



WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT
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The Malaysian state of Sarawak, remotely situated on the island of Borneo, usually lies beyond

the world's attention. Out of sight of the international community, Sarawak's long-standing Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud has followed a rigid resource exploitation policy which has disregarded Sarawak's indigenous peoples. His latest attempt to exploit Sarawak's vast hydropower potential with plans for a series of mega-dams, however, has provoked more resistance than he expected. Facing the threat of the extinction of their traditional livelihoods and culture, indigenous peoples are uniting to defend their rights and ancestral territories. A strong indigenous movement is emerging.

- [The criminalization of social protest against mining](#)

In response to the global advance of extractive industries, and particularly mining, many communities are taking action to defend themselves and oppose projects that are harmful to both nature and to the lives of the communities. Big transnationals are striving to eradicate social protest and are often supported by governments, who categorize protest as a dangerous, subversive and even terrorist activity.

- [Brazil: Voices of local communities in Acre denounce violations in Community-based Sustainable Forest Management](#)

In the state of Acre, so-called Community-based Sustainable Forest Management continues to advance, promising forest conservation and income for rubber-tapping communities. In this article, rubber tappers reveal that these promises are not being kept, and that this so-called "sustainable" management of forests, which is actually based on the extraction of timber for industrial purposes, threatens the physical and cultural survival of these communities.

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Corporations respecting human rights: An impossible combination

A small group of transnational corporations dominate, to an increasingly greater degree, almost every sector of the economy. These corporations were already big, but now they are enormous, and their activities are causing ever more negative impacts. At the same time, thanks to the hard-fought struggles by local communities, movements, organizations and activists, these same corporations have found themselves forced to adopt written commitments to certain ethical standards and to corporate social and environmental responsibility. They have also begun to develop systems for the certification of "sustainability" and to talk about "best practice". They have even begun to talk about respecting human rights.

In this bulletin, dedicated once again to International Human Rights Day, we have sought to reflect on this matter by looking at the conduct of big corporations. The analysis makes it impossible to ignore how the activities of these companies violate a wide range of basic rights, including those enshrined in international laws and agreements. Among basic rights, for example, we include all those which seek to guarantee the dignity of human beings and social and environmental justice.

This bulletin documents the violence of land grabbing as perhaps one of the most brutal corporate activities today, one which is expressed in various ways. It is violent how big corporations in the eucalyptus and pulp sector grab ever greater areas of land in countries like Brazil, to establish massive

industrial plantations, and how they have historically done so illegally and with the support of the government. Also violent is the unbridled expansion of big oil palm plantation corporations in Africa, which are invading the lands of peasant farmers, jeopardising food sovereignty and increasing hunger in countries like Sierra Leone. Equally violent is the way big corporations in the energy sector are grabbing land to build hydroelectric mega-dams in Malaysia and other countries, destroying biodiversity, forests and the livelihoods of the population, in order to profit from electricity generation. All of this results in massive liabilities, with millions of people forced off their lands and pushed to the peripheries of big cities, where an ever greater percentage of the population in the global South is now concentrated, even though there is enough land for a large part of that population to work the land, live in dignity and guarantee the food sovereignty of their countries.

The way that corporations treat their workers today is also violent, both those who are directly employed by them and, even more so, those who are indirectly employed. Slavery, which was formally abolished long ago around the world, continues to exist and worsen in the regions that supply big corporations with raw materials – for example, on the vast industrial oil palm plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia, the main producers of palm oil.

It is violent how big corporations do not accept limits to their activities, which are increasingly more globalized through “free trade”, which signifies a great advantage for even further increasing their profits. And because they control the market, they can gain even greater advantage. Corporations seek to guarantee their interests in key spaces like the World Trade Organization (WTO), which recently met in Bali, Indonesia.

It is violent as well when big companies adopt the discourse of the “sustainability” of tropical timber produced through so-called “sustainable forest management”, which actually promotes the gradual devastation of tropical forests, destroying the future of communities who depend on these forests for their livelihoods and ways of life. The only real objectives of this “sustainable” forest management are increasing corporate profits and promoting the consumption of unnecessary goods.

Without a doubt, it is extremely important to continue to fight to ensure that our governments, and the UN, guarantee basic human rights, placing special emphasis on the tireless struggle of La Via Campesina in recent years to push for the adoption of a UN declaration on the rights of peasant farmers – a struggle that deserves everyone’s support.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that big corporations, based on the logic of the capitalist system itself, are interested only in accumulation, speculation and generating ever greater profits. Big corporations are the ultimate expression of an intrinsically unjust and exploitative system. They seek to open up ever more markets, including those related to “sustainability” through “certificates of sustainability”, “social and environmental corporate responsibility” policies and “codes of ethics”. They do not accept binding rules, pushing instead for voluntary systems, since under the logic of capital, markets cannot impose barriers to free trade for corporations, and this applies to the “sustainability” business as well.

Without changes at the global level to drastically restrict the action of big corporations, we will witness the continued occupation and privatization of lands and forests by corporate power, and the myriad violations of rights will not stop. It is therefore well worth focusing efforts on holding corporations accountable for their current and historic rights violations.

We call on everyone to support and join the Global Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and End the Impunity of Transnational Corporations. Respect for human rights and corporations do not mix; human rights can only be combined with an economic system based on solidarity, food sovereignty and social and environmental justice.

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HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, LAND GRABBING, DEFORESTATION:
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- Time has come to provide justice for the victims of systematic violations perpetrated by Transnational Corporations



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Human rights violations and crimes perpetrated by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are no isolated facts. Rather, as documentation of such violations in Latin America (for this see Impunity Inc. at <http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/?p=3329> and Peoples Permanent Tribunal Madrid 2010 Indictment at <http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/?p=1386>) and many denunciations in other continents show, they are of systemic character. Even so, corporate violations enjoy a widespread level of impunity. Therefore, time has come to gather social counterpower to push for the establishment of binding regulations on corporate violations and crimes, thus shifting towards the dismantling of the current Architecture of Impunity.

What is the Architecture of Impunity and how TNCs benefit from it?

One of the main systemic reasons for widespread corporate impunity is what many social movements have conceptualized as the Architecture of Impunity: the asymmetric normative framework that, on one hand, grants TNCs “super rights” through LexMercatoria (the legal framework that protects the interests of investors, such as Free Trade Agreements, Bilateral and Plurilateral Investment Treaties, etc.), while, on the other hand, undermines the strength and implementation of all juridical norms designed to protect human rights.

Therefore, while LexMercatoria juridical instruments are binding and have enforcement mechanisms – such as the WTO’s Dispute Settlement Mechanism and the World Bank’s ICSID (International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes) – the international Human Rights system does not have a binding Treaty on TNC violations and crimes, and even less an enforcement mechanism.

Instead, the UN Business and Human Rights Unit promotes weak voluntary guidelines through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework as false responses to corporate impunity, with the complicity of governments and even some CSOs, as well as an obvious sponsorship by major TNCs. CSR provides non-binding norms, with no enforcement mechanisms, allowing for corporations to continue perpetrating systematic HR (?) violations and crimes, without facing adequate responses through processes of accusation, investigation, trial, corresponding indictment and punishment, as well as compensation and remediation for victims. Today this is expressed by the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights proposed by UN Special Representative John Ruggie, in 2011, and adopted by the UNHR Council.

Exposing voluntary guidelines as false solutions

The Global Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and Stop Impunity (see www.stopcorporateimpunity.org) organized with allies a demonstration (see <http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/?p=4704>) outside of the UN Business and HR Forum (2-4 December 2013) against the corporate capture of the UN and, simultaneously, demanded binding

regulation on TNCs. This Forum is the annual meeting where the CSR framework is “celebrated”, and it is supposed to assess the advances in the implementation of the Guiding Principles. The space expressed without disguise the UN capture by corporate power, not only through widespread presence of TNCs but also through the deceiving underlying rationale that there is no difference between private and public interest, thus the idea that having a space for dialogue would lead to some sort of fruitful collaboration among equally oriented “stakeholders”. This is in open denial of the asymmetry of power between recurrent perpetrators of violations (in this case, several TNCs, as documented) and victims (local communities and people more broadly), and in many cases states that should supposedly protect populations end up being complicit to violations.

Historic attempts for binding regulation

Throughout several decades all attempts to constitute binding frameworks within the HR system through an International Treaty and enforcement mechanisms were dismantled by corporate lobby and government complicity.

A binding Treaty does not mean an ideal world without violations. However, within the framework of international law, it would be the most advanced mechanism to counter corporate impunity and to get remediation and compensation for victims. At the same time, consequent juridical cases and indictments would reinforce the denunciation of the systematic character of corporate violations and crimes and this would be extremely important in one of the major tasks we face today: dismantling the hegemonic cultural legitimacy of corporations within the capitalist system, a legitimacy that has led public policy at all levels to be carried within a misleading ideology with tragic consequences –as if what is good for private interest of corporations would be exactly the same as the public and common good of societies.

The ongoing initiative for a binding Treaty on TNCs within the United Nations

A recent initiative of 85 countries (see <http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/?p=3830>) has requested the UN Human Rights Council to consider adopting a resolution for a binding Treaty. Opposition to the initiative is widespread. Most of the 85 countries are investment recipients and some might have already suffered harassment from Northern governments claiming that being linked to such an initiative would lead to loss of investment inflows, as the usual narrative goes.

However, what is important to stress is that over 40 years of attempts for binding regulation lacked pressure from a social movements base that could bring victims’ testimonies to the forefront and have them holding the demand for a binding Treaty as a powerful instrument for their struggle for justice. It is this important gap – social movements and corporate crimes victims’ counterpower – that the Global Campaign and its Peoples Treaty tries to close.

The Peoples Treaty process: a social movements’ alternative

One of the key strategies of the Global Campaign to dismantle corporate power and stop impunity is the Peoples Treaty (PT) process. The idea of a Peoples Treaty (see <http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/?p=4638>) has come from an understanding that the Architecture of Impunity should be countered with a radical and alternative use of law and justice from below, a proposal that originates from the people, especially from those most affected by corporate crimes. This means the PT will lay-out the political vision of social movements’ and affected communities’ norms and principles for justice and for a global system without corporate capture and power.

The added value of the Campaign and the PT process is exactly its potential for popular education and affected communities’ ‘ownership’ of the demands for a binding Treaty. And as such, it can and will be used as a political instrument for showing popular support and peoples’ voices in pushing governments to establish a binding mechanism to punish corporate crimes and provide remediation and compensation for victims.

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On December 9, 2013, a meeting was called in Pujehun District over the lease of 6,500 hectares of prime farmland in this southeastern part of Sierra Leone. Local sources said elders called the meeting to allow people to again express their grievances to the Paramount Chief over the lease of land to the Socfin Agricultural Company.

Hundreds were waiting in the village of Libby Malen for the chieftom authorities to arrive when they learned that nine of their fellow villagers had been beaten and arrested by the police en route to the meeting. More than three hundred people immediately left the meeting to go to the police station in nearby Sahn and demand the release of the villagers.

They were met along the way by an armed contingent of police who fired tear gas and live bullets into the crowd, leaving many people with serious injuries. One person was shot in the neck and at least 57 people were arrested and badly beaten. Shortly afterwards, a group of thugs, who witnesses report may have been police and/or company representatives, attacked villagers in Libby Malen itself, forcing people to flee into the bushes.

For some time now, those working with the local communities have warned the government and the company over the deteriorating situation in Pujehun.

"The community people are starving at the moment," Frank Williams, networking officer for the NGO Green Scenery, told GRAIN in a November interview. Williams is also the coordinator of ALLAT – "Action for Large scale Land Acquisition Transparency" – a civil society coalition formed in 2012 as a watchdog on land issues.

"They don't have enough land to do their farm work. Their lands have been taken away from them. The jobs which the company has offered them... they are being paid less than \$50 a month. [...] So these are all issues for the community people. We see future conflicts if the government does not come in at once to address these matters."

Pujehun District, in southeastern Sierra Leone, was badly affected by the civil war which ended in 2002. Today, the district is one of several parts of the country where the government is seeking to attract foreign investment to set up industrial oil palm plantations. But local communities are rejecting the handing over of large tracts of land to foreign companies.

Two companies – Socfin, the local subsidiary of a Luxembourg-headquartered corporation controlled by the Bolloré group, and India-based Siva Group/Biopalm Star Oil – have between them acquired rights to an area of nearly 90,000 hectares across five chiefdoms in the district.

The affected villagers say no proper consultations were held to enable community members to understand the deal before they were required to sign documents, and many are refusing to give up their lands.

The incident in December is only the latest in a series of hostile and increasingly violent reactions by the authorities to communities' resistance to the loss of their land.

In December 2012, 101 members of land-holding families in the Pujehun district wrote to Sierra Leone's

Human Rights Commission complaining about the lack of consultation, the destruction of crops and land, and persistent harassment by the district's Paramount Chief, the police and Socfin personnel. Local NGO Green Scenery also carried out a fact-finding mission into the land deals in the District and published a report.

Socfin's local subsidiary responded by filing a suit for defamation against the NGO.

And then in October 2013, says Williams, the company accused several community members of destroying palm trees belonging to it.

"Six people were arrested," says Williams. "The charges against them – one is incitement, two is conspiracy and three is destruction of company properties. Those are the complaints made against those six arrested by the Socfin company."

They were held for several weeks before being granted bail at the end of November. One of the six was among those arrested outside the police station in Sahn on December 9th.

Williams says that the community members are committed to stopping the company, despite the violence and intimidation they face. He shares the story of Safiya Vandí, who refused to allow her land – sold without her consent – to be destroyed to make way for a vast oil palm plantation.

"With strong heart and strong mind, the woman stood in front of the bulldozer so that they could not clear her land," Williams said. "And her interruption stopped the work for that day. And cases like this may likely come up frequently, because community members' complaints are not being listened to."

GRAIN, <http://www.grain.org/>

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- Modern-day slavery in oil palm plantations: The outstanding cases of Malaysia and Indonesia



Photo: E. Benjamin Skinner

Malaysia

Malaysia has become a destination for migrant workers from other Southeast Asian countries – mainly Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh – who usually occupy low-wage unskilled jobs in different sectors including the labor-intensive palm oil industry.

Up to 2006, Malaysia had a direct recruitment system which was then replaced by a centralized migration system that introduces outsourcing - mandatory for employers with less than 50 workers and optional for the rest. Labor brokers become the employer of contract workers acting as middlepersons between the workers and the plantation company, paying lower rates and profiting from the

difference. Maximization of productivity is often at the expense of reasonable working and living conditions and the rights of plantation workers.

Groups such as Verité and Amnesty International have reported abuses by labor brokers, who charge up to USD 1,000 for visas. These brokers have also been criticized for demanding additional fees for each migrant worker, charging high amounts for re-registration of immigration documents.

Outsourcing has led to a situation in which many migrant workers, enticed by the brokers, end up working on plantations even though they may not be suited to or prepared for plantation work with the result that migrant workers often feel less satisfied and are less productive and committed to their jobs.

Furthermore, workers are often trapped in the usually remote and closed oil palm plantation complexes, even more because they have to submit work permits, visas, and passports to employers. In those cases where migrant workers leave anyway the plantation, they are highly susceptible to extortion by local police, whose primary task is to return workers to the plantations where they are employed. Those migrants that successfully escape a plantation are unable to find legal employment in Malaysia and, as soon as they become undocumented immigrants, they become vulnerable to substantial fines, imprisonment, and corporal punishment by the police. If they do find employment elsewhere, it is often at small, independent plantations that draw few visits from industry and government regulatory groups, making these migrants susceptible to further exploitative labor practices.

On the other hand, even non-migrants are vulnerable to exploitative bonded labor. The smallholder model of production is a strategy developed by palm oil companies to create a more inclusive plantation industry where the companies are the winners. The report *Exploitative Labor Practices in the Global Palm Oil Industry* prepared by Accenture for Humanity United reveals that "Smallholder owners typically borrow between USD 3,000 and 6,000 (at 30 percent interest per year) from a commercial grower for seedlings, fertilizers, and other supplies. As oil palm plants take 3 to 4 years to bear fruit, in the interim smallholders work as day laborers with wages of USD 2.50 per day on the mature commercial plantations. Once their plantation becomes productive, the average income for a two-hectare allotment is USD 680 to 900 per month. The low level of income combined with the large start-up costs and relatively high interest payments means that smallholders frequently become indebted to the oil palm company, often for a long time. Rather than demand payment in cash, some of the companies that provide the loans require farmers to sell their palm fruit back to them at prices set not by the market but by the companies themselves. Farmers are tied to the core plantation under terms set by the companies until their debts are completely paid off. These claims were substantiated by field interviews, as well as by the testimony of farmers at numerous meetings of the RSPO.

Farmers speak emotionally of being "ghosts on our own land" because of the endless cycle of debt in which they are trapped. While not universal, these problems are common and amount to the extraction of bonded labor from smallholder estates.

Child labor in oil palm plantations is a sort of legacy of immigration. Migrant workers are prohibited by the Malaysian law to give birth to children while they are in the country. However, many do give birth. Those children are not granted citizenship in Malaysia or their parents' home country and thus become stateless and usually bonded to the work on plantations. They help family members in meeting the high quotas set by plantation management collecting loose fruit, helping carrying and loading bunches of oil palm fruit, and weeding the oil palm fields. In Malaysia, it is estimated that between 72,000 and 200,000 stateless children work on palm oil plantations.

Indonesia

According to a report from the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism (2), there is widespread violation of human rights in oil palm plantations in Indonesia. Relying on several interviews with workers of 12 plantations on Borneo and Sumatra—two islands that hold 96 percent of Indonesia's palm oil operations—the investigation revealed that among the estimated 3.7 million workers in Indonesia's palm oil industry, thousands of child laborers and workers face modern-day slavery.

The investigation reports of workers whose national IDs and other legal documents were confiscated by the company to prevent them to leave the plantation, even temporarily, or to return home during the years of their contract. It is common that workers aren't paid for their work until after their work commitments are complete and access to cash is through loans from the recruiter. They become

trapped in a situation of false debt, as was the case denounced by several workers who complained of being held captive by CV Sinar Kalimantan, a labor contractor for a top palm oil producing company, the Malaysia-based giant Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad (KLK).

Schuster Institute investigative team members also found child laborers, some as young as nine years old, at each plantation they visited. They commonly work in the nursery, collect fallen palm fruitlets from the ground or even have their own work agreements with plantation supervisors.

Despite the widespread abuses, the big palm oil companies go untouched. The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the voluntary certification scheme of the palm oil industry, declared that it has never decertified or suspended a member for failing to adhere to labor standards... At least 38 corporations have purchased KLK's palm oil and palm oil derivatives since 2009, including Archer Daniels Midland, Unilever, Procter & Gamble (P&G), and Cargill, which has sold palm oil and derivatives to Nestlé, General Mills, Kraft Foods, and the Kellogg Company.

Based on:

(1) "Exploitative Labor Practices in the Global Palm Oil Industry", prepared by Accenture for Humanity United, http://humanityunited.org/pdfs/Modern_Slavery_in_the_Palm_Oil_Industry.pdf

(2) "Forced Labor and Child Labor on Palm Oil Plantations", report of the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University, <http://www.schusterinstituteinvestigations.org/#!slavery-palm-oil-plantations-indonesia/cqcc>

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- Brazil: Purchase of land held under false title as part of land grabbing for the expansion of pulp plantations



The violence and plunder initially carried out by a gang of outlaws and thugs continued in the 1990s with the arrival of the forestry company Veracruz Florestal, which founded the company now known as Veracel Celulose. In August 1994, brothers Geraldo and Derolino ("Dedé") saw their lands "confiscated" by force. Taking advantage of the fact that the two had gone to the city of Eunápolis, leaving two workers to take care of their crops and livestock, armed and hooded men working for Veracruz violently burst onto their property and forced the workers to leave. Upon their return, the brothers were faced with a devastating scene: their house and crops half destroyed, their belongings strewn about, their animals killed.

In the following days, the brothers tried unsuccessfully to speak with the company directors. They subsequently attempted to return to their lands, but there were armed men blocking every entryway to their property. They tried the legal route, but this also failed.

This is just one of hundreds of stories of invasions, destruction of property and even the murder of peasant farmers without land titles, recorded over the course of more than 20 years in the police stations of numerous cities in the region. However, not a single one of these crimes has ever even given rise to legal proceedings.

These were not isolated incidents, but rather the result of an organized process in which big companies

were directly or indirectly involved. Those companies initially included Indústrias Cabrália S/A, Florestas Nipo Brasileiras (Flonibra) – which purchased land acquired through these means over the course of many years – and Brasil Holanda de Indústria S/A (Bralanda), a Dutch logging multinational with a hefty record of land invasions, acts of violence and murder. They evicted over a hundred small peasant farmers from lands in Vale Verde, in the municipality of Porto Seguro, Bahia.

The acquisition of land through the use of falsified land titles, known in Brazil as grilagem, was spurred by the inclusion of new areas of the far south of the state of Bahia for the expansion of industrial tree plantations for pulp production. Two centres of this activity were created, one in the extreme south and the other on the north coast. The initial investment was provided by Compañía Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD), in partnership with Japan Brazil Pulp Resources Development Co. (JBP). The two companies created the joint venture Flonibra, which also acquired thousands of hectares of land under false title, or terras griladas, from Indústrias Cabrália.

During this entire process of land invasions, Flonibra deforested vast areas for the exploitation of timber, which it sold to Japan and to European countries.

The final assault, beginning in the 1980s, was headed by the company Bahia Sul Celulose, in the municipality of Mucuri. In the early 1990s, in the micro-region of Eunápolis, Grupo Odebrecht established Veracruz Florestal, the precursor to Veracel Celulose.

Social movements, the NGO Cepedes – based in Eunápolis – and even the Public Ministry itself have denounced this company for illegally occupying thousands of hectares of public land and acquiring landholdings under false title.

The extreme south of the state of Bahia has become a centre of the pulp industry, and is now essentially one big eucalyptus plantation generating tax revenues for the Brazilian government. But the implementation of this means of “development” has resulted in enormous social and environmental liabilities, victimizing hundreds of families who now live on the periphery of the region’s cities, with no life prospects and without the slightest chance of returning to the lands from which they were evicted.

Around two years ago, however, brothers Geraldo and Dedé returned to and reoccupied a part of the lands where they used to live. In response, Veracel sent two officials, who acknowledged that this area did not belong to the company.

“I lived here for part of my life, and I will stay here for the rest of it,” said Geraldo. In the midst of the eucalyptus trees, he and his brother built a clay house and planted crops which have already yielded their first harvests. This has allowed them to experience once again the joys of sowing and harvesting.

This good news about the land recovered by these two peasant farmer brothers is accompanied by another piece of good news: on November 20, 2013, the Federal Public Ministry office in São Mateus, Espírito Santo initiated legal action against the company Fibria S/A (formerly Aracruz Celulose), the State of Espírito Santo and the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), calling for the annulment of the titles to public lands granted by the government to Aracruz Celulose. These lands were acquired through a fraudulent process in which the company used its own workers to sign statements posing as small farmers, in order to purchase and gain legal title to public lands that were immediately handed over to the company.

In addition to the return of public property that was acquired through illegal land occupation, the Public Ministry is requesting that, once the customary tenure of these lands by quilombola communities (1) is demonstrated, legal title to them should be granted to the communities of San Mateo and Conceição da Barra. In addition, in view of the deprivation of the right of the quilombola communities to occupy these lands, the Ministry is calling for Fibria to pay compensation for collective damages to the tune of one million reais (roughly 430,000 US dollars).

The suit filed also calls for BNDES to halt any financing to Fibria for the purpose of establishing eucalyptus plantations for pulp production on the lands in question for 30 days.

(1) Quilombola communities are traditional communities of descendants of Africans who were brought to Brazil by force in the colonial era to work as slaves.

Based on the article “Grilagem terceirizada”, by journalist Teoney Araújo Guerra, and a press release from the Federal Public Ministry office in Espírito Santo, “MPF/ES entra com ação contra antiga Aracruz Celulose por grilagem de terras públicas”, published in EcoDebate, <http://www.ecodebate.com.br/2013/12/06/mpfes-entra-com-acao-contra-antiga-aracruz-celulose-por-grilagem-de-terras-publicas/>

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- Cameroon: Opposition to Herakles Farms' oil palm project on native lands



Photo: credito: Greenpeace/Alex Yallop

On 25 November 2013, the President of Cameroon issued three decrees granting 19,843 ha of native land to SGSustainable Oils Cameroon/Herakles Farms in southwest Cameroon for the establishment of a large-scale oil palm plantation.

Local people and organizations denounce that the Presidential decrees, full of irregularities, are reminiscent of colonialism and slavery and violate provisions of the Cameroonian 1976 land tenure act as well as international laws on climate change that demand not to increase emissions through the conversion of tropical forests into monoculture systems, such as industrial oil palm plantations, which is the case.

The President's decree granting a land concession to Herakles in a very sensitive area has ignored local opposition to the project as well as warnings from eminent scientists and environmentalists that the project will cause widespread irreversible impacts.

The Cameroonian NGO SEFE denounces that the decision is in violation of the principle that any sustainable development can only be attained when all parties mutually agree to undertake a venture with the strict respect of principles and relevant criteria guided by existing conventional laws.

Since 2010, SEFE has led a campaign against Herakles Farms by organising community resistance against the establishment of large-scale oil palm plantations in the midst of four very important protected areas including the iconic Korup National Park. The area is also a complex watershed formation (Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve), which provides freshwater to nearby and far-off communities in Cameroon and Nigeria, and it is widely considered to be a hotspot for biodiversity. Therefore the project will not only have negative impacts to nearby communities but also on far-off communities living on coastal fringes in both Cameroon and Nigeria (Cross River State), which will be seriously impacted from pollution, flooding, changes in hydrology, biodiversity loss. Other underlying systems like mangroves south of the project area will be impacted as well.

Tension is now rife within the concession area since the signing of the decree and could degenerate into conflicts among the villages in the area which have long co-existed in peace and enjoyed communal life together for many centuries.

The company has on several occasions said that the area is a secondary and degraded forest but

most of the land within the Herakles lease is pristine forest, whether in Fabe, Masaka, Sikam, Talangaye, or other communities.

SEFE demands the decree to be cancelled because of inadequate facts contained in the so-called technical documents that are void of actual information and inputs from communities. The NGO believes also that the granting of a land concession for the establishment of a large-scale palm oil plantation that is socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable in this area, goes against Cameroon's obligations to global instruments like the Millennium Development Goals, Convention on Biological Diversity, RAMSAR, UN Human Rights bills, and others which demand the strong adherence to peace and stability, including the preservation of the environment and the protection of citizenry.

SEFE states that it "will continue with the campaign until justice is achieved because no decree has ever and will ever extirpate justice."

Based on the Press Release by SEFE "SEFE calls President of Cameroon's land deal with US company Herakles Farms a grave injustice and hindrance to conventional values", <http://farmlandgrab.org/22937#sthash.Kef1aXv0.dpuf>

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- Mega-dams in Sarawak: how indigenous peoples rise to defend their rights



300 indigenous people protested against Sarawak's dams at the congress of the International Hydropower Association (IHA) this May in Kuching - Photo: Bruno Manser Fonds

A history of resource exploitation, corruption and human rights abuses

Sarawak is home to an incredibly rich flora and fauna. Its rainforests are one of the most bio-diverse places on earth. Sarawak's Chief Minister Taib Mahmud, however, has radically exploited the state's rich resources during his 30 plus reign of power. Today, Sarawak's rate of deforestation is over three times faster than in Asia overall. (1) Plantations are also rapidly expanding: One twelfth of the state was already covered with oil palm plantations in 2012 (2) and Sarawak's government plans to double the area under oil palm by 2020. (3)

Chief Minister Taib Mahmud has personally profited from the state's resource exploitation. Taib has used his political position to award his family members with concessions for timber, palm oil or with state contracts. In Sarawak, the Taib family controls a well-diversified business empire with interests in timber and logging, plantations, electricity supplies, property development and media. During Taib's term in office, he and his immediate family have amassed stakes in over 400 companies worldwide. Taib's personal wealth has been estimated at US\$15 billion.

Human rights abuses have accompanied the aggressive exploitation of natural resources in Sarawak. The indigenous peoples' right to their ancestral lands has been denied time and again. The indigenous

communities want their forests, which they have used for hunting and gathering for centuries and which form an essential part of their identity and culture, to be legally acknowledged. The government, however, is only willing to grant land if it has been cleared for agriculture – the rest of the land is considered as state land and therefore up for logging and palm oil.

Large corporations profiting from large dams in Sarawak

In May 2013, international hydropower companies met under the umbrella of the International Hydropower Association (IHA) in Kuching. The International Hydropower Association (IHA) is an industry lobby composed of dam builders and financiers that promote the use of hydropower. The IHA is working closely with electric utility Sarawak Energy Berhad (SEB) to promote the Sarawak dams as “best practice,” despite evidence to the contrary.

In fact, the companies developing and providing advisory services for the Sarawak dams—including SEB, Norconsult, Hydro Tasmania, China Three Gorges Corporation, and Sinohydro— sponsor the IHA. The International Finance Corporation, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank, have also backed IHA, which in May 2013 hosted a workshop in Malaysia under the framework of its 2013 IHA Congress.

SEB has claimed that the IHA’s voluntary auditing tool, the Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol (HSAP), can help them manage environmental and social risks related to dams in Sarawak.

However, the HSAP was developed without the participation of dam-affected communities and civil society, and it has received criticism for being tightly controlled by industry, for its exclusion of affected people, and for its subjective scoring system, which could be used to greenwash dams.

“It is clear the building of the dams is mainly to supply power for energy intensive industries like aluminum smelting plants, magnesium plant and silicon industries,” denounced the grassroots network of indigenous communities and civil society organizations Save Sarawak Rivers.

Sources: “The Sarawak Dams and Industry Greenwash”, Save Sarawak Rivers, <http://www.savesarawakrivers.com/ihahsap/>

How the people’s rights go down in the waters of the dams

The government’s latest strike on the indigenous peoples’ lands is a series of at least 12 hydroelectric dams: The Sarawak government and the state-owned Malaysian power supplier Sarawak Energy target a six-fold rise in electricity production capacity from today’s 1,300 Megawatt to between 7,000MW and 8,500MW in 2020. (4) Whether enough purchasers for the new electricity will be attracted is highly questionable – the Taib family’s companies profit anyway: They build the transmission lines as well as the resettlement sites. They also have a monopoly on cement and are involved in the smelters to be fuelled by the new dams.

Sarawak is known to have one of Asia’s largest dams, the recently completed Bakun Dam. The 10,000 displaced indigenous peoples tell a story of broken promises and loss of livelihoods. They have never been properly informed or consulted on the construction of the dam. The circumstances in the resettlement sites have not allowed them to continue their traditional way of life, as the farmland is often unsuitable and there is no forest left for hunting and collection of forest products. Many of them are still waiting to receive the full compensation package they were promised – more than a decade after their resettlement.

The resettlement for the Murum Dam, the first dam of the new series, started in September 2013, only three weeks before the filling of the reservoir began. As at Bakun before, the rights of the affected communities have been violated: The indigenous communities have not been given the chance to grant

or withhold their free, prior and informed consent for the project. The social and environmental impact assessment was only done after the start of the construction. The indigenous peoples' right to choose their own development path has been denied: the government uses the resettlement to force the people into mainstream society.

Save Sarawak Rivers: an indigenous movement is emerging

The Baram Dam, the next proposed dam, would affect 400km² of indigenous land and up to 20,000 people. The affected people have heard the stories from their brothers and sisters displaced by the Bakun and Murum dams. They have made their first experiences with Sarawak Energy: Consultation and consent is understood as giving them information about how the Baram Dam will improve their lives. First expropriations of land have taken place although no environmental assessment has been completed and the project has not been officially approved. Consequently, the indigenous peoples took the decision to fight the Baram Dam and to protect their ancestral lands.

Affected communities and civil society groups founded the "Save Sarawak Rivers Network" (SAVE Rivers) in late 2011 with the following purpose: "Together we are working to protect our human rights and stop destructive dams in Sarawak." Since then, they have been tirelessly taking action. Their letters, petitions, conferences and protests have received a lot of public attention.

When Sarawak Energy tried to hold a traditional Baram prayer ritual at the proposed dam site in 2012, angry villagers interrupted the ceremony on boats: "How can Sarawak Energy and the government hold our traditional Baram 'Mayau Dalleh' prayer ritual for blessing a dam which will destroy our Baram culture?", asked Philip Jau, a member of SAVE Rivers. Some days later, 150 indigenous people held their own prayer against the dam at the same site.

In May 2013, international hydropower companies met in Kuching. They were faced with 300 protesting people travelling from all over Sarawak to speak out against dam development and the neglect of their right to their ancestral lands. Since October, around 200 indigenous people have been manning two blockades in the Baram area, one against the on-going construction of the access road and one near the proposed dam site. The construction work for the road and the soil sampling came to a complete standstill.

The protesting people have been surprised by their own success. The actions and especially the blockades have seen wide solidarity. It further seems like the movement against the dams has expanded and mobilized many indigenous groups based on land issues. The time might soon be ripe for a change in Sarawak. Let's support the communities in their struggle for their rights and lands.

Further information and taking action

Sign the petition on the SAVE Rivers website: www.savesarawakrivers.com

Watch the film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wewbJbo7I1Q

Read more: www.stop-corruption-dams.org, www.sarawakreport.org/tag/dam-watch/

By Annina Aeberli, Bruno Manser Fund, www.bmf.ch The Swiss-based Bruno Manser Fund is committed to protect the threatened tropical rainforests and the rights of the indigenous peoples in Sarawak. The organisation has been working closely with the local SAVE Rivers network in supporting the struggle against the planned mega-dams in Sarawak.

(1) SarVision, Impact of oil palm plantations on peatland conversion in Sarawak 2005-2010", 25 January 2011, <http://www.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/Malaysia%20Sarvision.pdf>

(2) Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) "Oil Palm Planted Area", December 2012, http://bepi.mpob.gov.my/images/area/2012/Area_summary.pdf

(3) Jack Wong (2010) "Sarawak to double oil palm plantation area", in: The Star [Malaysia], 30.11.10.

(4) Sarawak Energy Berhad (2012) "2010 Annual Report", page 28.

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Photo: <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/>

The criminalization of social protest upheld by local communities is a worldwide phenomenon. In Latin America, the Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), a network comprising social organizations, has issued the following declaration denouncing the violent repression of opposition against the mining companies in the region:

“The Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), gathered for its Fifth Meeting in Lima, Peru, expresses its utter condemnation of the series of murders that have taken place in recent weeks in Our America, and which claimed yet another victim in our sister nation of Ecuador yesterday. Comrade Fredi Ramiro Taish Tiwiram of the Shuar indigenous community was killed during a muddled Ecuadorian army operation against so-called illegal mining. It should be stressed that the Shuar people are currently facing a double threat, posed by both the arrival of transnational mining companies and the ongoing small-scale mining in the region. This new crime comes on the heels of another recent murder in Colombia, that of César García, a member of the Environmental and Peasant Committee of Cajamarca and well-known leader of opposition to the Colosa mining project, spearheaded by the mining transnational AngloGold Ashanti. These killings remind us of the death of José Mamani and the gunshot wounds suffered by eight others during protests against the Malku Khota mining project in Bolivia last year; and the repression, legal prosecution and deaths in Peru resulting from opposition to Yanacocha’s Conga mining project and the GlencoreXstrata mining project in the province of Espinar, among many other cases.

OCMAL believes that these killings cannot be viewed in isolation from the imposition of the extractive mining model in the region. On the contrary, they form part of a larger panorama of conflicts generated by the corporate invasion of territories currently disputed by companies deploying strategies of community plunder. If these external actors had not arrived in these territories with their projects, there is no doubt that the wives, families and communities of our fallen comrades could continue to live in their company, enjoy their teachings and their smiles.

We express our deep concern and indignation over the growing criminalization of defenders of nature in the region, a strategy that is being used by corporations and Latin American governments, even some of those who label themselves as progressive or alternative. We interpret strategies of criminalization in a broad sense, including stigmatization, invisibilization, individual and collective threats, legal prosecution, repression and the militarization of territories, which have even resulted in death, as demonstrated by the recent killings mentioned above, and which have historically occurred in our countries. Ultimately, criminalization in our region today is aimed at eradicating the possibility to be different, to freely exercise opposition and denounce destruction, and to be able to maintain harmonious relations with nature.

We invite our sister peoples and their national and international organizations to offer their characteristic solidarity to the families and communities that are now in mourning as a result of the physical loss of our comrades. The solidarity that reflects the loving affection

of our peoples will forever remind us that the death offered by the extractive model will neither silence our struggle nor dampen the joy of men and women who live in freedom, dignity and solidarity.

We demand that the competent institutions in the countries where these crimes have been committed take speedy action to uncover the motives and identify and arrest the masterminds and perpetrators of the attacks. We also demand respect for constitutional regimes and international agreements for the guarantee of the right to a healthy environment as a necessary condition for the protection of the right to life. We further demand a review of the regulatory and legal frameworks that contribute to the impunity of the economic and ecological crimes of companies and corporations, as reflected in, among others, the new mining law being developed in Bolivia and the law to safeguard public order in Chile, which are not only abominations but also exacerbate social repression.

We respectfully call on international human rights organizations to provide preventive monitoring for communities facing serious risks due to the social and environmental conflicts that the extractive model has generated and exacerbated.

We also request that they speak out and take action against the lack of guarantees in our countries for the exercise of the legitimate right to peaceful protest and freedom of organization to defend our territories.

Because we celebrate life, in Our America, mining shall not pass!"

Source: Declaration of the Fifth Meeting of the Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), <http://www.conflictosmineros.net/noticias/comunicados-ocmal/15723-declaracion-v-encuentro-del-observatorio-de-conflictos-mineros-de-america-latina-ocmal>

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- Brazil: Voices of local communities in Acre denounce violations in Community-based Sustainable Forest Management



Photo: Lúcia Ortiz

In the business world, “sustainability” promises, among other things, that economic activity does not violate the rights of the communities affected, and that future generations will be able to continue to benefit from the natural setting where the activity is practiced. NGOs, companies and governments who promote “sustainable forest management” (SFM) claim that this is possible to achieve in tropical forests, using certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as a guarantee.

The state of Acre in the Amazon region of Brazil is considered an international pioneer and model for SFM, including “Community-based Sustainable Forest Management”. In this case, logging is carried out within the territories of rubber-tapping communities, to whom SFM was promoted with a great many promises – above all, the possibility of significantly increasing their income, while preserving the forest

for future generations at the same time.

During a field visit to Acre, we listened to the stories of rubber tappers who have participated in Community-based SFM initiatives through their associations, including some in areas that have been certified by the FSC. The people we spoke to live in the Porto Dias and Chico Mendes Agro-Extractivist Settlements (PAEs). The first Community-based SFM experience took place in the Porto Dias PAE.

For this article, we decided not to reveal the identity of the majority of the people we spoke with, in order to prevent them from suffering any repercussions as a result of what they denounced: that SFM, even when it is labelled “community-based”, does not fulfil its promises, and threatens the rights of rubber tappers to maintain their ways of life and their control of the forest that they depend on for their survival.

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in Acre

In Acre, the coalition of political parties that has governed the state since 1999 has subscribed to the SFM concept since its inception. The current governor of the state, Tião Viana, stated in 2012 that “the forests of Acre are areas of production and wealth, with extractive characteristics, protected by the introduction of science and technology.” This could serve as the basis for creating “a dynamic and sustainable economy for current and future generations” and for “global, intelligent and humane insertion in the world.” (1)

During the Second International Expert Meeting on Sustainable Forest Management held in Acre in 2011, which also marked the 25th anniversary of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), Eduardo Mansur, a representative of the organization, declared that “Acre has succeeded in establishing a sustainable development model that is an example for all, because it followed sensible models of respect for the forest, and for traditional populations.” (2)

Impacts of community-based SFM on local communities

- A top-down proposal

FSC Brazil claims that the search for “alternative models of sustainable development” in Acre “is rooted in the ideals of the defence of the forest and sustainable development initiated and promoted by Chico Mendes,” the world-renowned leader of the organized struggle of rubber tappers in Acre and Brazil. The name and figure of Chico Mendes are constantly used in the discourse of those who control and benefit from SFM in Acre today.

But those who fought alongside Chico Mendes in this struggle stress that his goal was the creation of territories, known as Extractivist Reserves (RESEX), where rubber tappers could carry out their activities with full autonomy and control over the territory and the forest within the reserves.

Community-based SFM emerged in Acre in the mid-1990s with the support of technicians from an NGO called the Amazon Workers' Centre (CTA), according to a long-time rubber tapper we spoke with, who also explained that this was a top-down proposal which presented the tappers with two options: “We could go along with the legal management, or our forest would go up in smoke,” a reference to the clearing of forests due to the expansion of cattle ranching and illegal logging. To persuade the community, the technicians from the CTA promised that SFM would generate a good income, and that selective, “low-impact” logging would conserve the forest.

The state government also played a fundamental role, subsidizing Community-based SFM and FSC certification, and even using international funding to do so. In 2002, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) provided the state government of Acre with 65 million US dollars in financing for the promotion of “sustainable development”, with forest management and infrastructure identified as key “instruments” for this purpose. (4)

The main FSC-accredited certification agency in Acre, Imaflora, also made concerted efforts to convince communities to become involved in community-based SFM: “Making certification and its benefits accessible to communities and small producers, attracting them towards a model of sustainable use of the forest, is a task undertaken as a priority by Imaflora since its beginnings.” (5)

- The “engineers” and companies occupy the “colocações” [rubber tappers’ family landholdings]

As one rubber tapper told us, those who come to the communities to talk about sustainable management and FSC certification “are not forest people.” They are engineers from the firms that conduct forest inventories or head up the certification process, and “when the engineers are talking, everyone stays quiet,” he added. They have brought with them to the territories of the rubber tappers, in the words of the governor of Acre, “science and technology”.

This is essentially a violation of the community’s territorial rights, because the rubber tappers are no longer able to freely use their territories. So-called Community-based SFM, and particularly when it is certified, further strengthens the voice of the engineers who say what will be done in the SFM area, without listening to the rubber tappers.

- Broken promises of income

The people and institutions who convinced the communities to become involved in industrial logging activities promised them significant income in return. However, a married couple from the Chico Mendes PAE who spoke with us expressed their frustration over the small amount of money they have earned. For the extraction of timber from around 10 hectares of land, they will obtain 3,000 Brazilian reais – but they will have to wait until the end of the year to collect it, they complained, and furthermore, a percentage of the money will go to Cooperfloresta (see the box below). They emphasized that they could have earned more money from the land by gathering Brazil nuts, for example. Moreover, they told us that they have decided to pull out of the Community-based SFM initiative, but it is not that simple: they must continue for a certain amount of time in order to repay the costs of the technical work – for instance, the inventory conducted by third parties before the project began. This is part of the contract that they signed, which means that they are responsible for this debt, they say. However, there is one not-so-minor detail: they do not have a copy of the contract signed with Cooperfloresta.

Cooperfloresta

Cooperfloresta (the Community Forest Producers Cooperative) is a cooperative founded in 2005 and made up by “extractivist” families (whose traditional livelihoods depend on the extraction of non-timber forest products, such as rubber tapping and harvesting nuts and seeds), grouped into six associations, of which four have areas certified by the FSC. Cooperfloresta is responsible for selling the timber harvested by its members, seeking the best price. The cooperative has been subsidized by the government of Acre and the federal government through the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). (6)

According to one of the inhabitants of the Porto Dias PAE, Cooperfloresta was created in the course of a month, with little discussion, and is “more of a company than a cooperative.”

Although it is called “community-based”, Community-based SFM is an activity with industrial purposes and is increasingly carried out by companies more than by community members. While a rubber tapper receives, based on various testimonies, no more than 100 reais (roughly 42 US dollars) for a cubic metre of wood per family, a logging company in Xapuri reported that the sale of sawn timber in the port of Santos, one of Brazil’s main ports, can yield up to 2,500 US dollars per cubic metre.

A community member from the Porto Dias settlement agrees with the “engineers” that when timber is certified by the FSC it gains extra, additional value: around 240 reais (roughly 100 dollars) per cubic metre of wood, as compared to 120 reais (just over 50 dollars) per cubic metre of timber harvested from a non-certified management area. At the same time, however, he stressed that certification increases the cost of production due to the additional expenditures on consulting and auditing firms. Thus the additional income is reduced due to the additional expenses, which are charged to the families

participating in SFM.

The difficulties faced, even with all of the subsidies provided by the government, have reinforced the trend of an increasing proportion of logging being carried out by companies. And another growing trend is the sale of “standing timber”. Although the earnings per hectare are lower, in this case the rubber tappers do not need to do anything more – they simply receive the amount of money per hectare agreed upon with the logging company.

The current way of life and the future of the forest and the rubber tappers under threat

A family from the Chico Mendes PAE decided to withdraw from the Community-based SFM initiative. One of the main reasons for this decision was the devastation of the forest within their *colocação* – the landholding assigned to each family within a PAE – which they traditionally used to harvest non-timber forest products. During our visit they showed us a large clearing in the middle of the forest, inside their *colocação*. A number of new roads had been opened in the forest so that the skidder, a heavy vehicle used in a logging operation for pulling cut trees out of a forest, could reach this clearing where the logs were gathered in order to be transported on trucks to the sawmill. The family noted that all of these new roads contributed to blocking the rubber trails they use for their traditional livelihood of rubber tapping.

An inhabitant of the Porto Dias PAE told us that he had left the Community-based SFM programme three years ago after he “woke up” and realized that logging work was destroying the traditional way of life of the rubber tappers: “They extract rubber and know how to sell it, they gather Brazil nuts and know how to sell them. Timber is not something for rubber tappers, it is for engineers.”

With regard to Community-based SFM, Dercy Teles recounts:

“They presented the management plan didactically, meticulously, in full detail, claiming that this (logging) activity is not threatening because where there are three trees of the same species – the parent, child and grandchild – the parent is cut down first, then the child, and then the grandchild, and during this cycle, other trees are growing. This claim is not justified, as anyone who really knows the forest could tell you.”

An inhabitant of the Porto Dias settlement pointed to the risk of a larger amount of timber being extracted, thus further increasing the impact on the forest, but noted that some are willing to take this risk because “everyone knows that timber brings in money.” The trend towards selling “standing” timber could also generate more destruction. And there is the additional risk of even more destruction resulting from a lack of adequate care taken during the cutting and transporting of the timber by outsourced workers, who are sometimes poorly trained and often employed under precarious working conditions. This has been confirmed by various FSC audit reports in the state of Acre. Meanwhile, the presence of companies and workers from outside the region has other impacts on the communities.

According to Dercy Teles:

“We know that the logging is carried out by companies contracted for this purpose. The rubber tappers are merely guides. The inventory of the area is carried out by people from the outside. In addition to the damage that they cause, they also alter family relations, because they often become involved with women from the region who then leave their husbands. There are also cases of prostitution. In the community of Simintuba, the company that went to conduct the inventory disrupted the life of the community. There was an increase in prostitution – adolescent girls began to prostitute themselves when the company arrived – and marriages were broken up.”

Another Porto Dias resident said that it would be better “to leave behind the forest, the logging thing,” but complained that the government provides little incentive for this and, in general, little support for the proposals of the communities. Dercy Teles reports: “With the cattle ranchers advancing on the reserve, community members end up giving in to cattle farming, because it is the only thing that provides them with a quick income.” (7) But she added: “I am not obliged to knock down the forest in my *colocação* to raise cattle. I can combine it with another activity. And that is what I do. I raise cattle. I am not a cattle rancher.” Numerous community members agreed that the meagre income provided by the sale of timber is leading to an expansion of cattle farming – an activity that logging is supposedly aimed at curbing.

Final considerations

In Acre, in 2010, more than 960,000 hectares of land were under sustainable management plans negotiated with the Environment Institute of Acre (IMAC) in public, private and community areas. Of this total area, 30,300 hectares were exploited that year, resulting in the extraction of 756,000 cubic metres of timber in the form of roundwood, primarily by companies and large landholders. This represented an increase of 79% over the previous year and a 150% increase in the volume of roundwood extracted annually compared to the previous decade, which demonstrates that logging in Acre is in full expansion.

Thus we can see that instead of the needed reduction in the consumption of tropical timber – one of the main direct causes of deforestation – a new market for “sustainable” timber has been created. Paradoxically, there is a shortage of timber in Acre.

Clearly, the extraction of “sustainable” and “certified” tropical timber is being carried out today so that a small few in the urban centres of Brazil and other countries, primarily the most industrialized countries of the global North, can have access to luxury products made from precious wood, at the expense of the vast majority of the people in the areas where the timber is extracted and their surroundings.

We conclude by reaffirming the need to respect, value and provide incentives for the way of life of rubber tapper communities. They have vast experience in their traditional livelihood practices, which do not destroy the forest and require very little expenditure, such as the extraction and gathering of latex, Brazil nuts and açaí. In the words of Dercy Teles: “Above all, we believe that in order to guarantee the preservation of nature, there is a need to value the products that have proven to be sustainable for centuries, as in the case of extractivism. Rubber tappers are extractors, they extract latex. For us, this means well-being, because one can live an extremely tranquil life in harmony with nature. It is very good to live in the forest.” And in the words of Chico Mendes: “We learned from the indigenous people and from the forest a way to raise our children. We satisfy all of our basic needs and we have created our own culture, one that brings us much closer to the indigenous tradition than to the tradition of the ‘civilized’ people. (...) Together (indigenous peoples, rubber tappers, riverine communities, etc.) we can protect nature.” (8)

Winnie Overbeek, winnie@worm.org.uy, WRM

(1) Acre+20 – Uma Terra de Sonhos, um Mundo de Oportunidades, 2012.

(2) Paula, Elder Andrade de (2012), “A dupla face da destruição das florestas tropicais”

(http://www.wrm.org.uy/oldsite/paises/Brasil/A_dupla_face_da_destruicao_das_florestas_tropicais.pdf).

(3) <http://br.fsc.org/newsroom.261.4.htm>

(4) Carvalho, Ricardo da Silveira: “Desenvolvimento, sustentabilidade e manejo madeireiro em comunidades no sudoeste da Amazônia: um olhar para além da engenharia florestal”. Master’s thesis, Universidad de Lavras, 2009.

(5) http://intranet.gvces.com.br/cms/arquivos/caminhos_para_a_mudanca.pdf

(6) http://cooperfloresta.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=57

(7) <http://www.wrm.org.uy/oldsite/boletim/172/opiniaio.html#7%20e>

(8) Revista Contracorrente, interview with Dercy Teles Cunha Carvalho, vice-president of the Rural Workers Union of Xapuri, Acre, “O extrativismo morreu”, 2013 (<http://issuu.com/guilhermeresende/docs/contracorrente5>).

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PEOPLES IN ACTION

- Sued for protesting against Wilmar's refined destruction

Eight activists of Robin Wood, a grassroots group in Germany, were sued in October 2013 for taking part in a peaceful demonstration to protect Indonesian rain-forests. In September, the activists hung a banner at Wilmar’s palm oil refinery plant in Germany saying "Wilmar's refined destruction - No palm oil from deforestation". They were convicted for "assault".

Wilmar International is the world's largest owner of oil palm plantations as well as the largest refiner of

palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia. Wilmar is a major player in south-east Asia and it is also expanding in Africa, where the Group started an international joint venture to convert an area of around 6,500 hectares of forest and farmland into palm oil plantations. Farmers and their families were expelled from their land without compensation.

Robin Wood initiated a campaign to stand in solidarity with the eight activists, asking people to send protest letters against the intimidation seeking to prevent environmentalists to expose environmental crimes.

Contact: Ute Bertrand, press@robinwood.de, Stefanie Hess, stefanie.hess@robinwood.de, http://environmentalpaper.org/mailman/listinfo/indonesia-forests_environmentalpaper.org

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- Say no to corporate power grab: Reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a highly secretive and expansive free trade agreement between the United States and twelve Pacific Rim countries, including Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and Australia. Leaked text reveals that the TPP would empower corporations to directly sue governments in private and non-transparent trade tribunals over laws and policies that corporations allege reduce their profits.

Legislation designed to address climate change, curb fossil fuel expansion and reduce air pollution could all be subject to attack by corporations as a result of TPP.

Additionally, the deal could criminalize internet use, undermine workers' and human rights, manipulate copyright laws, restrict government regulation of food labeling and adversely impact subsidized healthcare.

A campaign has been created to show our governments that we won't stand for foreign corporations disabling our sovereignty, democratic processes or the right to a safe future.

Sign the petition at <http://campaigns.350.org/petitions/say-no-to-corporate-power-grabs-reject-the-trans-pacific-partnership>

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- Indonesia: Action on Customary Forests

On 16 May, 2013, the Indonesian Constitutional Court issued a decision confirming that Customary Forests are forests located in Indigenous territories, and should no longer be considered as State Forests.

Indigenous Peoples throughout Indonesia welcomed the Constitutional Court's decision and started rehabilitating their territories which have been damaged by the activities of companies who were given licenses to operate by the State.

It has been few months since the Constitutional Court's decision. However, up until now there has been no attempt by the government to implement this decision.

Thus, it will be a long and difficult process before Indigenous Peoples have and manage their own forests. Meanwhile, the State continues to give large tracts of forest areas to companies, meaning forest conversions for industrial activities are increasingly widespread. Thus, justice for Indigenous Peoples is continuously ignored by the State.

Indigenous Peoples have launched a petition to push the Government of RI to implement the Constitutional Court on Customary Forest and immediately adopt the Bill on Indigenous Peoples!

Sign on this petition and help to spread over to others. <http://www.change.org/id/petisi/indonesia->

- Remembering Laotian community activist Sombath Somphone one year after his disappearance

Sombath Somphone, perhaps the Lao PDR's most prominent community development activist and founder of the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC) was last seen on the evening of Dec 15, 2012 on a road in Vientiane. According to footage from a CCTV camera, he was stopped in his own vehicle by police, left it, and minutes later got into another vehicle and was driven off into the darkness.

Since then, a veil of silence has descended on the disappearance of the man who in 2005 was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. The Lao government which has denied any involvement in his disappearance, has come under pressure for a credible explanation - which has not been forthcoming.

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