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OUR VIEWPOINT

- **FAO and WWF: birds of a feather promote “planted forests” together**

According to the FAO, halting deforestation is neither a political nor a social nor an environmental issue: it is just a matter of definitions.

As evidence of the above, the FAO has just released a report (1) which proves that we and many others have been absolutely wrong: deforestation in Asia is not only not happening; forests have actually expanded during the last decade! The report says: “Asia, which had a net loss [in forest area] in the 1990s, reported a net gain of forest

in the period 2000–2010”. Hallelujah!

How did this miracle happen? Well, in the first place it is not a miracle (it's a fraud) and in the second place it did not happen (it's a lie). As the FAO report adds, the “net gain of forest” was “primarily due to the large-scale afforestation reported by China”. That means that those plantations “reported by China” -defined by FAO as “forests”- can counter the “continued high rates of net loss in many countries in South and Southeast Asia.”

As stated above, it's just a matter of definitions. According to FAO's “expertise”, any area covered by trees is a “forest”. Which means that if forests are destroyed –as they certainly have been- in Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, India, etc.- the Asian forest area will not have changed if a similar area has been planted with tree monocultures in another Asian country: in this case China.

But the issue is not restricted to Asia. FAO states that “Large-scale planting of trees is significantly reducing the net loss of forest area globally.” “The net change in forest area in the period 2000–2010 is estimated at –5.2 million hectares per year (an area about the size of Costa Rica), down from –8.3 million hectares per year in the period 1990–2000.”

Under this fraudulent approach, all the world's forests can be destroyed and substituted by monoculture tree plantations (eucalyptus, pines, acacias, oil palm, rubber) and the “net forest area” will not have changed. As a result, the FAO will eventually be able to announce the good news that deforestation has been stopped!

Given the increasing number of people and organizations challenging FAO's unscientific “forest” definition and the growing opposition to large-scale monoculture tree plantations, another organization has stepped in to provide support to both FAO and plantation companies: the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

This move comes as no surprise given the role played by WWF in corporate-friendly processes such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, the Roundtable on Responsible Soy, Sustainable Aquaculture and in the certification of monoculture tree plantations under the Forest Stewardship Council.

While it is difficult to see how the wildlife that WWF is supposed to be protecting – headed by the charismatic panda bear it uses as logo- may benefit from monoculture tree plantations, the fact is that WWF is leading and coordinating a process called the “New Generation Plantations Project” (2, 3). Participants in the project are well known plantation companies, including Forestal Oriental (Finnish UPM/Kymmene subsidiary in Uruguay), Mondi (South Africa), Portucel (Portugal), Smurfit Kappa Carton de Colombia (Irish-Dutch company operating in Colombia), Stora Enso (Finnish-Swedish), UPM Kymmene (Finland), as well as the Sabah Forest Department (Malaysia), the State Forest Administration of China and the UK Forestry Commission.

What WWF is actually doing is to promote the expansion of tree monocultures and helping to greenwash the long –and well documented- history of past and present destructive activities of the companies and organizations involved in this project. At the same time, it is assisting the beleaguered FAO by continuing to define tree

plantations as “planted forests”, thereby weakening the growing civil society demand for changing a definition that has so much served plantation companies for obscuring the true and negative nature of these monocultures.

Legend has it that the Italian mathematician, physicist and philosopher Galileo Galilei muttered the phrase “Eppur si muove” meaning “And yet it moves” after being forced to recant in 1633, before the Inquisition, his belief that the Earth moves around the Sun. In a similar vein, we hope that some serious FAO officials and honest WWF activists will be heard muttering: “And yet plantations are not forests”.

Sources:

(1) <http://www.fao.org/forestry/static/data/fra2010/KeyFindings-en.pdf>

(2) <http://assets.panda.org/downloads/newgenerationplantationsreport2009.pdf>

(3) http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/forestry/sustainable_plantations/newgenerationplantations/

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Indonesia: NGOs denounce misleading propaganda of APP

Asia Pulp & Paper (APP) is a giant pulp and paper company which has long been deforesting Indonesian forests in Riau province, Sumatra, destroying Kerumutan’s and Bukit Tigapuluh’s peat forests. Most of the estimated 25 percent deforestation of the original natural forest cover has taken place on carbon rich soils.

The damage carried out by APP has several implications: it destroys the territory and livelihoods of indigenous communities who have been living there for centuries; it threatens the survival of some of them; it leads Sumatran tigers, elephants and orangutans to the verge of extinction; it causes millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions as the forest is cleared and drained peat soils oxidize, pushing Indonesia into third place (behind China and the U.S.) of greenhouse gas emitters.

It is difficult to think that with such a profile APP could earn some credit. However, the company is trying to promote their corporate responsibility and paper products through propaganda.

During the 12th Annual RISI European pulp & paper outlook conference held in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on March 10, APP attempted to promote their “corporate responsibility”. Several Indonesian NGOs reacted calling on buyers and investors of APP “to reject the company’s misinformation and stop purchasing or financing the company until it met conditions articulated in an open letter calling for reforms in Indonesia’s pulp and paper sector”.

In a joint communiqué NGOs denounced that a series of TV paid programming (infomercials) touting APP’s environmental and social accomplishments may be “an effort to pave the way for the company’s anticipated initial public offering (IPO) of its

Chinese division, and comes at the same time as new investments in direct sales capacity in Europe and North American paper markets. In the early 2000's, APP defaulted on a debt of more than U.S. \$13 billion and became Asia's biggest bankruptcy. In the aftermath of the bankruptcy, significant legal, social and environmental issues associated with the company's pulp production, natural forest clearance and pulpwood sourcing operations emerged".

WALHI/Friends of the Earth Indonesia, the national environmental forum in Indonesia which has over 450 member NGOs, blew the whistle on the misinformation campaign and alerted consumers: "We're trying to set the record straight for APP's customers and investors who may have been taken in by APP's misleading advertisements and glossy brochures," said Teguh Surya Campaign Director of WALHI. "APP and its affiliates continue to do more damage to Indonesia's forest dependent communities, wildlife and the world's climate than any other single corporate player. Being associated with APP poses major reputational risks to companies that do business with it", Teguh said.

Rivani Noor of the Indonesian national network, Community Alliance for Pulp and Paper Advocacy (CAPPA) bears witness of APP's deeds: "Indonesian NGO's and the communities we work with have experienced the devastation caused by APP firsthand, so we can't be fooled by infomercials or environmental prizes," he said.

APP's record of destruction and violation of community rights cannot be cleaned up with propaganda.

CAPPA's Rivani Noor declared that "We urge APP to stop the destruction of natural forests and peatlands, respect community rights and tenure, resolve existing disputes and retract misleading statements about their low carbon footprint. This is how APP can go beyond business as usual and help fulfill Indonesia's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and the transition to an equitable and low-carbon future for all Indonesians".

Article based on the "Open Letter to Customers of and Investors in the Indonesian Pulp and Paper Sector" (<http://www.eyesontheforest.or.id>), and the joint communiqué "Indonesian groups reject APP's green claims at RISI Paper Conference", sent by Rivani Noor, Coordinator, Community Alliance Pulp and Paper Advocacy (CAPPA), e-mail: rivani@cappa.or.id. More on APP's social and environmental impacts is documented at: <http://www.eyesontheforest.or.id>, <http://www.savesumatra.org/index.php/link>, <http://www.environmentalpaper.org/indonesiaroundtablesummary.htm>, and photos of APP impacts at: <http://www.eyesontheforest.or.id>

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- European Ecolabel's greenwashing of Asia Pulp and Paper must stop

The European Commission claims that the EU Ecolabel is only awarded to "the very best products, which are kindest to the environment". But when the EU Ecolabel has

been awarded to Golden Plus and Lucky Boss, two brands of photocopy paper manufactured by Pindo Deli, a subsidiary of Asia Pulp and Paper, this claim is greenwash.

“EU Ecolabel allows forest destruction: The case of Pindo Deli,” is the title of my latest report, recently published by FERN. Despite the EU Ecolabel, which was awarded in 2006, the logging and plantation operations associated with Pindo Deli are extremely destructive and in some cases may not even be legal under Indonesian law.

Pindo Deli is a paper manufacturing company with two paper mills in West Java, producing around one million tonnes of paper products a year. Around 80 per cent of the pulp used in Pindo Deli's paper mills comes from two massive APP pulp mills in Sumatra: Lontar Papyrus and Indah Kiat.

Vast areas of forest have been cleared to supply the raw material to these pulp mills. Two forestry companies, PT Arara Abadi and PT Wirakarya Sakti (PT WKS), supply timber to the pulp mills. Both are part of the Sinar Mas Group, the company that owns Asia Pulp and Paper. PT Arara Abadi has an appalling record of human rights abuses, documented in detail in a 2003 report by Human Rights Watch, titled “Without Remedy”.

In November 2009, David Gilbert of Rainforest Action Network visited PT WKS's logging operations in Jambi province, Sumatra. Gilbert travelled to the edge of PT WKS's concession, bordering Bukit Tigapuluh National Park. “Private security forces turned us away,” he says. “Just beyond the gates, biodiverse lowland rainforests are being illegally logged by Asia Pulp and Paper.” Gilbert saw around 100 trucks leaving the forest, “headed to the nearby APP pulp and paper factory.” That factory is Lontar Papyrus.

About 10,000 people live in PT WKS's concession area, including about 500 members of the Orang Rimba indigenous group. The Orang Rimba's livelihoods are being devastated by PT WKS's logging operations.

A 2008 report by a group of NGOs, including WWF Indonesia, found that PT WKS was logging in an area of forest where orangutans had recently been re-introduced. The NGOs documented the destructive logging and questioned whether PT WKS's operations in Bukit Tigapuluh were legal.

APP's operations are so controversial that even the Forest Stewardship Council will have nothing to do with the company. In December 2007, FSC issued a statement “dissociating” itself from APP. “There is substantial publicly available information,” FSC wrote, “that suggests that APP, a Sinar Mas subsidiary, is associated with destructive forestry practices.”

I tried to find out how on earth the EU Ecolabel could have been awarded to a company involved in this level of destruction. To get the Ecolabel, Pindo Deli had to convince one of the EU's “Competent Bodies” that it complied with the Ecolabel's criteria. In this case, the “Competent Body” was a French company called AFNOR.

I wrote to AFNOR to make a formal request for the assessment report carried out before the Ecolabel was awarded and any audits that had been carried out since the award. AFNOR declined to respond.

I wrote to Pindo Deli and APP to ask, among other things, what evidence the company could provide that its raw material comes from “sustainable forest management”, as required to comply with the Ecolabel criteria. Pindo Deli and APP declined to respond, even when I sent a draft copy of my report and invited them to provide a comment and offered to include the comment as an annex to the report. APP did respond after the report had been published, but failed to address the allegations of destructive logging operations in the report.

I wrote to the European Ecolabel Helpdesk to ask what information about the assessment is publicly available. None, it turns out. “I doubt that the assessments are available to the public since it might contain private information, for example regarding the composition of the products, that producers might not want to disclose,” Camille Ouellete from the Helpdesk told me. “Unfortunately, I fear you will not be able to obtain those documents,” she added.

Benjamin Caspar at the European Commission's environment department told me that “I don't think that French CB [Competent Body] can give any information to external parties and not even sure if the Aarhus convention [on access to information] is applicable in this case.”

ENDS Daily (a news service covering European environmental issues) reports that the European Commission's environment department will ask AFNOR to investigate and “act in response to these severe accusations”. Whether AFNOR's investigation will be made public, however, is not clear. “When licenses are found to be in breach, which happens occasionally, they are taken away immediately,” the environment department told ENDS Daily.

There is little doubt that APP's operations are not sustainable, nor do they comply with the EU Ecolabel criteria. EU's greenwashing of this destructive company should stop. The EU Ecolabel should be withdrawn from Pindo Deli's photocopy paper.

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

The report “EU Ecolabel allows forest destruction: The case of Pindo Deli” is available here: <http://fem.org/node/4684> (pdf file 1.26 MB)

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- Madagascar: Forest communities impacted by a Rio Tinto mine

Madagascar is the world's fourth largest island and is usually portrayed as being one of the poorest countries in Africa, with over three-quarters of its population mainly dependant on agriculture for their livelihoods.

The Anosy region, located in the mountains in the south east corner of Madagascar,

is home to approximately half a million inhabitants. It is a wet region with varied biodiversity ranging across littoral, humid, and transition forests to marshlands and wooded bush.

Since 2005 the main city of the region, known as Fort Dauphin, has been the target of financial investment under a World Bank 'growth pole' programme which has placed mining at the core of the regional development strategy. The mine is privately owned by QIT Minerals Madagascar (QMM), a subsidiary of Rio Tinto. Over the next sixty years it will extract and export to Canada approximately 750,000 tons of ilmenite (a mineral which transforms into industrial whitener titanium dioxide).

The mine has brought dramatic changes to the lives of rural villagers who live adjacent to, and who depend upon, the local forests situated in the mine's trajectory. Approximately 6000 hectares of coastal landscape is under QMM project custody for extraction. An estimated 1097 hectares have been designated as conservation zones with restricted access.

The newly designated 'conservation zones', set up by QMM and the Forest Service, employ a system that restricts access to the forest. This means that many villagers – who previously relied on their own traditional management mechanisms – must now pay (or be fined) to enter and take products from the forest. Most are cash strapped market gardeners and fishermen earning less than a dollar per day who now find themselves excluded from this vital resource.

Some communities have already been displaced from their lands to allow for construction of a new port, quarry, roads and housing for mine workers. Others have been restricted from access to their traditional fishing sites. A cash compensation process has been applied for those affected by displacement, but there are ongoing disputes about the level of compensation delivered. Most consider it insufficient to balance the loss of access to farmlands or fishing areas that have supported their families over many generations.

The majority of local people live from the land (86%) as subsistence farmers. They designate ownership of their land by traditional means which are recognised at community level. Legal tenure is difficult and costly and of an estimated 90% of Malagasy farmers who own land, only 8% have formal land titles. Compensation processes inevitably favour those who can establish legal title.

What follows are some testimonies from local people on the impacts that have resulted from the mining project:

A 22 year old woman called Fanja, tells: "I have to collect sticks from the forest to fence the vegetable garden and stop domestic animals grazing or eating the seeds. But collecting sticks has become a problem because the forest belongs to the foreigners (QMM). It is amazing how a forest growing in our region can become the property of foreigners. Right now, local people need authorisation to cut down trees. The worst thing is that we have to pay to get the permit... We did not have to purchase firewood [before]... Men went to collect construction wood and brought back the amount they needed to build a house. Women took advantage of free firewood and made a small business of selling it to other people... In addition,

people did not buy medicines. Medicinal plants were available to us from the forest... I still rely on the forest to supply my needs, especially to collect mahampy for my occupation [weaving baskets]... In [the past], if I could not collect mahampy, I could switch to collecting firewood and make a little bit of money... Now, everything has changed. The forest is a forbidden place... If such restrictions continue we will fall into chronic hardship.”

Constand, a 31 year old man, explains how the forest became “a protected area”: “QMM came to the village... They said that they needed the forest to be protected... QMM collected signatures from each individual in the village to get approval for the transfer of forest management to them... The local community, along with the local NGO, registered their opposition to QMM’s plan to manage the forest. But this could not prevent QMM from appropriating the forest around St Luce... [They said] deforestation threatened St Luce Forest so it was time to take action... People in St Luce believed...they would still have access to the forest... So they did not oppose the plan vehemently enough.

Unfortunately, [our] hardships have been accentuated, because QMM does not allow access to the forest any more... It has taken away so many of the resources that people need to sustain their lives... Because people are poor, they need the forest... Instead of building houses of bricks, people use forest resources... Second, forested land is fertile and provides good yields of cassava, sweet potatoes and rice. Therefore many farmers clear forest in order to expand their cropland. Third, the forest provides many good things such as medicinal plants... The only thing that people are still allowed to do is collect firewood, but QMM’s forest guards must supervise anyone who wants to do that...

In the past, the local community managed the forest directly; they collected fees from tourists visiting the forest and its biodiversity. The number of tourists has increased every year, and now many foreign students come to conduct scientific research. Such visits improve people’s income.

Those benefits have [now] disappeared... Now QMM staff have tagged most of the animals living in the forest. Soon QMM will claim that all those tagged animals are theirs...

I came to the conclusion that only the government can work out a deal to claim back the local community’s rights... It is a huge challenge for people to draft a letter and send it to the respective authorities. Most of us are illiterate... The only opportunity for the people of St Luce to express their complaints is through interviews like this.”

Bruno, male, 43, remembers: “In the past, there was thick forest, but since QMM has taken over its management, it is as if the forest has diminished... This has made it difficult for us to survive, since our lives depend so directly on forest products... Our children are going to have difficulty finding construction wood and they lack money to buy it elsewhere...

Another problem is the restriction on collecting firewood, despite this being the primary means by which we cook our meals. [Now] people are obliged to go to Fort Dauphin to buy charcoal...

If I have a visitor in my house, our custom is to give them something to eat... Now I do not have a supply of firewood, I cannot rapidly prepare a meal... I am obliged to go off to look for it... [My visitor] might leave without having eaten, which in my culture brings shame on me.”

As Zanaboatsy, male, 58, explains “[QMM] took advantage of our situation, of us being too weak to oppose them. In addition, we are mostly uneducated people; therefore we had to accept – against our will – what they [proposed].” Zanaboatsy sums up the situation by describing QMM as “the bain-tany” – literally ‘wound of the earth’, expression meaning a time of hardship and deprivation- and that he now has “no opportunity to succeed in life and provide a better future for my family.”

Extracted and adapted from: “Madagascar. Voices of Change”, Andrew Lees Trust & Panos London, 2009. The complete document is available at:
<http://www.andrewleestrust.org/Reports/Voices%20of%20Change.pdf>

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- Honduras: Shrimp farm expansion within a Ramsar Site and protected area

Wetlands are ecosystems having a high biodiversity, temporarily or permanently flooded by fresh water, brackish water, mixed waters or sea water with a maximum depth of 6 metres. In some cases they form swamps, mud flats, peat bogs, lakes or lagoons, usually accompanied by grasses, seaweeds, mangroves or other vegetation. In some cases wetlands remain temporarily dry and devoid of vegetation and desert-like and become productive and full of life during rainy seasons.

Mangrove ecosystem included in the mudflats, lagoons, marshes, grasslands, etc., are considered wasteland by hotel and shrimp entrepreneurs and other “developers” whereby justifying their use of the land for hotels, restaurants, shrimp farms, etc., without considering the environmental, social and economic damages caused to humanity.

The Ramsar Convention is committed to safeguarding wetlands, thus recognizing the importance of their biodiversity, in addition to their function in maintaining aquifers, rehabilitating fisheries, lessening erosion, protecting against winds and storms, as a carbon and pollution trap, as a salinity regulator for groundwater and as the basis of food sovereignty.

Honduras is signatory to the International Ramsar Convention and boasts about having declared and having under conservation measures five “Ramsar Sites,” totalling 223,230 hectares of wetlands which are supposedly “under State protection.” But what is going on in a part of the “Ramsar Site” reveals that this is a false “protection.”

The tropical coastal wetlands ecosystem of Berbería, Municipality of el Triunfo, Department of Choluteca, is fed by creeks along which mangroves grow amid grasses, tropical pasture plants and other vegetation on sand flats. This ecosystem

hosts a wide resident and migratory biodiversity which interrelates with the fishing communities giving them access to firewood, game, fish and recreation.

The expansion of shrimp farming in Honduras started in 1972 and in 2010 it is still expanding, with no kind of development plan. The only means of control are shrimp diseases, a drop in prices on the international markets, lower demand and sometimes, pressure from the communities. However, destruction, pollution, eviction of the communities and looting of natural resources have given rise to a social movement aimed at lessening the negative impacts. This movement has been headed by the organization CODDEFFAGOLF since 1988 and has established as its objective to get the Gulf of Fonseca Wetlands to be declared a Protected Area.

CODDEFFAGOLF submitted a proposal for Protected Area, including segments of the shrimp farms within its limits, in order to halt expansion, classifying them as “of intensive use.” In July 1999, during the International RAMSAR Convention, the Honduran shrimp farmers (ANDAH) were surprised that Honduras was able to achieve nomination of the coastal wetlands of the Gulf of Fonseca (mangroves, lagoons sand flats and other fragile ecosystems) as “Ramsar Site” allocated no. 1000 on the list of the world’s wetlands, with the consequent commitment of conserving them.

In 2000, following mass mobilization by fisher-folk and forced negotiations with the shrimp farming sector, Berbería was included among the Protected Areas of the Gulf of Fonseca. The objective would seem to have been achieved as the expectations were to halt the expansion of shrimp farming and place the rest of the wetlands under conservation measures. But a few months after promulgation of the Decree, a Spanish company known as El Faro converted over 100 hectares of wetlands in the Protected Area of La Berbería into shrimp holding ponds. Meanwhile, the EMAR I company was advancing, without an environmental license, over tens of hectares.

In 2004 the Central American Water Tribunal condemned the Government of Honduras, the El Faro, Granjas Marinas San Bernardo shrimp farms and the World Bank for pollution and destruction of the wetlands. The verdict amounts to an ethical and moral sentence and therefore does not go beyond a slight embarrassment for distracting the guilty party.

In 2005 the ANDAH shrimp farmers held up adoption of the Management Plans and it was only due to local, national and international pressure that they agreed to the submission and adoption of the Management Plans for the “Natural Protected Areas of the Southern Zone Sub-System,” which includes “la Berbería.”

Nevertheless, expansion over the wetlands continued, stimulated by high international demand for shrimps. In January 2010, the Natural Resources and Environment Secretariat (Secretaría de Recursos Naturales y Ambiente -SERNA) granted an environmental license to EMAR II to set up a shrimp farm on 169 hectares following an amazingly short licensing process lasting only five days (21-26 January). Over this short period a license was also granted to EMAR I, which had been operating for several years without an environmental license. It also took three SERNA Directorates just one day to issue favourable reports before the new governor took up office!

As if this were not enough, the EXCASUR company waited for EMAR II to establish its shrimp farm with impunity to expand over other tens of hectares, claiming to have an Environmental License obtained on 15 December 2009. What is ironical and cynical in all these cases is that the police and even the state army are protecting the shrimp farm operations, equipment and facilities. Meanwhile, the President of the Honduran Private Enterprise Council (Consejo Hondureño de la Empresa Privada - COHEP), stated that "We need more security, because, while the peasants in Bajo Aguan try to recover their lands, in the South, (Gulf of Fonseca), they have "taken over" a shrimp farm: work cannot be done in this way because they frightens off investment..."

To demonstrate the fraud committed by government officials in confabulation with the companies, CODDEFFAGOLF decided to carry out a field assessment, observing than on a local level, on 5 March 2010, over two hundred hectares of wetlands had been added to thousands of others converted into fish farms in the Gulf of Fonseca. In la Berbería, wildlife has lost almost all its habitat and the fisher-folk have either lost or are fighting for their right to access the mangroves, their source of food and survival. They are putting direct pressure on the companies in order to obtain social compensation measures.

On a national level, disrepute of the Honduran legal system is almost total. The institutions that are responsible for working in favour of environmental conservation act as if they were subordinate to the corporate groups that recently took part in a coup d'état and that seemingly continue to be in power behind the mask of a new democracy. The Director of ANDAH, a brother of the former dictator Micheletti, managed to get agreements signed between ANDAH and government institutions together with other arrangements that attack natural resources, conventions and agreements still in force with the new government.

On an international level, the Ramsar Convention would seem to ignore the situation, which is not exclusive to Honduras. Even if they knew about it, their limited power would only enable them to advise the Honduran government on the introduction of ways to improve their behaviour. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the Dutch Oxfam Novib in addition to the World Wildlife Fund-USA (WWF-USA), among other international NGOs, have changed their interest in conservation and are now into the business of certifying shrimp and other aquiculture species' farming.

La Berbería is just a tiny example of what is going on in the tropical zones of the planet where the addition of impacts is contributing inter alia, to climate change, to the destruction of biological diversity and to the loss of food sovereignty.

While the insatiable demand for shrimp continues in Europe, Japan, the United States and Australia, wetland ecosystems continue to disappear. Does it matter?

Article excerpted and adapted from: "Consumismo en países desarrollados causa destrucción de Humedales en el trópico"(Consumerism in developed countries causes destruction of Wetlands in the tropics), Jorge Varela Márquez, CODDEFFAGOLF, March 2010. The complete document with photos can be found in: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Honduras/Consumismo.pdf>

- Indonesia: REDD project – many threats, no solution

Last month, a new Australian-Indonesian Forest Carbon Partnership was announced under the scheme of the International Forest Carbon Initiative (IFCI) - a government initiative, with implementation jointly managed by AusAID and the Department of Climate Change. The A\$30 million funded REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) trial project will be implemented in the Indonesian Jambi province located on the east coast of central Sumatra.

Forests in Jambi are experiencing high deforestation rates as a result of rampant expansion of oil palm and pulpwood plantations by multinational companies as well as mining and logging operations. The ecological disturbance has brought about drought and forest and land fires in the dry season, and floods and landslides in the rainy season.

Allegedly aimed at paying for not cutting forest and thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the REDD project has been denounced by NGOs from Indonesia and Australia as a mere “source of cheap credit for the increase in emissions in Australia”, as Arif Munandar, Jambi’s Regional Executive Director of WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia), put it.

“Treasury modelling shows that the [Australian] government plans to achieve its 5% (30.75 MtCO₂) emission reduction target by purchasing 46MtCO₂ of offsets for overseas, that is purchasing more tonnes of carbon offsets than we reduce emissions by! Without offsets the modelling shows that our emissions would actually increase by over 5%”, explained James Goodman from Friends of the Earth Australia, who added that such “offsets” do not reduce global carbon emissions, but provide a dangerous smokescreen behind which the Australia government can hide its lack of action on climate change and continued fossil fuel use.

Many social organisations share this concern. A statement of the Durban Group for Climate Justice against Schemes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation expresses that: “The new pollution licenses to be generated by REDD are designed in a way that obstructs the only workable solution to climate change: keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground.” “Like CDM credits, they exacerbate climate change by giving industrialized countries and companies incentives to delay undertaking the sweeping structural change away from fossil fuel-dependent systems of production, consumption, transportation that the climate problem demands. They waste years of time that the world doesn’t have.” (2)

It is difficult to believe in good intentions to avoid deforestation when, as Chris Lang reminded (see WRM Bulletin N° 145) “Indonesia was the first country in the world to establish legislation on REDD investments. Yet earlier this year, the same Indonesian government decided to allow the expansion of oil palm plantations on peatlands. To grow palm oil or pulpwood tree plantations on peatland the land has to be cleared and drained, which releases millions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The

authorities also allow pulp companies to log native forests and turn a blind eye when they use illegal timber.”

WALHI Jambi and Friends of the Earth Australia fear also “that REDD projects will undermine the rights of Indigenous and forest-dependant peoples in the area. In September 2009 the United Nations Committee on Racial Discrimination wrote [to the government of] Indonesia to express concerns that Indonesia REDD regulations do not respect the rights of Indigenous peoples. Documents from the Australian-Indonesian Kalimantan REDD project fail to guarantee the rights of Indigenous people in the area.”

As many have warned, covered under REDD schemes land grabbing grows and financial transactions are promoted for the benefit of big corporations. Meanwhile our common future is warming up.

(1) <http://www.foe.org.au/news/2010/sumatran-forest-carbon-deal-slammed-by-australian-and-indonesian-environment-groups>

(2) <http://www.wrm.org.uy/COP15/durban.pdf>

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- Meso-America: Communities issue statement on protected areas

The concept of protected areas, born in the United States in the nineteenth century as an idea of conservation by establishing “national parks,” was part of the colonization of the “Wild West” and, in many cases served as an instrument to appropriate indigenous peoples’ territory, handing it over to the States, research centres or corporate interests. Although an international organization such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has acknowledged that when establishing protected areas, indigenous peoples’ rights to their territories should be respected and the value of their lifestyles recognized, most of the protected areas established since then have violated these rights.

Last March the Third Meso-American Congress on Protected Areas took place in the City of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. Simultaneously, the Indigenous Peoples, Local and Afro-descendant Communities of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama gathered at the Third pre-congress of Meso-American Indigenous Peoples, Local and Afro-descendant Communities on protected areas and territorial rights, to claim that “we have existed since time immemorial on this territory and well before the formation of the present Nation States.”

The “Yucatan Declaration” (1) was a result of this meeting, reaffirming that “In our ancestral concept, the territory goes far beyond a physical space, because it is there that we are born, raised and our culture is reproduced and it is there that we must continue our life after life. It also represents the security and continuity of future generations.”

“Territoriality is where we develop our condition as subjects of political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights in self-management of Good Living and the continuity in time of our cosmovision.”

This reaffirmation seems particularly appropriate in the light of events over the past forty years, during which the rich indigenous territories of this area “have been subject to reiterated colonialist systems of looting, expropriation, bio-piracy, bio-prospecting, dispossession, declaration of protected areas and megaprojects.”

In this context, the Declaration demands recognition of the Indigenous Peoples, Local and Afro-descendant communities’ right to free determination and to reserve the right to establish management/conservation areas under their own regulatory systems and institutions, guaranteed by a legal framework implemented in each one of the Meso-American States. Therefore, “the States shall not declare protected or conservation areas of any type on the lands and territories that the Indigenous Peoples, Local and Afro-descendant communities have historically or traditionally used, possessed or occupied, without their free, prior and informed consent.” In those cases that protected areas have been declared without free, prior and informed consent, it is demanded that processes be initiated to return these lands and territories.

The declaration warns against projects promoted by national governments such as the Meso-American Biological Corridor, the Merida Plan, the Meso-American Strategy for Environmental Sustainability or the programme for the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), that directly affect indigenous territories and that therefore should guarantee full and effective participation of the local communities.

In short, what is at stake is the free determination of the peoples’ and their right to Good Living.

(1) See full text of the Yucatán Declaration (in Spanish) at:

http://www.indigenouspeoplesissues.com/attachments/4378_Declaracion_Yucatan.pdf

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- Ecuador: The long struggle in defence of El Pambilar forest

El Pambilar with its 3123 hectares of native forest, has since 1997 been a matter of dispute between peasant farmers and the logging company Bosques Tropicales S.A (Botrosa), belonging to the Peña Durini group.

El Pambilar is part of the almost disappeared Ecuadorian Choco ecosystem, recognised as one of the world’s 10 biodiversity hotspots. In 1997, ignoring this fact, the Agrarian Development Institute illegally allocated El Pambilar to the Endesa Botrosa company for forest exploitation. This allocation disregarded the fact that the inhabitants of the place, peasant farmers and settlers, used the forest and that their economy was partially based on this ecosystem. It also disregarded the fact that this location is a State Forest Heritage site and that they therefore had no right to dispose of it in this manner. However, this type of illegal allocation, favouring major

corporations has been very common in the country and in Latin America in general.

The dispute arose when peasant farmers from the location of “El Pambilar” in the parish of Malimpia, Esmeraldas province, did not give in to pressure exerted by the BOTROSA logging company on their forest. They had been living there for the past 20-24 years, in small scattered settlements comprising some 10 to 25 families of settlers from different provinces from all over the country. It was to this same area of state heritage, over which the families had acquired rights of possession, that BOTROSA entered in 1997 with the aim of extracting timber.

Faced by some of the inhabitants refusal to sell, company employees, private guards and the police set fire to peasant homes, destroyed their crops, seeds, tools, household equipment and threw gases at men, women and children.

The loss of their belongings and the physical aggression forced some of the families to abandon their lands. Others gave up their rights of possession to the company.

Following the destruction, the company planted grass over the rubble to hide the evidence. Over a period of a year, some 35 homes were burnt down.

This climate of violence became a constant theme in the area. The company had an armed group of between 10 and 50 people to dissuade the inhabitants circulating in the forest, going as far as to threaten to kill them.

However, the struggle in defence of El Pambilar did not only take place on the site; it was also brought up before the State legal institutions. Thus, several governmental institutions made different statements, pointing out that the allocation to Botrosa was illegal and that they were in favour of the conservation of El Pambilar.

The Peoples’ Defence Counsel issued a resolution in 2001 declaring that the allocation to Botrosa was illegal and urging that the forest be returned to the State. The Ministry of the Environment made a statement on similar terms in the year 2000, the National Congress in 2001, the Commission for Civil Control of Corruption in 2001, the Constitutional Tribunal in 2002, the General State Auditor in 2003. Finally, in 2008, the Constitutional Tribunal issued a non appealable sentence annulling the allocation of 3123 hectares of tropical rainforest and ordering the land to be returned to the State. For over TEN YEARS six of the most important State institutions issued sentences in favour of the conservation of El Pambilar and its inhabitants, while the company, through wheeling and dealing, corruption and cheating, managed to remain in the forest that it had illegally taken over.

The new National Assembly had to take matters directly in its hands to have the Constitutional Tribunal’s sentence executed, achieving that, at least on paper, Ecuador regained El Pambilar.

Within this context, José Antonio Aguilar and his wife Yola Garófalo were murdered on 24 February 2010. A few days before their death, a national radio had broadcast evidence given by José Aguilar on Botrosa’s aggression towards him to force him to sell his forest.

This murder is a dangerous precedent for all those defending nature. With the death

of this couple, the message given to the local inhabitants is one of defencelessness, impunity, of the untouchable economic and political power moving its wheels and its puppets to silence all those who oppose its decisions. If the news gets about that in Esmeraldas it is possible to take over forests and lands by murdering their owners, what was once a green province will be left without forests or inhabitants, it will only have desolation and deserts.

It is for this reason that the designation of El Pambilar as a Protector Forest leaves us with a sweet and sour taste. Peace and satisfaction will come with justice, when a real investigation is carried out in the country to discover those who are responsible, the minds behind these crimes, the accomplices and those that covered them up.

It is not enough that Botrosa has left El Pambilar; a process of social and environmental justice must be launched in order to repair the environmental and social damage caused and the investigation recommended in the Auditor's report must be continued for the rest of Block 10 of the State's Forest Heritage.

We all, the Aguilar-Garófalo family, our communities, our companions, our country, we all demand that this crime does not go by unpunished. We demand that compensation be awarded to those who for the past ten years have been affected by State omission: that the homes burnt down, the crops destroyed, the families destroyed, the daily life under the terror of violence and incomplete justice should be recognized.

The designation of El Pambilar as a Protector Forest is barely a small step forward. The way is long and for our own good, we must cover it.

By Acción Ecológica, e-mail: info@accionecologica.org

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: Communities hit by monoculture eucalyptus plantations exchange experiences in Minas Gerais

On 19 and 20 March this year, peasant, indigenous and quilombola* communities and movements from the States of Espírito Santo and Bahia who are fighting to get back their territory invaded by monoculture eucalyptus plantation companies, paid a visit to Raiz and Vereda Funda in the locality of Rio Pardo in the north of Minas Gerais, in solidarity and to exchange experiences with these two communities struggling to regain their traditional territory.

Over 30 years ago the northern region of Minas Gerais was taken over by companies exploiting monoculture eucalyptus plantations for charcoal, the energy source used in the production of iron and steel in the scores of metal works located in the State. The invasion of eucalyptus trees was devastating. The companies managed to plant over one million hectares of eucalyptus, forming one of the world's largest continuous tract

of plantations of this monoculture.

The companies were mainly interested in the flat lands known as 'chapadas.' These lands were used by the traditional communities of the region, called 'geraizeiras', to graze their cattle and to gather innumerable fruit and medicinal plants from the 'cerrado' (savannah). As a result the communities were trapped in the valleys and their streams and springs dried up. They were deprived of their freedom to come and go over their own territory and are even being criminalized every time they try to gather firewood in the 'chapadas.' The companies' big promise had been employment. But in the locality of Rio Pardo de Minas, the over 90 thousand hectares of eucalyptus gave rise to fewer jobs than the artisan production of 'caña' (alcoholic drink produced from sugar cane) which provided 1,150 jobs and only covered 2,500 hectares. It should be borne in mind that the employment generated by monoculture eucalyptus plantations very often is degrading, with work carried out under appalling conditions, jeopardizing the workers' health and quality of life.

Motivated by the networking and meetings promoted over the last 10 years by the Alert against the Green Desert Network – a network gathering communities opposed to monoculture eucalyptus plantations who are struggling to regain their territories – various communities from the north of Minas Gerais started to organize themselves to achieve this goal. Two of the communities that are struggling are Vereda Funda and Raíz.

The first to recover their territory in the region were the 130 families from Vereda Funda. This territory covers 5 thousand hectares of collectively used 'chapada,' which had been rented out by the state government of Minas Gerais to the Florestaminas Company. Following expiry of the contract and inspired by the struggle of the Tupiniquim and Guarani indigenous people from Espírito Santo, in 2005 the community recovered an area of 5 thousand hectares with the support of Via Campesina.

After much struggle, confrontation and persecution, the community achieved definitive control of the area which the state of Minas Gerais is presently transferring to INCRA – a federal institution for agrarian reform – in order to set up an agro-extractivist settlement. Within the settlement each family will have its own area to plant and there will also be collective areas for agro-extractivist production and for cattle-grazing. The community, with the support of the Rio Pardo de Minas rural workers' trade union and the Centre for Alternative Agriculture of Minas Gerais, drew up a plan for reoccupation of the territory and a map, with some areas corresponding to environmental rehabilitation of the cerrado and others for crop growing. Embrapa Cerrados is contributing with studies in the community towards this purpose. Regaining the territory gave new encouragement to the community, particularly to the older members as, on removing the eucalyptus plantations, the springs are flowing again and wildlife is returning. Furthermore, the community re-conquered a fundamental right: its freedom.

At the Vereda Funda community centre, the visitors were shown a pilot scheme for an agro-forestry system and then were taken on a field visit to a farm with corn, bean, cassava and other crops growing on a piece of land that had been planted with eucalyptus. In this area they want to plant various crops together in an agro-ecological

way, replacing the chemical monoculture eucalyptus plantation. They were also shown an agro-industry making jams, where a group of women work thus generating more income and labour.

The Vereda Funda community served as a mirror for other struggles for land. For example, the Raiz community, that was also visited. In the 80s this community comprising 40 families underwent expropriation of 3,600 hectares of their traditional territory for eucalyptus exploitation and the land is presently in the hands of the Replasa company. The monoculture eucalyptus plantation depleted the valley's water resources, forcing the families to move up to the 'chapada' in order to find adequate land for their crops. However the company occupied the whole 'chapada' trapping the families in the valleys. During the struggle, the community discovered that the company considered that the valleys they inhabited was its legal reservation. This made them even more aware that if they did not adopt a strong stand they would also be evicted from that area and outraged with this discovery, decided to start struggling to regain their territory.

With the help of the elders, the community of Raiz started to demarcate the community area, resulting in a map. According to this map the community had lost close on 3,600 hectares to Replasa. Immediately, the community got mobilized and made public the self-demarcation of its territory, once again following the example of the Tupiniquim and Guarani indigenous people of Espirito Santo and of the community of Vereda Funda. Subsequently, they stopped the company's machines from pulling up the tree-trunks of native cerrado trees to plant eucalyptus. Later, in December 2009 with the support of Via Campesina, the community finally recovered its traditional territory with the construction of a camp, resisting eviction up to the present although there is an eviction resolution threatening its continuity on the site.

According to the participants, this exchange and supportive visit was very important in strengthening and encouraging the struggles, both of Raiz and of Vereda Funda and also those of the communities and movements of Espirito Santo and Bahia. And there are many struggles. Only in the locality of Rio Pardo there are at least 18 disputes involving eucalyptus companies!

For those who inhabit regions where encroachment by eucalyptus is at an initial phase, such as in some parts of Bahia, the experience of the communities visited was an example for trying to avoid the same process in these regions. The communities of Minas Gerais also gave a practical lesson on the importance of resistance, in particular that of Raiz which is presently seriously threatened with eviction from the area they have regained. A noteworthy aspect was that of the strength of women who are actively participating in the struggle. Additionally, an important aspect is the planting of food crops to replace eucalyptus as well as the various experiences aimed at implementing agro-ecological practices.

At the end of the meeting, following a fairly positive assessment by all the participants, those present proposed that these exchanges should be continued as an essential element in encouraging, socializing and strengthening the struggle in different states. Furthermore, the participants showed great interest in continuing to organize themselves on different fronts such as fostering knowledge and exchange on reforestation with native trees, the promotion of agro-ecology, political and

ideological training and joint and mutual support in concrete struggles against the expansion of monoculture eucalyptus plantations and in favour of regaining the territories of the quilombolas, indigenous, geraizeiros and peasant farming people.

By: Winnie Overbeek, Alert against the Green Desert Network and Cepedes/BA, 23 March 2010

*Quilombolas: the descendents of slaves that escaped from slave plantations that existed in Brazil until abolition in 1888

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- South Africa: Thirsty alien trees in a water scarce country

GeaSphere and EcoDoc have just launched a report by Liane Greeff of EcoDoc Africa, "Thirsty alien trees, no water left and climate confusion – what version of sustainable development are we leaving our children". The paper highlights the dramatic contradiction of the expansion of water intensive industrial timber plantations in South Africa under planned development programmes, and the scarce water resources of the country. It is a thorough report that we highly recommend and which can be read at: [Http://www.geasphere.co.za/articles/thirstytreesnowater.htm](http://www.geasphere.co.za/articles/thirstytreesnowater.htm) Liane Greeff has produced the following summary in order to give WRM's readers a brief view of the report.

There is not enough water for South Africa's current and planned developmental approach, and therefore we need to re-examine the impossible nexus between our scarce water resources, potential climate change impacts, our decision to plant more water intensive timber plantations, and issues of long term food security. We need to weave these threads together in a way that links with the broader issues of a sustainable development that our planet is facing, and humanity's current collision course with an unknown climatic crisis. The question we need to ask ourselves (as a species) is "Why isn't our generation doing something whilst we still can, and why aren't our leaders leading us?"

Southern Africa is the 30th driest country on the planet, and according to recent statistics South Africa is already using 98% of its available water and within the next few years will be having a water deficit. Exacerbating this situation are the dire climate change predictions which indicate that Africa will be affected badly, and that South Africa in particular is likely to experience less rainfall over most of the region with longer dry periods and increased storm events. When you put these statements together they portray a very bleak picture of water availability in our future.

Our leaders, however, seem to be carrying on with their business as usual approach to macro-economic planning. Most of the development projects planned, such as the 150 000 hectares of timber plantations in the drought prone Eastern Cape, are water intensive and seem to be taking place in complete isolation from the fact that South Africa is a water-scarce and arid country. Indeed, South Africa needs to take much greater cognisance of our natural resource constraints.

The history of timber plantations and water research: Since 1935 South Africa has been researching timber plantations and their water use due to complaints when rivers downstream of plantations starting running dry. This resulted in seventy years of hydrological research at Jonkershoek and other sites, using the paired-catchment approach, which showed that plantations result in significant streamflow reductions, which vary according to species. For pines, it was calculated that there was 30-40 mm streamflow reduction per 10% of catchment planted, at peak water use, and using about 400-450mm of rainfall equivalent.

Eucalypts use more water - approximately 600mm of rainfall equivalent – because of their ability to grow deep roots, which measure 30 to 50 metres, and therefore are able to “mine” soil water, or desiccate a catchment. In a South African catchment with deep soils and afforested with eucalypts, the stream can dry up completely and only reappear 3-4 years after the trees are removed. The amount of water a tree uses is dependent on what species it is, what age, where it is in the landscape, its size, the size of its canopy, how close it is to a river and whether it is growing by itself or as part of a plantation. Generally speaking a eucalyptus tree will use anything from 100 to one thousand litres of water per day and a pine from 50 to 600 litres of water per day.

Recent research has found that plantations use a much higher proportion of streamflow during periods of low rainfall and low stream flow, when compared to an average per annum reduction. For example, in South Africa the annual reduction to stream flow caused by plantations is about 3.2%. However, the impact is far worse in periods of low flow where plantations reduce the stream flow by 8%. This means that when there is a lot of water, plantations use a smaller proportion, but when there is limited water, plantations use a higher proportion. So when water is scarce, timber plantations uses a lot and uses it before other users get a chance.

How much water does timber use? The exact answer is difficult. According to Statistics South Africa, timber used 10 828 million m³ or 16% of South Africa’s water for 2000 whilst for the same year the National Water Resources Strategy indicates that the incremental water use of the timber plantations in excess of the natural vegetation amounted to 1 460 million m³ (3%) for South Africa as a whole. However, the word “incremental” is important as it gives the impression that plantations use less than they do. The difference between these two figures is because the Statistics SA Water Accounts reflect the evapotranspiration use of the plantation trees whilst the NWRS figure refers only to incremental use and the reduction in streamflow. Environmental organisation GeaSphere calculated plantations to use an amount equal to 30 times more water each day than the entire population’s free basic water allocation of 25 litres per person per day. What makes timber very different is that the trees use the water before it gets into the stream flows, which means that once the trees are planted the water-use is committed.

Community experiences of water scarcity: Timber plantations have impacted on communities in a number of ways. Firstly, timber plantations cover 1.7 million hectares of land in the high rainfall belt, and about 40% of this land is claimed by communities as their ancestral land, and rightfully theirs. Secondly, communities living downstream of plantations find that their water supply often dries up and they have no

water.

Timber plantations and other invasive alien plants: Many of the species used in plantations such as some pines, eucalyptus and black wattle, are highly invasive, and South Africa has a huge problem with invasive plants taking over our natural landscapes and using vast quantities of water resources. Recent research indicate that under current conditions the amount of South Africa's water being lost to the expansion of alien invasive species could rise from its current estimate of 3% to over 16%.

Climate Change Predictions for South Africa and the double burden of clean development mechanisms using plantations as carbon sinks: The clean development mechanism is one of the more controversial climate change mitigation strategies which enables trading based on carbon sequestration or the sink solution, whereby carbon emitting industries in the North can continue or expand if the equivalent amount of carbon is sunk somewhere else, for instance in a plantation. Using timber as carbon sinks have been described by some authors as trading water for carbon, whilst other studies conclude that where plantations could cause or intensify water shortages, that this factor should be explicitly addressed when considering carbon sequestration programs. Indeed many organisations complain that carbon sequestration programmes often result in people from developing countries “paying twice” for climate change – firstly, with the climate change itself, and secondly with the often devastating impacts that are associated with development projects such as tree plantations and large dams.

Pulp and paper industry: Another factor to be included in the consideration of timber and water use is the amount of water used and polluted through the pulp and paper processing mills. Linked to this is the wasteful use of paper around the world where global use has increased five times in 40 years.

Conclusion

The intention of the report is to share with you just how thirsty alien trees are and to try and give you an idea of how vast the plantations are in terms of land area, and the size of the problem with respect to the shortage of available water that this generation is facing. With respect to climate change, the paper has argued that the costs specifically in terms of water use and biodiversity are too great and that timber plantations should not be expanded further, and indeed where possible, removed, and that other forms of carbon sequestration, such as increasing organic soil concentrations and promoting grassland health, are preferable.

By Liane Greeff , EcoDoc Africa, e-mail: liane@kingsley.co.za,
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- RSPO: The impossible “greening” of the palm oil business

Over the past few decades, oil palm plantations have rapidly spread throughout Asia,

Africa and Latin America, where millions of hectares have already been planted and millions more are planned for the next few years. These plantations are causing increasingly serious problems for local peoples and their environment, including social conflict and human rights violations. In spite of this, a number of actors – national and international – continue to actively promote this crop, against a background of growing opposition at the local level.

It is within this context that a voluntary certification scheme has emerged – the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil- with the aim of ensuring consumers that the palm oil they consume –in foodstuffs, soap, cosmetics or fuel- has been produced in a “sustainable” manner.

Given the importance of this issue, WRM has produced a new briefing: “RSPO: The ‘greening’ of the dark palm oil business”, available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/briefings/RSPO.pdf>

As the briefing states, the major flaw of the RSPO is that it tries to make sustainable what is inherently unsustainable: a product obtained from large scale monocultures of mostly alien palm trees, which have severe impacts on water, soil, wildlife, forests, livelihoods as well as on human health, provoking displacement and leading to human rights violations.

A recent Court decision in Malaysia helps to illustrate the difference between the stated aims of the RSPO and on-the-ground reality. This month, the Kayan native community of Long Teran Kanan on the Tinjar river in the Malaysian part of Borneo won an important legal battle against the Sarawak state government and IOI Pelita, a subsidiary of Malaysian oil palm producer IOI - a founding and leading member of the RSPO. (1)

The Court declared the land leases used by IOI "null and void" as they had been issued by the Sarawak state government in an illegal and unconstitutional way. In the light of this decision it is important to know that, according to IOI, the RSPO had found that the company "had acted responsibly for the management of land in Sarawak".

The above means that, in the absence of a 12-year long legal case brought up by a local community and in the absence of a Court decision, IOI's activities would have been “greened” by the RSPO and the communities affected would have received no compensation at all.

WRM's briefing explains that the RSPO does not even ensure the conservation of forests. On the contrary, RSPO legalizes past, present and future destruction of all types of forests, with the exception of those defined as “primary forests” or as “high conservation value habitats”. All the others can be “sustainably” bulldozed, planted to oil palm and receive RSPO certification.

In relation to local peoples' rights, the RSPO criteria do not ensure sufficient safeguards against the further expansion of oil palm plantations over their territories, which will deprive them of their lands and means of livelihoods, while at the same time impacting on their health.

As respects to soils, water and biodiversity, the RSPO will only serve to disguise the inevitable impacts of oil palm plantation management on these three crucial resources, while forest destruction will add further CO2 emissions to climate change.

The problem with the RSPO is that it conveys the message that palm oil can be certified as “sustainable”. Confronted with that claim, the only possible response from anyone who knows something about the impacts of large-scale oil palm monocultures is that RSPO certification is a fraud.

It is quite clear that the only palm oil that could truly claim to be ecologically sustainable is the one produced by local communities in Western Africa –where oil palm is a native species- from natural palm stands. Small scale plantations outside the species’ native habitat –such as in the case of Bahia in Brazil where it is part of the culture of Afrobrazilians- have also proven to be socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable.

However, most of the oil traded internationally –even from Western Africa- comes from large-scale monoculture oil palm plantations that result in widespread social and environmental impacts. As with plantations of other trees –such as eucalyptus and pines- the problem is not the species planted but the way and scale in which they are established. To pretend that palm oil produced from such plantations can be certified as sustainable is clearly an impossible task.

(1) “Borneo natives win class action suit against Malaysian oil palm giant”, BRIMAS Media Release, 31 March 2010, http://www.illegal-logging.info/item_single.php?it_id=4323&it=news, disseminated by Bruno Manser Fund, Basel / Switzerland, e-mail: bmf@bmf.ch

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- Brasil: Outrage over killing of local man by Fibria Celulose’s guards

On 16 March 2010, Henrique de Souza Pereira, 24-years old, was killed by a team of guards of the private ‘security’ company hired by Fibria, former Aracruz Celulose and partner of Stora Enso in the Veracel Celulose company.

They alleged that Henrique was stealing wood in an area of the company with eucalyptus trees and that he had responded ‘*aggressively*’ when he was requested to leave. Henrique’s father Osvaldo Pereira Bezerra was accompanying his son and during the incident, the security force broke his arm. Henrique eventually died of his wounds since after shooting him, the security force left the area and returned with an ambulance only after 40 minutes.

As the press release of the Socio-Environmental Forum of the Extreme South of Bahia and the Alert against the Green Desert Network recalls, Henrique was “one of the innumerable neighbours of the extensive eucalyptus areas who are trying to survive, fenced inside small properties. Another murder happened in 2007 when Antônio Joaquim dos Santos, geraizeiro [traditional inhabitant of the Cerrado region],

was killed by the Security force of V&M Florestal when he was collecting firewood in an area with eucalyptus from V&M Florestal. It is noteworthy that both V&M Florestal as well Fibria had at the moment that these incidents happened the international FSC certificate that affirms to the consumer that the production comes from a “*socially beneficial forest management*”.

The statement adds that “in the Extreme South of Bahia and in the north of Espírito Santo, tens of local people, landless workers and especially quilombolas [Afro-Brazilians] are being criminalized and persecuted, supposedly because of ‘stealing’ wood of the company from lands that have always belonged collectively to these communities and that always guaranteed their subsistence. On November 11, 2009, the state government of Espírito Santo carried out in the quilombola community of São Domingos a big police action with 130 armed police men with rifles and sub-machine guns, dogs and horses, arresting 39 quilombolas”.

The root of the conflict remains unsolved. While big plantation companies like Fibria continue receiving support and even public funds from the authorities to expand their land area to plant eucalyptus monoculture –Fibria presently occupies more than 1 million hectares in Brazil- the agrarian land reform and the demarcation of quilombola, indigenous, peasant and geraizeira lands keep being past over.

The concerns expressed in the press release are more than relevant: “In the face of what happened, one may ask: what is this social and economic development that destroys the life of local inhabitants? That ignores the rights of communities and destroys the hope of the people? It is unacceptable that a company with these practices can obtain supposed ‘sustainability’ seals such as FSC and Cerflor, besides the many ‘sustainability ratings’.”

Based on the press release "Armed security force of Fibria (Aracruz) kills local villager in Bahia", Sócio-Environmental Fórum of the Extreme South of Bahia and the Alert against the Green Desert Network, March 23, 2010

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CLIMATE CHANGE

- Bolivia: a peoples' conference on climate change - a forum for changing course

Following the resounding and anticipated failure of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change held in Copenhagen in December 2009, the president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, has taken the initiative of calling another type of summit meeting in search of solutions. The World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth will be held from 19 to 22 April 2010, in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba (<http://cmpcc.org/>).

It is expected that some 10,000 people will attend, mainly members of social organizations and movements, although there will be official delegations from countries all over the world.

It will be possible to participate either personally or virtually in the 17 working groups organized for the event. Some of the groups are focused on classical issues such as “Forests,” “Adaptation,” “The Kyoto Protocol,” “Funding.” But there are other issues that surely reveal the intention of taking a different path from that followed so far by the Climate Change Convention in seeking solutions, such as “Dangers of carbon trading,” “Climate debt,” “Climate Justice Tribunal,” “Referendum on Climate Change,” “The Rights of Mother Earth,” “Structural Causes.”

Furthermore, there is a long list of self-organized events that reveal a wide diversity of confronting ways for addressing the problem. Critical analyses on the interests surrounding the commodification of nature are to be found, like those regarding forests in mechanisms such as REDD. There are those who state that we are facing a crisis of civilization and that we must seek alternative paradigms, defending the importance of peasant agriculture and food sovereignty as a way of addressing climate change, involving the very active participation of women as agents for proposals and change – in organizations such as the World March of Women, GenderCC, National Confederation of Peasant and Indigenous Women of Bolivia, Community Feminist Network, Movement of Peasant Women, National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI), to name but a few.

This peoples’ summit opens up the possibility for other voices and other proposals, silenced at official events, to be heard with greater force. The recent Climate Change Convention negotiations held in Bonn in April agreed that the new text for negotiation under discussion shall take into account proposals made before 26 April 2010. This means that there is time to include those arising from the Peoples’ Conference.

This conference is a grass-roots meeting in a Latin American country, where the indigenous people have been bled and plundered for over 500 years by colonialism, neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism but that have also fought and won an incredible battle for water and for their dignity and that have put into government the first indigenous president of the continent. It is a significant venue to transform this climate crisis we have been sunk into by the prevailing western model of civilization, into an opportunity for change. A change that will return us to our roots, to harmony with Mother Nature, among the brothers and sisters who live on Her.

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- Global Sign-On Campaign against REDD

Criticism of the ineffective and unjust solutions to climate change which under carbon compensation and trading pretend to continue business as usual, are mounting amid global civil society.

Affiliates from the Durban Group for Climate Justice - an international network of independent organisations, individuals and people's movements - draw attention to the dangers of REDD including land grabs and the inclusion of REDD in the carbon market and request urgent solidarity in a new statement rejecting Schemes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) currently

being formulated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – and already piloted in schemes such as the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the United Nations REDD Programme. The new pollution licenses to be generated by REDD are designed in a way that obstructs the only workable solution to climate change: keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground.

They urge to sign onto the REDD Statement ahead of the World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, 19-22 April 2010, so that the voices of those opposing REDD can speak with global support.

The statement can be signed at <http://www.durbanclimatejustice.org/>

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