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We would like to thank everyone who took part in our recent survey on the WRM bulletin. Your answers and comments will help us improve what we believe to be a valuable communication tool in support of the struggles waged by communities and peoples around the world to defend their territories and nature.

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- **From Durban back to Rio+20: What about our agenda?**

As expected, the climate conference in Durban has not taken any significant decision in terms of combating the climate crisis. Maybe in 2020 a new binding agreement will be signed. 2020? According to the network of organizations and movements called

Climate Justice Now, this constitutes a “crime against humanity”. It seems as if those governments who are the most responsible for the climate crisis have given up any consideration for the people who have become victims of the crisis, those who are affected or seriously threatened by climate change, especially poor women.

But we know and have seen how those governments do have a lot of consideration for their own interests, their wealth, for their transnational companies and financial institutions. They continue denying their historical responsibility for climate change, and continue polluting, even more than before, but point their fingers at countries like China, India and Brazil, recently more significant polluters. The peoples, both in the North as well as in the South, and even many mainly Southern governments, are just observers of the conferences. They are not consulted, while the consequences will be huge for the big majority of the world population that lives in the global South and that has an insignificant responsibility for the climate crisis.

The next international meeting point for governments to discuss climate and the environment will be the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012, 20 years after the 1992 conference in the same city. In 1992, the environmental crisis was given a more central place in the international debate. After 20 years, the climate issue, and in broader terms, the environmental issue, has definitely lost priority for Northern governments. It seems to be only of interest to them if it can benefit their companies, their banks, their economic growth, including offsetting their pollution through REDD+ projects, falsely supposed to conserve forests. Not surprisingly, Rio+20 actually puts the word “economy” – *not environment, climate, nature or people* – at the center of the debate. And to make it sound good, and not like “business as usual”, they call it not just “economy” but “*green economy*”.

In December in Durban, you could hear the following kind of observation among civil society groups and social movements, commenting on the official conference: it is time that we build and decide on *our own agenda*, instead of following the agenda of the governments and their conferences, which do not lead to solutions, only to more frustrations, besides corporate profits. Maybe this idea of an “own agenda” could be a way of dealing with and even influencing in a more fruitful way the conferences and the governments.

One way of building this kind of people's agenda by organizations and movements could be, instead of spending time, money and energy in going to and attending the conferences, a decision to invest time, money and energy in meeting at the local and regional level with communities to discuss and analyze what is happening at these conferences and contribute to discussing actions at the local, regional, national and even international level in order to put pressure on the governments. Maybe such a coordinated effort in many countries all over the world, in the North and in the South, before, during and after the conferences, could make governments more willing to consider listening to the people and their demands.

And more concretely for Rio+20 and for the participating organizations, instead of going to the conferences and organizing their often interesting but mostly fragmented and separated agenda of activities, let's work more together towards a joint agenda, which should include concrete support for the struggles of people in and around Rio de Janeiro against destructive projects, in order to put pressure on our governments

for real solutions for the climate and related crises. Maybe such a proposal could involve many more people in our mobilizations, as well as being much more effective in terms of influencing our governments. And let's continue this spirit of cooperation beyond Rio+20, building a stronger movement.

This proposal is being spread by the call to *Mobilize Together Towards Rio+20 and Beyond*, launched last month by organizations, networks and social movements involved in the building of the *Peoples' Summit for social and environmental justice, against the commodification of life and nature in defense of the commons*, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 18-23, 2012, parallel to the Rio+20 conference (see www.wrm.org.uy/RIO+20/Mobilize_together.html for the complete text of this call).

We need to be creative, to find ways of more effectively challenging unequal power relations, including unequal gender relations, in the world. Social movements teach us that to change unequal power relations, movement building, with women and men, is an essential tool. And it is possible to build a strong and powerful movement, especially if we realize that women and men all over the world are affected, although in different ways, by the profit-driven practices of corporations and other actors including states, backed by financial institutions and governments. With a stronger and more common voice, it will become less and less easy for our governments not to consider or not to listen to the people.

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COMMUNITIES, FORESTS AND PLANTATIONS

- Chile: Forest fires and repression, the legacy of the industrial tree plantation model

The new year got off to a fiery start in Chile, as seen in the national and international news reports of the devastating forest fires raging across various regions of the country. These include the regions of Araucanía and Bío Bío, in central-southern Chile, where there are more than three million hectares of industrial plantations of exotic tree species. Over two million hectares of these plantations – primarily made up of pine and eucalyptus trees – are owned by the companies Arauco and Mininco, and have also been hit by the wildfires.

For defenders of the model of large-scale monoculture plantations of fast-growing tree species, Chile is a “star” example. The plantation industry has been heavily promoted by the Chilean state not only through large subsidies, but also with strong military support. The industry needs and uses this support to deal with disputes with Mapuche indigenous people that have been ignited over land ownership, since the plantations have expanded into ancestral Mapuche land.

In addition to the land conflict with the Mapuche, large-scale tree plantations have led to a long string of disastrous impacts. There have been repeated reports of the clearing of native forests for their replacement by plantations, resulting in the loss of medicinal plants and sources of food, as well as wildlife; the enormous amounts of water required by these fast-growing tree species have affected surface and

underground water resources and caused serious droughts; ecosystems have been polluted by the widespread use of chemical pesticides; rural communities have been effectively “fenced in” by plantations; rural roads have been destroyed by heavy machinery and trucks; plantations have taken over land previously used for livestock raising and agriculture, with a consequent loss of food sovereignty; they have invaded and occupied sacred sites; and they have contributed to an increase in rural emigration and poverty.

Now the outbreak of forest fires has demonstrated the fragility of the monoculture model. The director of Mapuexpress, Alfred Seguel, says that the responsibility for the rash of fires lies with the plantation companies, because the introduction of exotic species like pine and eucalyptus has created veritable deserts. Seguel also stressed that the potential fire hazards posed by plantations are increased by the presence of dead pine trees that have fallen prey to the Sirex wood wasp (*Sirex noctilio*) – and it just so happens that the areas where fires have broken out are the same areas that have been hit by wood wasp infestations.

In spite of all this evidence, the government's reaction has been to step up its support for the plantation companies, blaming the tragedy on Mapuche organizations and unleashing a wave of repression against them.

The Ethical Commission Against Torture (CECT-Chile) sent an open letter to President Sebastián Piñera to express its concern over the violent police operations being conducted against Mapuche communities, and particularly the fact that they are being carried out under the Anti-Terrorist Law, Law 18.134, created during the Pinochet military regime to repress opposition to the dictatorship. The Commission maintains that this law “does not comply with international standards in regards to human rights and obstructs minimum guarantees of due process,” and that “the arbitrary and discriminatory use of this legislation over the past decade has served to stigmatize the Mapuche people.”

The industrial tree plantation empire is collapsing, declared Alfredo Seguel. And like any empire, when faced with crisis, it responds with violence and the criminalization of protest. But the Mapuche people will keep up their resistance, in defence of their ancestral land.

ANAMURI, a Chilean indigenous women's organization, is calling for solidarity with the peasant community of Quillón in the Bío Bío region. The community is surrounded by pine and eucalyptus plantations, and people's houses and crops have been wiped out by the wildfires. To make a contribution, write to secretariag@anamuri.cl, visit the ANAMURI website at <http://www.anamuri.cl>, or call +562 672 0019

This article is based on information from the article “Chile: la caída del imperio forestal”, Alfredo Seguel, January 2012, Mapuexpress.net, <http://www.mapuexpress.net/?act=news&id=8057>; and the Letter to President Piñera from the Ethical Commission Against Torture (CECT-Chile), January 2012, <http://notascect.wordpress.com/2012/01/09/carta-al-presidente-pinera-2/>

- Brazil: The definition of forest – another front for resistance and reconquest

The year 2011 was declared the International Year of Forests by the United Nations. Major international events such as the climate conference in South Africa and the upcoming Rio+20 summit in Brazil and biodiversity conference in India have also contributed to making forests a key issue on the global agenda, as well as the subject of high-profile public relations campaigns.

Given the obvious importance of forests for life on the planet, numerous statements and declarations have aimed at raising international public awareness of the urgent need to protect forests. The provision of water, food, wood, medicines, etc.; the regulation of the water and climate cycles; the decomposition and reproduction of life – the defence of forests, as a campaign slogan, has universal appeal. Who could be against the defence of forests? These are a type of discursive campaign that seeks to construct a “we” that simultaneously encompasses the source and target of the campaign's message.

The FAO and UN campaign to defend forests has been joined by, among numerous others, the World Bank's Forest Protection Programme, British Petroleum's New Forests in Brazil and Scotland, and other initiatives sponsored by Petrobras, Fibria, Veracel, Suzano, Vale do Rio Doce, Plantar, and so on. In addition to the “sustainable forest management” initiatives of pulp and paper and green steel industries, and the WWF's New Generations Plantations Project, an international alliance called the Diálogo Florestal (Forest Dialogue) (1) has been created in Brazil, bringing together private companies, scientific institutions and certification bodies, as well as environmental organizations.

Any internet search turns up a huge number of links on the protection and promotion of forests. What is not made clear, in initial searches and in the titles of the linked web pages, is what is understood, and what is meant to be understood, by the word “forest”. Because this is supposedly such an obvious concept, the question is rarely posed: What exactly is a forest, anyway?

According to FAO, whose definition of forests is used as the guideline for international climate and biodiversity conferences, a forest is “land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ.” (2)

The Kyoto Protocol and other international climate-related documents use the FAO definition to define the “forests” that should be defended and promoted, for example, through the flexibility mechanisms established for the countries of the North to fulfil their emissions reduction commitments, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). In these contexts:

“Forest” is a minimum area of land of 0.05-1.0 hectares with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10-30 percent with trees with the potential to reach a minimum height of 2-5 metres at maturity in situ. A forest may consist either of closed forest formations where trees of various storeys and undergrowth cover a high proportion of the ground or open forest. Young natural stands and all plantations

which have yet to reach a crown density of 10-30 percent or tree height of 2-5 meters are included under forest, as are areas normally forming part of the forest area which are temporarily unstocked as a result of human intervention such as harvesting or natural causes but which are expected to revert to forest. (3)

For Claudentina, a quilombola woman (descendant of escaped African slaves) in her 60s from the community of Angelim in Sapê do Norte, in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, the forest is “a place where people used to go to find fruits and seeds, vines, wood, plants, roots; to hunt and fish. It was also a place to practice our faith.” Claudentina's definition of forest is based on her experience with the Atlantic Forest or Mata Atlântica in the region where she lives. It is also based on her memories of the past, because, since the age of 20, she has witnessed the clearing of her forest and its replacement with the tree plantations established by companies like Aracruz-Fibria and Bahia-Sul Suzano.

When compared to Claudentina's description, the official definitions of “forest” are clearly insufficient and formal, since they frame the term as an “area of land” of a certain size, with certain characteristics, also quantitative, in terms of trees at different stages of growth. What species of trees are these? What are their uses? Who does this area belong to? Are there conflicts or threats? The official definitions also fail to make any reference to other forms of life that inhabit the forests: mushrooms, plants other than trees, animals, people, and also the rich immaterial universe of Claudentina's faith.

An important key for the interpretation of hegemonic semantics: the FAO definition that is the basis for forest-related international dialogue implicitly establishes that “forest” can also (or mainly) be interpreted and co-defined as a large-scale plantation of a single, fast-growing tree species. This underlying meaning in the official definition makes it possible to channel large shares of financial investment, public and private policies and scientific research towards industrial plantations.

In Brazil, while the powerful agribusiness lobby is tearing apart the Forest Code (see box) in Congress, the key objective of government policies is the expansion of the “forest stock” of eucalyptus and pine from the current 6.5 million hectares to 12 million hectares, primarily to supply the pulp and steel mills already installed in Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Bahia and planned for Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Maranhão, Rio de Janeiro and Pará. The pretexts are numerous: to “recover degraded areas” in Bahia, “neutralize the carbon footprint of ‘mega-events’” in Rio de Janeiro, “prevent a forestry blackout” in São Paulo, “create a forestry centre” in Maranhão and Pará, promote the “clean development mechanism” in Minas Gerais and foster a “forestry economy” in Rio Grande do Sul. The underlying reason is much more straightforward: to create the symbolic and social, financial, environmental and legal conditions for the promotion of plantations of fast-growing eucalyptus trees.

Claudentina's testimony demonstrates that the Forest Code is more than just another piece of legislation. It evokes for younger, “post-eucalyptus” generations the meaning of the gallery forests that once grew along the banks of rivers and streams that no longer exist – forests that the Forest Code is meant to protect. It evokes the memory of the Murici lagoon where people used to fish in Angelim, which is now

completely dried up and covered over after 40 years of eucalyptus planting by Aracruz-Fibra.

Claudentina's memories are not merely a recollection of the past. Rather, they serve as a key element in a discourse of resistance aimed at the future reconquest and reconversion of her people's territory.

This is a summary of the report "Que é isto – uma floresta? Marketing verde e o código de Claudentina como resistência discursiva" (What is a Forest? Green marketing and Claudentina's code as discursive resistance) by Marcelo Calazans, FASE-ES/Rede Deserto Verde. The full text in Portuguese is available at: http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Marketing_verde_e_o_codigo_de_Claudentina.pdf

(1) www.dialogoflorestal.org.br.

(2) FAO. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010, Annex 2. Terms and definitions used in FRA 2010.

(3) Decision 11/CP-7. Annex 1 (a) adopted in Marrakech.

What is the Forest Code?

The current Forest Code is a 1965 law which establishes, among other requirements, that landowners in Brazil must preserve a certain percentage of native forest on their properties as so-called Legal Reserves. The percentage ranges from 20% in the Mata Atlântica region to 80% in most of the Amazon region. In addition, the code establishes the category of Permanent Preservation Areas where forests must remain intact along the banks of rivers and on the sides and tops of hills and mountains. With regard to rivers, while the requirement varies in accordance with the width of the river, a minimum 30-metre strip of forest must be maintained on both sides. (For more information see WRM Bulletin 166.)

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- Industrial monoculture tree plantations in South Africa: The culture of traditional healers versus the culture of consumption

In the reports about the effects of industrial tree plantations of eucalyptus, pine or oil palm on peoples' lives, negative impacts such as conflicts over land tenure, depletion of water resources, lack of work opportunities and destruction of local economies are most frequently mentioned. Specific impacts on fundamental aspects of people's culture are usually mentioned less or not at all, although the consequences can be tremendous when the culture of a people is strongly linked to their identity, self-esteem, well-being and ultimately to their survival.

This is the case with traditional healing in South Africa. Because of the expansion of industrial tree plantations, traditional healers in Bushbuckridge in northern South Africa suffer from loss of and restricted access to areas with indigenous tree species

used for traditional medicine, which is fundamental for people's health and well-being. In Bushbuckridge, the traditional healers' organization has its own centre in the middle of the community, intensively frequented by the community members, showing the importance of their practices for the community. Due to the lack of access to certain indigenous tree species, the traditional healing culture is under threat. The healers were never consulted, as is true for most of the affected communities as a whole, as to whether or not they wanted the industrial tree plantations (see the testimony of a traditional healer at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHZ2t4CMkZY&list=UUt5J0iXFPrUH3sYHcw4bz_g&index=8&feature=plcp).

Actually, in South Africa and in many other countries in the South, corporations that promote industrial monoculture tree plantations not only destroy local cultures, they try to introduce a new concept of culture: the culture of consumption, carefully “wrapped” in a discourse that uses nice words like “development”, “progress” and “job creation”. However, Stora Enso's Latin American director Otávio Pontes, for example, in a 2006 video about the impacts of Stora Enso activities in Brazil called It Is Sweden That Is Too Small, makes a very clear defense of the “culture of consumption” when he states, “Consumption of paper is a way of measuring the level of education of a population. Therefore the higher the consumption of paper, the higher the level of education of the people” (see www.wrm.org.uy/videos).

This culture of consumption that, according to this paper industry executive, makes people ever more educated when they consume more paper, actually has little to do with education and/or literacy, even if education is considered in a strict sense, e.g. the consumption of books for the important activity of reading, studying, gathering information and knowledge. The majority of paper consumption is for wrapping and disposable paper (see Mountains of Paper, Mounting Injustice at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVDQc-r_Wb8 or www.wrm.org.uy). Moreover, consumption is concentrated in urban centres far away from the affected communities, and strongly linked to the industrial profit- and consumption-oriented society that has been leading the world to the present scenario of increasing climate change, hunger and death that is affecting the majority of the world population – precisely the non-consuming part – as well as nature itself.

The culture that traditional healers promote and are part of is based neither on consumption nor on false propaganda of the type that Stora Enso and other corporations use for their own and their shareholders' benefit. The traditional healers have strong roots in the territory and base their healing on respect for and knowledge of nature and they aim to promote community well-being and solidarity. It is neither about ever increasing consumption, nor about profits. While their practices are being threatened, their presence has become even more important, considering the problems faced by communities fenced in by large-scale plantations when they try to oppose these plantations and conserve their culture.

This motivated Geosphere, a local NGO in Mpumalanga, northern South Africa, to work actively together with and support traditional healers and their organizations in the struggle against the expansion of industrial tree plantations. Traditional healers participate, for instance, in the Water Caucus, a broad non-governmental coalition of

NGOs and community organizations concerned with the conservation of water resources for people's needs. Their concern over industrial tree plantations and their expansion is obvious, since plantations in South Africa, promoted mainly by a few large corporations, have been known for decades as a proven cause of depletion of water resources.

The involvement of traditional healers in South Africa where communities are resisting and struggling against industrial tree plantations has proven crucial, as is also being shown in many other places. It is one more fundamental element that can create solidarity and build a movement among affected communities. It shows once again that people need to be respected, and that culture and education have nothing to do with ever increasing and excessive paper consumption.

By Winfridus Overbeek, WRM, information obtained during a field trip in South Africa and Swaziland carried out in December 2011, with the local organization Geasphere.

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- Philippines: The increasing menace of oil palm plantations in Palawan

Palawan, located between the Sulu and South China seas, is one of the most beautiful islands of the Philippine archipelago. The island is 450 kilometers long and 40 kilometers at its widest portion. Along its gorgeous beaches - framed by mangroves and by the last remaining lowland evergreen forest - coral reefs are home to unique marine biodiversity.

Of the approximately 900,000 inhabitants of Palawan, around 20 percent are indigenous peoples who belong to three main ethnic groups - Tagbanua, Palawan and Batak - whose main livelihood is upland agriculture (rice, cassava, colocasia, corn, banana, coconut, etc.), hunting and gathering, and commercial collection of, non-timber forest products (see Bulletin N° 165).

The Provincial Government of the island boasts of Palawan being "a paradise like no others". And indeed, besides its highly diverse forest, the place is home to seven protected areas, a declared "Game Refuge and Bird Sanctuary" since 1967 and a "Mangrove Reserve" since 1981. Since 1990 the whole Province of Palawan has been declared a Man and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The province has also two World Heritage Sites: the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park and the Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park, of which the Subterranean River has been recently voted as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

However, such gorgeous scenery and unique biodiversity faces the risk of being jeopardized and plundered by industrial activities.

Mining, denounced in previous WRM bulletins (see 165 and 172), has become a big issue in Palawan. The enormous threats posed by mining have raised widespread opposition that has mounted to a strong campaign which up to now has collected over four million signatures, demanding the stop of mining in Palawan and other island ecosystems (see <http://no2mininginpalawan.com/>). On the other hand,

indigenous peoples through their own network (Aldaw Indigenous Network (Ancestral Land/Domain Watch)) have also started their own online campaign both against mining and oil palm expansion (see <http://www.petitiononline.com/PA2010/petition.html>).

In fact, indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers are now being threatened by the expansion of industrial oil palm plantations which the Provincial Government started to promote in certain areas of Palawan in 2003 as part of the nationwide target that allocated 20,000 ha to be planted with oil palm in Palawan until 2011.

Despite the fact that in many other places – including neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia - industrial oil palm plantations have proven to impact negatively on the environment and the local communities, the local government of Palawan established the Palawan Palm Oil Industry Development Council in 2004 to make Palawan one of the oil palm producing provinces in Asia.

In a report from Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) (Oil Palm Expansion in South East Asia. Trends and implications for local communities and indigenous peoples; <http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/11/oil-palm-expansion-southeast-asia-2011-low-res.pdf>), Jo Villanueva gives an in-depth description of how the oil palm industry is being shaped in Palawan as part of the development of plantation crops with private investors and processing plants. In some provinces, oil palm expansion is already competing with other native palms such as the buri palms (*Corypha elata*) - a popular basketry material whose trunk contains edible starch while its leaf-bud or heart of palm trees (ubud) is also edible raw or cooked, as well as the kernels of the nuts.

In other cases oil palm plantations are taking over cultivated lands and overlap with ancestral domain territories converting forest and indigenous fallow land (benglay) to oil palm plantations. This reduces the number of rotational areas needed for the traditional agricultural swidden cycle which requires that areas used for cultivation be left to fallow for several years before they regain the soil nutrients and vegetation cover. When no sufficient areas are available for rotation, the sustainability of the indigenous farming system is jeopardized (Novellino, D. 2011*) Whenever large areas planted with diverse crops become mono-cropped lands they need chemical inputs like insecticides and pesticides that deplete nutrients from the soil and release carbon dioxide.

Oil palm expansion has led to massive land buying and selling, encroachment on indigenous communities' lands, deforestation – like in the municipality of Quezon where tropical forest is being converted into oil palm plantations – and land conversion with impacts on the food sovereignty of local communities (see ALDAW video <http://vimeo.com/16570512>)

In south Palawan, the Philippine-Singaporean-Malaysian joint venture Palawan Palm & Vegetable Oil Mills Inc. (PPVOMI) is the main actor of oil palm plantations and sells the whole production to its sister company Agumil Philippines Inc. (API), which will establish and operate an oil mill in Maasin, in the province of Brooke's Point for the processing of crude oil palm and palm kernel. At least 70% of its production will be exported to Singapore, China and Malaysia.

It is estimated that API would convert more than 8,000 hectares of agricultural land into oil palm plantations in the Municipalities of Brooke's Point, Sofronio Spaniola and Quezon.

Other plantations belong to contract growers of API – either cooperatives or individuals. Also the construction company Cavite Ideal International Construction and Development Corporation (Cavdeal) involved in the road-building project in South Palawan has turned into the palm oil business and has purchased about 5,100 hectares in the Municipalities of Brookes' Point and Sofronio Spaniola while the Filipino enterprise COH has purchased a total of 700 hectares in southern Palawan, also for the establishment of oil palm plantations.

Overall, the municipality of Española has the highest percentage of land under oil palm plantations though they are expanding to other municipalities such as Brooke's Point, Bataraza, Rizal, Quezon, etc.

The Philippines-based advocacy campaign network of indigenous peoples ALDAW has identified the peril of the expansion of oil palm companies and is making a call for the implementation of more restrictive regulations on oil palm expansion to halt deforestation, habitat destruction, food scarcity, and violation of indigenous peoples' rights.

ALDAW invited WRM to make a field trip in November to the municipalities of Española, Quezon and Brooke's Point in order to witness the increasing impacts of oil palm expansion. In our visit we met several members of Palawan indigenous communities in the village of Irray II in the municipality of Española who complained that their coconut palm orchards were being destroyed by a pest that bored large networks of tiny tunnels into the coconut palm's trunk and started to attack their coconut groves after oil palm plantations expanded in the area. Coconut is very important for local livelihood since it provides multiple products and the dried endocarp (copra) is sold to obtain cash. The destruction of coconut palms is a menace to the household based economy and it will surely increase rural poverty in the affected areas. We could see the bug on one of the yellowish leaves of a decaying coconut palm, a red insect that has been identified by Aldaw as the Red Palm Weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*), native of south Asia. The insect might find it easier to attack coconut trees than oil palm trees sprayed with pesticide. FPP's study reports that in Irray alone more than 1,000 coconut trees belonging to twenty farmers were affected.

In the municipality of Brooke's Point, the local government of Ipilan has issued a resolution on November 11, 2011 (Resolution N° 51) requesting the Municipal Government (Sangguniang Bayan) of Brooke's Point, the Provincial Government (Sangguniang Panlalawigan), the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other concerned agencies “to take immediate measures countering the negative impact of oil palm plantations and halting the expansion of such development schemes within the jurisdiction of Barangay Ipilan and neighboring communities” on the grounds that in some locations oil palm development “is already competing and taking over cultivated areas (e.g. rice fields), which are sustaining local self-sufficiency”, it is “also expanding into indigenous fallow land (benglay), thus adversely affecting the

sustainability of the Palawan farming system (uma)”; and “the herbicides used in oil palm plantations are playing a tool on local biodiversity, causing the dead of several species of birds, as it has been confirmed by farmers and indigenous peoples”.

Oil palm expansion has also serious implications for indigenous peoples' access to their ancestral lands not only because toxic chemical inputs, used in industrial oil palm plantations, would pollute watersheds and water supplies but also because rent agreements and land leases with oil palm companies lead to the loss of access and control over their land and its natural resources.

The resolution acknowledges that “there is scarcity of public records showing the processes and procedures (‘rent agreements’ and ‘land leases’) leading to the issuance of land conversion permits and environmental clearances to palm oil companies”; “members of indigenous communities have ‘rented’ portions of their land to the oil [palm] companies, without having a clear understanding of the nature of such ‘agreements’ and without receiving clear contracts countersigned by the companies”.

Oil palm is being promoted in the name of “development”. But whose development? Quoting ALDAW “when lowland farmers in Palawan talk about ‘agricultural development’ they are mainly concerned on how to improve their wet-rice cultivation and find a steady market for their coconuts and other minor farming produces. When upland indigenous people talk about ‘agricultural development’ they are referring to the availability of sufficient forest land to be converted into swidden fields for upland rice and other crops (sweet potatoes, cassava, taro, maize, sorghum, etc)”.

By their sheer nature industrial oil palm plantations are not ecologically sound as long as they deplete biodiversity, and they are certainly not a sustainable livelihood option for small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples.

Opposition to oil palm expansion is mounting in Palawan, and a new international campaign will be launched soon to stop further expansion of such plantations

By Raquel Núñez, WRM, raquelnu@wrn.org.uy, based on the field trip to Palawan led by the team of ALDAW INDIGENOUS NETWORK (Ancestral Land/Domain Watch) and background reports produced by Dario Novellino, of ALDAW.

(*) The Status Of Oil Palm Plantations On Palawan Island (The Philippines), by D. Novellino 2011. This paper has been submitted to Corporate Watch and it will be included in one of their forthcoming publications.

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- Oil palm plantations behind land-grabbing in Sierra Leone

During 11 years - from 1991 to 2002 - a harsh civil war fueled by the inequitable distribution of power and resources decimated the population of Sierra Leone. The country now faces a state of food insecurity and has become a net food importer attributed not only to the war but also to World Bank and IMF recipes. With the aim of fostering a market-based economy, those institutions imposed policies that curtailed

state agricultural programs and investments in agriculture.

Now the government is promoting the “Agriculture for Development” under the model of agribusiness, with larger and more mechanized farms and incentives for large-scale foreign agricultural investment especially in sugarcane and oil palm plantations for agrofuel. Several measures facilitate foreign investors' access to land such as a 10-year tax exemption on investments in tree crops.

The result is a land-grabbing process in Sierra Leone where farmland previously cultivated for food is being made conveniently available to big business, often in long-term leases to produce non-food products for export. The country report on Sierra Leone produced by The Oakland Institute (1) reveals that “about 500,000 ha have already been leased or contracted out to large-scale agricultural investors, mostly foreign” on the grounds that only 12 to 15 percent of the country's arable land is being “used” or “cultivated” - implying that the rest is available for investors.

However, as the report explains, 60 % of the arable land of Sierra Leone is occupied by the bush fallow farming system of smallholder farmers, where fields are cultivated for a few years until soil fertility is depleted, and then are left to fallow for 10 to 15 years. During that period bush fallows perform important functions including replenishment of soil nutrients that promote the re-growth of many plant and tree species thus conserving biodiversity, carbon sequestration, protection of watersheds and water resources. Bush fallows also provide firewood, wood for construction and tools, fodder for livestock, medicinal plants, bush yams, bush meat, wild fruits, all of them vital elements for the communities.

The great environmental, social and economic value of the bush fallow system is being dismantled by policies that allow big foreign companies to rush into Sierra Leone to try to make windfall profits. The Oakland Institute reports that Quifel Agribusiness (SL) Ltd. (subsidiary of Quifel Natural Resources, Portugal) has acquired 126,000 ha of primarily lowland farmland or bush fallow in the Port Loko District, in the eastern region of the country. The company focus is renewable energy and agribusiness, and it has a biodiesel plant in Brazil.

Three different land leases were signed in the Masimera Chiefdom, the Koya Chiefdom, and the LokoMassama Chiefdom, all of them for 49 years, with possible renewal for 20 years, at USD 5 per ha, rising each year up to USD 8 per ha. According to the Oakland Institute's report the three chiefdoms where Quifel lease areas are located are inhabited by smallholder farmers who cultivate rice in the lowland rice growing areas called bolilands as well as non-industrial oilpalm, cassava, sweet potatoes, pineapple, cocoyams, beans, maize, many different vegetables, mango, banana, plantain, papaya, coconut, orange, lemon and grapefruit. They produce food for subsistence as well as surplus to sell. When the smallholders farmers of the community of Petifu in LokoMassama Chiefdom saw their bush fallows being felled to clear the Quifel plot they staged a protest saying they had given up their fertile land on false pretenses.

Local “agents” engaged as “coordinators” are usually hired to negotiate leases with local communities, chiefs and landowners who are led to believe that they would obtain only benefits from the deals. Agreements lack transparency, potential affected

people have not been consulted and possible risks such as loss of farmland or negative environmental impacts are not even considered while no Environmental Social and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been conducted to quantify environmental impacts.

Quifel's promises of employment and other alleged "development" opportunities were the main reasons that landowners and chiefs say they agreed to the leases. However, there are no reported statements or documents indicating how many jobs will be created or whether those jobs can compensate for lost income and decreased food supplies. So far, employment opportunities have been extremely limited.

The company Sierra Leone Agriculture (CAPARO Renewable Agriculture Developments Ltd.) - focused on oil palm plantations for agrofuels, edible oil and soap -is another agro-investor in Sierra Leone studied by The Oakland Institute, with a lease on 43,000-46,000 ha for a projected oil palm plantation.

According to data provided by the company to the The Oakland Institute, the lease in Sierra Leone is for 45 years with possible renewal every 21 years, and it is for 43,000 ha where oil palm plantations would be established to produce palm oil for the local market. The project would involve mills and processing plants, allegedly creating 3,000 to 5,000 jobs. The Oakland Institute says this information has never been made public in the country.

Regarding women, the report identifies that they are "extremely vulnerable in the face of land negotiations. While women represent an extremely important part of the farming population and are vital contributors to food security, women have no legal title to land (although there are some exceptions). Because they are not landowners, women are generally not present at consultations with investors and, even if they are, they have no voice. In many cases, they are not even aware that the land they are cultivating is being leased. Not surprisingly, therefore, women are not entitled to a share of land rental fees, even when they lose their land."

At present there is a push for a rapid land tenure reform in Sierra Leone. The land reform process which is funded by the World Bank appears to be driven by a desire to facilitate large-scale agricultural investment. The Oakland Institute says that "There are concerns that the land tenure reform, by favoring investors, will overlook the rights of local peoples, particularly women. For example, civil society groups fear that foreign investment will displace women farmers who currently have no title to land and thus are not eligible for compensation from land leases."

Oil palm has been a traditional crop for many African communities but now it has become a menace in the hands of greedy corporations driven by the international demand for palm oil and agrofuels. However, awareness is rising. The NGO Green Scenery in Sierra Leone has denounced that small farmers who are losing their livelihoods to plantation owners are petitioning the government for renegotiation of the 40-year lease agreement of 16,000 acres of prime farmland with Socfin Agriculture Company Sierra Leone Ltd (Socfin SL), a subsidiary of the Belgian corporation, Socfin. The farmers argue that they had not been properly consulted and they were cheated with information on the lease agreement. They claim that

“compensation for plantation and annual land rent completely ridicules the value for loss of land and livelihood incomes of land owning families” (2). The claim has been faced with imprisonment and pending court trials.

You can join the protest action started by Rainforest Rescue at <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/mailalert/814?mt=1264> to stop SOCFIN plantation project and return the land to the farmers.

Article based on: (1) “Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa. Country Report: Sierra Leone”, The Oakland Institute, 2011, <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/understanding-land-investment-deals-africa-sierra-leone> ; (2) <http://www.greenscenery.org/index.php/component/content/article/32>).

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- Bolivia: Urgent action demanded to protect indigenous peoples living in isolation and situations of extreme vulnerability

On December 7 and 8, 2011, a meeting was held in the Amazonian city of Cobija, Bolivia, to assess the status of the rights of indigenous peoples living in isolation or in situations of extreme vulnerability in the Amazon and Gran Chaco regions, and to establish an action plan for the defence of their rights.

What follows is a summary of a report and reflections on the meeting written by Pablo Cingolani (the full text is available in Spanish at http://www.ecoportal.net/Temas_Especiales/Pueblos_Indigenas/Un_camino_hacia_la_proteccion_de_lo_s_pueblos_indigenas_en_aislamiento_de_Bolivia).

Over the last five years, in the framework of an impressive social and cultural mobilization, Bolivia has lived (and continues to live) through an era of changes. Today, like never before, the issue of the country's indigenous peoples – survivors of a genocide that began in the 16th century and an ethnocide that continues – is the subject of a debate that has been enriched and strengthened by a pluralistic human sensitivity, and with historical, present and future significance.

Sixty years ago, the nationalist process in Bolivia sought to integrate the indigenous peoples of the highlands and to dilute their identity through mestization and the creation of so-called agricultural syndicates. As for the indigenous peoples of the lowlands, their territories were subjected to a succession of tragic plans, over the course of decades, that implied the invasion and state/private control of their lands. Today, this conflict not only remains ongoing and unresolved, but has also become more ruthless, as it has been incorporated and creatively and contradictorily empowered in the new legal framework of rights – enshrined in the new Constitution – and in the permanent mobilization of social sectors that has marked the last decade of national life.

The meeting in Cobija, convened by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of

Bolivia (CIDOB), was attended by representatives of (almost) all of the stakeholders involved in the issue of peoples living in isolation and in situations of extreme vulnerability, including the national government, the Ombudsman's Office, regional branches of CIDOB, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, based in La Paz.

Numerous presentations and denunciations were heard about situations faced by peoples living in isolation, initial contact and extremely vulnerability. The focus of the meeting, however, was extensive discussion of the formulation of a minimum action plan for immediate and ongoing execution, in order to establish, for the first time in the country's democratic history, a visible and proactive agenda in defence of the rights of the most forgotten people of all.

The final declaration and plan of action recognized the urgent need for the adoption of a framework law for the defence and protection of indigenous peoples living in isolation, initial contact and a high degree of vulnerability. In this regard, the draft legislation developed by the Vice-Ministry of Justice of the Plurinational State of Bolivia was viewed as a positive step.

They also deemed it crucial to begin a process of demarcation and monitoring of all indigenous territories, but especially the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples living in isolation, initial contact and a high degree of vulnerability. This would effectively stop major infrastructure construction at the service of extractive and agro-industrial projects from continuing to claim victims, devour peoples and promote ethnocide and genocide.

A minimum action plan was established, which would entail: the demarcation and safeguarding of a reserve area for the Toromona and another one for the Pacahuara indigenous people, for the strict protection of these people and the prohibition of entry into their territory; the establishment of a special refuge area for segments of the Tsimane indigenous population living in conditions of extreme vulnerability; a call for the creation of multidisciplinary and inter-institutional working commissions headed by CIDOB for the identification of other refuge areas for indigenous peoples or segments of indigenous peoples within the national territory, such as those inhabited by segments of the Araona, Chacobo, Yuqui, Mosestén, Ese Ejja and Yuracaré populations and others to be determined; and the creation of Ayoreo reserve areas to prevent any potential impacts on the Ayoreo people by prohibiting all types of hydrocarbon extraction and/or mining activities in their territories.

The final declaration concludes: "If almost three decades ago it was proclaimed that Bolivia could no longer live without its indigenous peoples, then today with the same force and the same conviction we proclaim that Bolivia and its Plurinational State can only exist as a full and dignified nation if it defends and protects its last indigenous peoples living in isolation, initial contact and a high degree of vulnerability in the Amazon and Gran Chaco regions."

"Bolivia never again without its indigenous peoples living in isolation and situations of extreme vulnerability."

- Ecuador: Pronouncement in Defence of Pachamama and Life

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo (Third World Institute for Ecological Studies) and to pay tribute to Ricardo Carrere (who was the WRM coordinator up until December 2010), the Ricardo Carrere Conference on Ecological Thinking was held in Quito, Ecuador. (*).

Representatives of indigenous peoples of the region and national and international environmental networks and organizations gathered together to share the concepts and analysis developed through their work in different areas of environmental struggle. They reflected on the way ecological thinking makes it possible to integrate concepts, link different currents and issues, and identify the relationships between different activities, and between these activities and centres of power, as well as the links between the environment, society, culture and the economy, beginning with the recognition of the existence of the ancestral values of indigenous peoples and their relationship with Pachamama, or Mother Earth. At the same time, the information generated through this analysis makes a valuable contribution to empowering communities and organizations in their struggles.

The tribute to Ricardo Carrere was present throughout the conference, due to his fundamental contribution to international ecological thinking. Ricardo not only contributed with his own thoughts, but also stressed the need for an ongoing space for expression that would lead us to listen, think, reflect and act.

The “Pronouncement in Defence of Pachamama and Life”, the final reflection issued by the gathering, reaffirms the determination to “keep up our resistance to defend our life as peoples and our territorial rights. Only on this basis is it possible to achieve Sumak Kawsay, understood as a full life, in harmony with nature.”

The pronouncement notes: “We come from a historical process of confronting capitalism, the modernization that dehumanizes and commodifies life, and in current times, the ‘citizens’ revolution’ that uses different strategies, discourses and banners to continue to rob us of our sources of livelihood. We do not consider ourselves to be poor, because if we were poor, the companies and the state would not set their sights upon us to strip us of our water, biodiversity and other natural riches that have become the new bases of capitalist accumulation under the criteria of the perverse ‘green economy’ that they seek to impose as the new means for companies to increase their profits.

“Among many of our peoples, the word ‘poor’ does not exist. In the Kichwa language, for example, the concept has been adapted to the word ‘wakcha’, which literally means ‘orphan’. For these people, to be poor means to have no family or community, and therefore no way to practice complementarity, solidarity and reciprocity, which leads to individualism.”

“With regard to ‘environmental services’,” the statement stresses, “we reject the attempt to reduce nature and its functions to ‘resources’ and ‘services’. We know that language is another instrument of domination and imposition. Once again, based on our own cultures, in which these notions do not exist, we do not accept these words:

Pachamama is not a resource, and she does not provide services. As Taita Lorenzo Muelas of the Guambiano-Misak people of Colombia says, 'The indigenous Higher Law is a legacy passed down by our ancestors; it is imprescriptible, inalienable and non-transferable, and is not for sale anywhere on the continent.'

With regard to the situation in Ecuador specifically, the participants declared their categorical opposition to "any attempt to expand the oil frontier in the country, and in particular in Yasuni National Park, the ITT block, Block 31 and the Armadillo oilfield, as well as in indigenous territories and the territories of peoples living in voluntary isolation. We believe in the initiative to keep the crude oil underground as a first step towards a post-oil country and world. It is not for money that we defend Yasuni and other threatened areas, but because we are aware of all of the damage caused by oil exploitation in all of its stages. In the areas already affected we demand a process of comprehensive reparations, and the cancellation of the Pacific Refinery Petrochemical Complex project.

"We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who have been criminalized, evicted and repressed for defending the water, their lands and their territories, through the use of illegal mechanisms and public force. These are used as a means of intimidation to silence voices of opposition to this model. We do not understand how those who defend their own home, how those of us who defend our Mother, can be branded as terrorists.

"We condemn the acts of violence and evictions that have taken place in Río Grande (Manabí), for the construction of a dam, and the Topo community (Tungurahua), repressed to facilitate the construction of a hydroelectric plant for the benefit of a powerful economic group. We likewise condemn the blackmail exercised over the Secoya people because of a history marked by oil drilling, oil palm plantations, environmental services and even militarization in the name of conservation.

"We reject all extractive and industrial monoculture projects that threaten the rights of nature. We demand the withdrawal of these companies.

"We stand in solidarity with all of our comrades affected, because we share the same spirit of struggle and resistance. Despite any agreement or contract that has been imposed on the peoples, we must continue on the path of resistance to defend our territories, exercising the rights enshrined in the Constitution and in international instruments like ILO Convention 169 and those that protect human rights and the rights of nature."

The pronouncement concludes: "Our struggle is in defence of life, which is why it is sacred and non-violent. We continue, after many centuries, to be the custodians of Pachamama and her forests, plains, rivers, mangroves... For this they call us ignorant savages, to justify their 'civilizing' and 'modernizing' interventions. As [Eduardo] Galeano would say, 'In this world, words and deeds very rarely meet, and when they do, they don't greet each other.' As our peoples have always done, we want to continue fighting against this fragmentation, by truly living and practicing Sumak Kawsay, not only as nice words, but through complementarity, solidarity and reciprocity, both between our peoples and with the sacred earth, keeping up our resistance. Our political proposal is to build the power of all the peoples to defend

life to its fullest.”

(*) The conference, organized by the Red de Ecologistas Populares and the Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo, was held in Quito, Ecuador on November 17 and 18, 2011. The full text of the statement is available in Spanish at http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Ecuador/Pronunciamiento_en_defensa_de_la_Pachamama.html

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PEOPLE IN ACTION

- New request for FAO to define forests by their true meaning

On January 21, during International Green Week in Berlin, the environmental organization Rainforest Rescue presented the director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with more than 27,000 signatures in support of an initiative headed up by 613 scientists and professionals in various fields related to the study of nature around the world, calling on FAO to amend its definition of “forest” (see http://wrm.org.uy/forests/letter_to_the_FAO.html).

The definition currently used by the organization has made it possible for native forests to be replaced with monoculture plantations of exotic tree species without this being classified as deforestation. The FAO definition has also allowed the word “forest” to be used for industrial tree plantations that are expanding at the expense of the destruction of other ecosystems. At the same time, the current definition does not consider the structural complexity of forest ecosystems, nor their capacity for preserving biodiversity or storing carbon. Nor does it recognize the fundamental role played by forests in the lives of local communities.

The signatures were collected through two campaigns, organized by Rainforest Rescue and the World Rainforest Movement (WRM).

It is now hoped that FAO will respond by promptly taking steps in the direction urged by the initiative.

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- Open letter against the “green economy” and in favour of life

This March 6 to 9 the Convention on Biological Diversity and the governments of Ecuador, India, Japan, Norway and Sweden will host a “Global Dialogue Seminar on Scaling Up Finance for Biodiversity” in the city of Quito, Ecuador. The purpose of the seminar is to explore “financial mechanisms and resources” for biodiversity.

The Ecuadorian environmental organization Acción Ecológica has launched a call to collect signatures for an open letter that will be presented to the participants in the seminar, in which it denounces the intent to convert biodiversity into a key part of the so-called “green economy” that is meant to be consolidated through the agreements reached at the upcoming Río+20 summit.

“With the same discourses of poverty relief, conservation and sustainability that have benefited the industrial, military and financial sectors, they are once again trying to convince us that the ‘green economy’, promoted by the same actors, is the solution,” the letter states. “In practice, they promote the implementation of neoliberal measures to address the climate problem, biodiversity management and protection of forests,” it stresses. As part of this process the letter points to “the false solutions to climate change such as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and so-called TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity). A tangled web of proposals that essentially seek control over land, forests, water and biodiversity as means to compensate for the loss of biodiversity or as raw materials for new technologies.”

The organizations, networks and social movements signing the letter urge the governments hosting the meeting in Quito to stop the commodification of nature, prevent the advance of the so-called green economy and “act in line with models of society that differ from the capitalist system and are built on the principles of community and on relationships with nature based on the protection of life.”

You can sign on to the letter by writing to iramos@accionecologica.org, with a copy to ivonney@accionecologica.org, or through the Acción Ecológica website: www.accionecologica.org

The full letter can be accessed in Spanish at :
http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Ecuador/Carta_Abierta_Seminario_Dialogo_Global.html

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- India: Michelin factory menaces forest of the “untouchables”

In the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the French Michelin company is planning to build a huge tire plant that would impact on the community forest, rice fields and lakes of the Dalit people (the so-called "untouchables"). Some 1500 families depend on the forest, especially during the dry season. Other 13 neighboring communities also depend on the forest and the water.

Repression and even imprisonment since February 2011 have been the response to hunger strikes and demonstrations against the construction of the plant.

A call for international help: support the Dalit people by signing a letter demanding to stop the construction of the Michelin plant to save the forest of the Dalit people, at <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/mailalert/821/india-no-michelin-factory-in-the-forest-of-the-untouchables>

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- Indonesia: Police Brutality in support of the Bima Gold Mine Project

The Indonesian police attacked a peaceful demonstration in SAPE Harbor on December 24, 2011, killing three persons and injuring at least twenty-nine others.

The protestors were members of Anti-Mining People's Front (FRAT) and were

demanding against the Bima Gold Mine Project, owned by Australian PT. Arc Exploration Ltd.. The undertaking will dismantle the agricultural lands and disrupt water resources with very harmful consequences on the environment and the lives of local people who are mainly fisherpersons and farmers.

An international letter has been signed in solidarity with the demonstrators who have been legitimately fighting for their rights and protecting the interests of their community (<http://www.walhi.or.id/id/ruang-media/pernyataan-sikap/2008-solidarity-statement-against-indonesian-police-brutality.html>).

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