our people in the forests should also be respected. The laws must be enforced as well. For example, it should be prohibited to enter or work in these areas, and to sell the land where they are living, to ensure that they are left in peace. They are not interested in living with any missionaries or white people. All they want is to live in their own habitat, with the gods who are known only to the Ayoreo, and they have the right to decide how they want to live. If they want to come out they will come out, but in the meantime they must not be pressured. They have their way of life in harmony with the forest. The forest, Eami, gives them what they need and protects them, and they take care of the forest. Before the white men came, we Ayoreo lived in our territory without changing the face of our mother, the forest, Eami.”

The measures needed to ensure both the conservation of the forest and the survival of the last Ayoreo who use it sustainably are simple: the enforcement of the laws, regulations and international agreements that protect indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation.

We hope that the Paraguayan government will heed the call of the Ayoreo, who are “calling on the competent authorities to stop allowing the continuation of the human slaughter of our uncontacted sisters and brothers who are living in their own territory and their own culture. We do not want their culture, our culture, to die.”

At the same time, we hope that the governments of Paraguay, the Netherlands, Uruguay, Germany, Brazil and the United Kingdom will take action to stop the criminal activities committed by their corporations – against the indigenous people and against the climate of the entire planet – in the Paraguayan Chaco.

And finally, we also hope that the international community will join in the struggle to demand the respect of the right of these indigenous people in voluntary isolation to “decide how they want to live” and to be able to do so in the forests that belong to them.

Information extracted from: “Paraguay: el caso Ayoreo”. Unión de Nativos Ayoreo de Paraguay, Iniciativa Amotocodie. Informe IWGIA 4 (soon to be translated into English) [http://www.wrm.org.uy/pueblos/El caso Ayoreo.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/pueblos/El_caso_Ayoreo.pdf)

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## PEPPER SPRAYING DEMOCRACY IN COPENHAGEN

### **- Human rights violated by climate change ... and by the UN Climate Change Convention in Copenhagen!**

The UN Climate Change Convention in Copenhagen presents itself to the world as if it were truly tackling the major global crisis of climate change, with thousands of government delegates and even a hundred or so presidents and heads of state joining the meeting.

However, the most powerful countries – which are those most responsible for climate change – have been twisting negotiations in order to derail any binding agreement and to impose a top-down agreement with very low carbon reduction targets – more based on carbon offsets than on real carbon cuts. The trend of northern countries has been to wriggle out of their emission reduction commitments, to marginalise southern countries and to silence criticism or alternative voices.

At the same time, civil society groups demanding real solutions to the global problem of climate change have been excluded from their already marginal participation.

In response, thousands of people from all over the world took to the streets of

Copenhagen demanding real and just solutions to climate change, with banners and placards around the idea: "Climate Justice means System Change not Climate Change".

The huge and peaceful demonstration that took place on December 12, ended with more than 918 people arrested.

On Monday 14, hundreds more were arrested following a public meeting addressed by Canadian journalist Naomi Klein.

On Tuesday 15, Tadzio Mueller, a spokesperson for the group Climate Justice Action, was arrested by undercover police officers following a press conference at the Bella Centre (petition to release Tadzio Mueller: <http://www.PetitionOnline.com/Tadzio/petition.html>).

On Wednesday 16, the NGO Friends of the Earth had their accreditation revoked in a so called "surgical removal".

On that same date, thousands of protesters marched toward the UN climate summit with the stated goal of transforming the talks into a People's Assembly and to call for climate justice. Police made over 200 arrests. Meanwhile, inside the Bella Center, hundreds of people staged a walkout to try and meet the marchers outside but were met with a heavy police response (reported by Democracy Now! at <http://tiny.cc/IDlfq>).

On Thursday 17, hundreds more protesters were arrested and there have been numerous reports –including video-taped evidence- of police brutality and the extensive use of batons, pepper spray and tear gas.

Not only people's rights are being swept. As Bolivian President Evo Morales said in his speech at the climate summit: "Our Mother Earth is treated as if she were a thing without life, as if she didn't have rights."

See videos in English at:

Democracy Now!: <http://www.democracynow.org/>

The Guardian: <http://tiny.cc/7cJB2>

The Independent: <http://tiny.cc/du48A>

More information on Copenhagen available at:

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/COP15/cop15.htm>