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OUR VIEWPOINT

- [16 October: World Food Sovereignty Day](#)

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY vs. AGROFUELS

- [Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty as the peoples' alternative to destructive agribusiness](#)
- [Colombia: "Green washed" palm increases threats to food sovereignty and human rights](#)
- [Why certification of agrofuels won't work](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- [Ghana: Newmont Mining Corp. threatens Ajenjua Bepo Forest and neighbouring communities](#)
- [India: the Police and the Forest Department attack women that fight for their lands](#)
- [Mexico: Massacre of indigenous people and peasants safeguarding their territories](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- [Brazil: Fisher-folk affected by Aracruz Celulose close the company's private port](#)
- [Indonesia: Pulp mill impacts on health of local population](#)
- [Malaysia: Indonesian children and migrant workers enslaved in oil palm plantations](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- 16 October: World Food Sovereignty Day

The economic development model promoted by global power has already clearly shown that it leads to social and environmental disaster, both on a local and on a global scale. Climate change is the clearest example regarding the environment, while increasing food scarcity suffered by millions of people, proves this at the social level.

Global policies do nothing to solve problems; they only make them more serious. This is not out of ignorance but according to plan. The result is the appropriation of more and more resources by increasingly larger and more powerful transnational corporations. Seeds, water, soil, biodiversity, all become the property of these companies and the local inhabitants are stripped of the resources ensuring their survival. What follow are but a few examples of the above:

- Family farming, producing a wide variety of food, is destroyed to give place to industrial production of a single product, generally not intended for human consumption and normally for export.
- Enormous areas of farmland are given over to the production of pulpwood (eucalyptus and pine trees), or for agrofuels (corn, oil palm, sugar cane, jatropha).

Mangroves – a source of life for thousands of local inhabitants – are destroyed to give place to industrial shrimp production for export.

- Commercial logging not only affects the availability of food and other resources on which local inhabitants depend, but is also the spearhead for the replacement of the forest by export-oriented monoculture plantations (soybean, oil palm, rubber).

- Oil production and mining contaminate water, air and the resources used as food by the local inhabitants (fishing, hunting, gathering).

- Large hydroelectric dams evict entire populations and destroy the food resources on which thousands of people who live in the affected area depend.

None of this happens by chance. Decisions are taken in full awareness of the impacts involved. Under cover of the “sustainable development” discourse, large-scale destruction is going on, affecting nature and all the resources that until then had ensured the local inhabitants’ food sovereignty.

The divorce between the needs of the great majority of people and global policies is increasingly wider. While people clamour for food, sufficient in quantity and appropriate in quality, the governments open the doors to foreign investment, strengthening the process of appropriation and destruction of resources. As a result, the inhabitants of countries rich in natural resources are stripped of them, thus becoming poorer and suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

To top it all, even the most serious problems – such as climate change – are perceived from the standpoint of the economic powers as “business opportunities” and are treated as such. It is thus that a scientifically absurd, but economically profitable “carbon market” has been developed, where destructive monoculture tree plantations are advertised as positive “carbon sinks” where the conservation or destruction of forests are negotiated for dollars, where strongly questioned agrofuels are promoted as humanity’s lifebuoy, where the impossible becomes possible: that burning of fossil fuels can be “compensated for” and people and companies can become “carbon neutral” through a simple payment of money to skilful carbon market entrepreneurs.

Faced by this scenario, many struggles have arisen seeking real alternatives to face the growing social and environmental catastrophe that large corporations have imposed on humanity. Many of them are joining together under the banner of food sovereignty, which appeals to the good sense of devoting land to satisfy peoples’ need for food, promoting family and cooperative farming as the basis for the production of food, encouraging locally-based trade, promoting resource conservation through appropriate farming and forest-use practices. Which appeals, in sum, to social justice based on the responsible use of nature.

On this 16 October we are therefore making a joint appeal to everyone so that this date may serve to further unify struggles to defend and promote peoples’ Food Sovereignty.

Via Campesina - World Rainforest Movement

[index](#)

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY vs. AGROFUELS

- Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty as the peoples’ alternative to destructive agribusiness

Via Campesina is an international and intercultural movement that coordinates national and regional organisations of small farmers, peasants, rural women, landless peasants, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples, migrants, fisherfolk and men and women who work in artisan activities.

This autonomous, multicultural, multi-ethnic and pluralist movement primarily works for changes in agricultural production, in consumption habits, in the role of women, education, health, environment etc. The central themes of La Via Campesina have been enriched through the cosmic vision of indigenous peoples, which preserves the mother earth against natural disasters, global warming

and the ecological crisis provoked by unabated unrestrained capitalism.

The organisation has been pushing the concept of food sovereignty up to the point that it is now part of the mainstream discussion on agricultural and food policies. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples and governments to choose the way food is produced and consumed in order to respect our livelihoods, as well as the policies that support this choice.

However, agriculture and food production are presently dominated by transnational corporations whose industrial production pattern seeks the complete vertical integration and full domination and control over food and agriculture from the seed to the plate in order to take in huge profits. This exploits workers, concentrates economic and political power, and destroys rural communities.

Food sovereignty demands that food should not be marketed as a mere commodity in order to obtain economic and political advantages and neither should the base of food production –biodiversity, land and water- be destroyed, degraded, used or appropriated at the expense of other people or other nations. A genuine agrarian reform should guarantee everyone the right to work on the land, and democratize its ownership, giving priority to family, social and cooperative forms of agriculture.

In the face of the present drama of global warming false solutions such as agrofuels produced from monocultures –including tree plantations– that undermine food sovereignty are being promoted.

Indeed, industrial agriculture is a major contributor to global warming and climate change by: transporting food all around the world, imposing industrial forms of production (mechanization, intensification, use of agrochemicals, monoculture...), destroying biodiversity and its capacity to capture carbon, converting land and forests into non-agricultural areas, transforming agriculture from an energy producer into an energy consumer.

The agrofuel “package” comes wrapped in the agribusiness model imposed by the transnational corporations who see this as yet another opportunity to increase their profits and control, while at the same time destroying peasants’ livelihoods.

The basic inputs needed in order to produce agrofuels on a grand scale is the existence of three factors in abundance: land, water, and sun. So, corporations immediately turned to the southern hemisphere, especially to those countries near the tropics and those that have abundant land. In many countries this expansion of area cultivated by agrofuels has taken over areas dedicated to food and also to dairy cattle. The possibility of earning a lot of money has allured foreign capitals to buy land and expand large scale monocultures in Southern countries –including the “green deserts” of eucalyptus and pines in Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, Chile, South Africa, Swaziland, Thailand and others, the oil palm plantations in Colombia, Cameroon, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, etc.- thus bringing a huge concentration of property and a process of de-nationalization of land ownership.

In relation to the environment, the monoculture form of production based on agrotoxics is going to seriously affect the environment, destroy the existing biodiversity, affect rainfall, and also add to climate warming. Either the “first generation” of agrofuels based on the different forms of sugar from crops or the “second generation” based on cellulose from wood –including genetically modified trees which pose an additional risk to the environment– increase corporate control and destroy existing biodiversity, contributing to the imbalance and to global warming.

Apart from bringing about greater environmental problems for the producing countries, industrial agrofuel production will revive colonial plantation systems, bring back slave work and seriously increase the use of agrochemicals, as well as contribute to deforestation and biodiversity destruction. Intensive agrofuel production is not a solution to global warming; neither will it solve the global crisis in the agricultural sector. The impacts will again be felt most seriously in developing countries, as industrialized countries will not be able to cover their agrofuel demand and will need to import huge amounts from the South.

Via Campesina believes that solutions to the current crisis have to emerge from organized social actors that are developing modes of production, trade and consumption based on justice, solidarity and healthy communities. No technological fix will solve the current global environmental and social disaster.

A set of true solutions should include:

* Sustainable small-scale farming, which is labor-intensive and requires little energy use, can actually contribute to stop and reverse the effects of climate change.

- * A true agrarian reform, that strengthens small-scale farming, promotes the production of food as the primary use of land, and regards food as a basic human right that should not be treated as a commodity.
- * Local food production will stop the unnecessary transportation of food and ensure that what reaches our tables is safe, fresh and nutritious.
- * Changing consumption and production patterns which promote waste and unnecessary consumption by a minority of humankind, while hundreds of millions still suffer hunger and deprivation.

Therefore, *Vía Campesina* demands:

- * The complete dismantling of agribusiness companies: they are stealing the land of small producers, producing junk food and creating environmental disasters.
- * The replacement of industrialized agriculture and animal production by small-scale sustainable agriculture supported by genuine agrarian reform programs.
- * The banning of all forms of technologies such as genetic manipulation that endanger natural resources.
- * The promotion of sane and sustainable energy policies. That includes consuming less energy and decentralized energy instead of promoting large-scale agrofuel production as is currently the case.
- * The implementation of agricultural and trade policies at local, national and international levels supporting sustainable agriculture and local food consumption. This includes the ban on the kinds of subsidies that lead to the dumping of cheap food on markets.

Article produced by WRM based on documents from *Vía Campesina*

[index](#)

- Colombia: "Green washed" palm increases threats to food sovereignty and human rights

It seems like a slap in the face. The oil palm agro-industry has chosen precisely 16 October, World Food Sovereignty Day, and the Latin American country most hit by oil palm – Colombia – to hold the first Latin American meeting of the "Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil."

This is an attempt by palm grower groups – presently on the rise because of the possibility of their oil being used to produce agrofuels – to acquire certification from the Roundtable. They are seeking a "greenwash" that will enable them to overcome the negative publicity received by agrofuels regarding the food crisis and because of their harvest of pain and blood with the terrible violations of the Colombian communities' human rights.

The Colombian social and environmental organizations' emphatic rejection of the attempts to expand monoculture oil palm plantations states that, far from solving the climate crisis, they lead to "the land no longer being allocated to food production and therefore creating peoples' greater food dependency on large multinational corporations. Vast stretches of land are given over to plantations for agrofuel; tropical forests are being cleared to plant thousands of hectares of oil palm, sugar cane and other crops." "In many cases, palm plantations are expanding over the territories of displaced communities" through repression, death and misery. (see full statement at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Declaration_Social_Organizations_Communities_Regarding_RTSP0.html)

However, it is not only in Colombia that there is proof of the serious negative impacts of monoculture oil palm plantations. Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Cambodia, Thailand, Ecuador and other countries can give evidence of what they involve: violation of the right to food and food sovereignty, violation of human rights, illegal appropriation of territories, deforestation of tropical forests, stepping up of climate change, the threat they imply for millions of Indigenous people, conflicts over land tenure, increased use of agrochemicals, just to name a few impacts mentioned in an international declaration promoted by the Network for Alternatives to Market Impunity and Globalization against the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and in support of Colombian organizations (http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/International_Declaration_RTSP0.pdf). The international declaration originated at the Territory and Life Meeting held in Udine, Italy last September, where work was carried out around several issues with the common denominator of the imposition of social and economic models that destroy peoples, deeply affect the environment, convert territories of life into territories of death, torture, the negation of rights and the transformation of human beings

into a merchandise. Monoculture oil palm plantations have been denounced as one of the expressions of this ransacking by market interests exploiting ecosystems and natural resources to feed the consumer and social welfare of a very small part of humanity – basically in the North – and to deprive a considerable part of humanity of the minimum conditions of survival.

You are invited to support the International declaration by sending a message with the name and country of the organization to the following e-mail address: unsustainablepalmoil@gmail.com

The declaration denounces that the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil “is an instrument for the expansion of the palm business and not an authentic strategy to contain its negative environmental and social impacts. Many of the member companies of RSPO continue to destroy vast areas of the rainforest and to violate human rights, as in the case of Wilmar International on the Isle of Bugala (Uganda), PT SMART, Agro Group and IOI Group in Indonesia, FEDEPALMA in Colombia, Unilever in Indonesia, Malaysia and Côte d’Ivoire.” At the same time, “the serious crimes, irregularities and paramilitary control related with the palm oil agribusiness” are silenced.

The main argument for rejecting the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil is that the principles and criteria it proposes for the definition of sustainability include large-scale plantations and it is well known that monoculture oil palm plantations “like all agro-industrial monoculture plantations ARE NOT and NEVER can be sustainable.”

What is needed is a change, a radical change in the way of “producing, transforming, marketing and consuming farm products.” For this to be possible it is necessary to halt the industrial production of food contributing to climate change and to the destruction of small rural communities; to end the privatization of natural resources; to dismantle agribusiness companies, financial speculation over raw material and the economic and market policies responsible for the food crisis (and emergency); to replace industrialized agriculture by sustainable peasant and family agriculture, supported by true agrarian reform programmes; to consume less energy and produce solar and wind energy and biogas locally instead of promoting large-scale agrofuels; to implement agricultural and trade policies on local, national and international levels supporting sustainable peasant agriculture and the consumption of local and ecological food. This includes the total abolition of subventions that lead to unfair competition through subsidized food.

For their part, the Colombian organizations are demanding “a halt in the expansion of palm plantations and the processing of raw material for agrofuels on the lands of local communities, aimed at supplying markets for unsustainable consumption, at the expense of sacrificing our heritage and territories.” They ask, in exchange “for a rural policy enabling local communities to remain in their territories and strengthen their traditional ways of production and food sovereignty.” For this to be possible it is necessary to “recognize and respect the rights of the local communities over their territories and heritage and give reparation to the country’s victims of the oil palm agro-industrial model.”

At the moment of publishing this bulletin we receive the sad news of yet another victim: on October 14, a communal leader from the Curvarado area, WALBERTO HOYOS RIVAS, was shot dead by the paramilitary who serve agroindustry interests encroaching on communal lands for the expansion of oil palm plantations in the area.

By Raquel Nuñez, WRM, e-mail: raquelnu@wrm.org.uy, based on both declarations.

[index](#)

- Why certification of agrofuels won't work

Arguments in favour of certification often explain that a company wanting to sell its products as sustainably produced has to have some way of proving this. A consumer who wants to buy socially and environmentally friendly products needs a label that they can trust on the products. When the problem is framed in this way, certification seems to be the obvious answer. But the certification of timber products provides three lessons that are important in any consideration of whether certification of agrofuels might help to prevent the worst excesses of a destructive industry.

First, the certification system has to be credible. The standards have to be clear and have to be interpreted consistently by third party certifiers. To prevent a conflict of interest in the assessment, there has to be no commercial relationship between the certifier and the

company being certified. In the timber sector, no certification system has achieved these basic requirements.

The products have to be tracked from where they are grown to where they are sold. The problems of developing a rigorous chain of custody control for timber products was pointed out in a 2007 report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Part of the problem, notes OECD, is that "Wood is processed into many different products and sourced from many different wood species, origins and owners." Paper mills, for example, can source their wood chips from a wide range of sources (from thinnings from thousands of different forestry operations, waste from a range of sawmills and from recycling schemes). In order to accommodate the industry, in 2004, the Forest Stewardship Council amended its chain of custody certification. The new "mixed sources" label allows FSC's logo to appear on products that contain as little as 10 per cent FSC-certified material.

A label that guarantees that only a small percentage of the product comes from well-managed sources, doesn't indicate the percentage that is actually certified and relies on companies to confirm that the rest is not from destructive monocultures or clearcut forests, is guilty of misleading consumers.

The second lesson is that even if a perfect certification system were to be developed (which has not so far happened), there is nothing to prevent the industry from setting up its own, far weaker, certification scheme. FSC, PEFC, CSA, SFI, AFS, MTCC, LEI, CERFLOR, Certfor – as this alphabet soup shows, this is precisely what has happened with the certification of timber products. NGOs who have spent the last fifteen years wrapping their heads around the pros and cons of the various schemes can tell the difference. Consumers cannot.

Third, while a voluntary certification scheme can reward companies that meet its standards by giving them a "green seal", certification can do nothing to prevent the worst companies from continuing their destructive operations. In theory, if a consumer only buys agrofuel credibly certified as coming from well-managed operations then that consumer will be avoiding buying products that come from vast, chemical-soaked, monoculture plantations. But buying certified agrofuel does not prevent the destruction, because one consumer buying certified products does nothing to prevent others from buying uncertified products.

There is no evidence that any of these lessons from certification of wood products are being applied in the certification of agrofuels. The Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels, run by the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne in Switzerland, is drawing up "sustainability standards for sustainable biofuels" and is currently inviting comments on "Version Zero" of its draft standard. Sitting on the Steering Board is Heiko Liedeker, who was FSC's director from 2001 to 2008. Liedeker consistently ignored reports from WRM and other NGOs explaining how FSC certification of industrial tree plantations was undermining local struggles. Other Steering Board members include oil company representatives, Cameron Rennie of BP, Julio Cesar Pinho of Petrobras and Paloma Berenguer of Shell.

Getting involved in a discussion about the content of the principles and criteria for agrofuel certification may seem like an important thing to do. If the standard is weak enough it will allow the certification of almost any agrofuel plantation. But getting involved in the writing of the standards is to miss the point. The standards will do nothing to prevent the abuses carried out by the worst agrofuel plantation companies. The Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels will provide a way for Europe and North America to claim that their demand for agrofuels is somehow sustainable. It is little more than a green fig leaf allowing business as usual to continue.

Discussions about "sustainable agrofuels" distract us from working towards genuine ways of reducing carbon emissions such as demanding tough legislation on energy efficiency and massive state investment in improved building standards, public transport, high voltage direct current electricity grids and solar and wind power.

Trying to persuading consumers to buy "sustainable agrofuels" may sound like a first small step towards bigger steps, which will eventually lead to real change. But the reality is that certifying agrofuels helps greenwash a hugely destructive industry and impedes the development of urgently needed structural changes.

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

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Ghana: Newmont Mining Corp. threatens Ajenjua Bepo Forest and neighbouring communities

The US-based Newmont Mining Corporation, one of the world's largest producers of gold, has plans to place an open pit gold mine in the Ajenjua Bepo Forest Reserve in the Birim North District in the Eastern region of Ghana.

The organization No Dirty Gold informs that the projected mine would occupy an area 1.65 miles long (2.6 km) and a half mile across (0.8 km), and would create waste piles 60-100 m high. The mine would destroy an estimated 183 acres (74 ha) of forest in the reserve.

Mining is a short-term activity with long-term effects and when it takes place in forest zones, it is a factor of forest destruction and degradation from the prospecting phase –when routes of access are open, camps and auxiliary facilities are established, geophysical works are carried out— to the exploitation phase, with great elimination of vegetation that not only affects the habitat of hundreds of species but also the maintenance of a constant flow of water from the forests towards other ecosystems and urban centres.

A self-perpetuated dumping of acid toxic material is generated that can go on for hundreds or even thousands of years. Furthermore, the small particulates of heavy metals that with time separate from the waste, are disseminated by the wind, landing on the soil and in the beds of watercourses, slowly integrating the tissues of living organisms, such as fish.

Water is manifold affected: by the consequent erosion and silting produced by excavation, by the acid drainage that contaminate it, by the forest destruction that disturbs rainfall patterns.

The threatened Ajenjua Bepo forest is critically important to several neighbouring communities that fear the project may displace them or ruin the crops that they rely on. According to No Dirty Gold, community groups in the area “including the Concerned Farmers Association at New Abriem, have protested against Newmont's mining plan and the inadequate compensation Newmont has offered for ruining their lands and livelihoods. They have gathered over 200 petition signatures to present to the Ghanaian government. ‘We have been spending sleepless nights thinking about the trauma of relocation, loss of farmlands and livelihood, new diseases especially the upsurge in malaria cases as a result of the open pits and other stagnant pools of water in the open trenches that will be created in the area by Newmont Ghana Gold Limited,’ said Akosua Nsia of Yayaaso, one of the communities in the mine's direct footprint area.” (1)

International support came from over 6000 signatures from more than 50 countries across the world “urging the Government of Ghana to resist any attraction to grant license to any mining company to undertake mining in the controversial Ajenjua Bepo Forest or any other forest in the country.” (2)

The signatories denounce that permitting mining in the Ajenjua Bepo Forest would displace over a thousand people from their homes and at least 8,000 people would lose their land. “The available information on the probable impacts of the mine indicate that the mine's impacts on biodiversity, forest cover, water quality, and communities would be extremely serious. Over a quarter of the forest in the Reserve would be destroyed, as would habitat for many Endangered and Vulnerable species, and wastes and toxic chemicals would threaten the water supply. Thousands of people and important cultural sites would be displaced.”

The mining project comes at a time when a grim picture of mining impacts in Ghana has been exposed by Ghana's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) in a report that found evidence of “widespread violations of human rights of individual members of communities and communities' collective rights” and “widespread pollution of communities' water sources, deprivation and loss of livelihoods.” (3)

(1) Akyem Proposed Mine, Ghana, No Dirty Gold, <http://www.nodirtygold.org/ghanaakyem.cfm>

(2) Ghana: 6,000 Signatures against Mining Concession, Selorm Amevor, Public Agenda, http://www.ghanaweb.com/public_agenda/article.php?ID=11743

(3) The State of Human Rights in Mining Communities in Ghana, <http://www.nodirtygold.org/HumanRightsInGhanaMiningCommunities.pdf>

[index](#)

- India: the Police and the Forest Department attack women that fight for their lands

In yet another incident, the tribal and dalit women of village Harna Kachar, Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh, had to bear the brunt of atrocities by the Police and the Forest Department.

A mob of more than 300 that included Police, Forest Department, revenue officials and dominant sections of the village participated in the attack where more than 20 women were injured. They were ruthlessly beaten by sticks, their belongings --clothes, utensils, grains, cycles, livestock, etc-- were looted, and around 100 of their huts were lit on fire. This atrocity was inflicted on tribal and dalit women after the implementation of the historical 2006 forest rights act.

Just in a span of one month this is yet another incident of caste clash instigated by the Forest Department and the Police so that the tribals are not able to form their organization and struggle for their lost land rights. In August 2008, more than 300 huts of tribal and dalit people were razed to the ground by setting them on fire by a particular caste group known as Yadavs under the instigation of the Forest Department and the Police. A strong action was taken by the District Magistrate and the instigator Yadavs were booked under the Scheduled Caste & Schedule Tribe Act. The Police and the Forest Department were desperate to take revenge of this defeat.

The clash with women has been going on since the Police and the Forest Department built up pressure on women to evict tribals from the 150 acres of occupied land that tribal people claim belong to them. In one of these clashes, a policeman snatched the saree (Indian women dress) of one of the women. A newspaper reported that women got angry and used their sarees as weapons, in almost a half naked protest where they opened their sarees and threw them at the Police force who had to run away. But on 24th September 2008, the Police force came prepared --with only two Police women as a token presence- and started abusing women and beating them. Women had already pushed their men away and took a frontal position to face the Police force. The Police and the Forest Department started setting their huts on fire and then attacked and stripped the women.

The struggle for forest land has been going on in this area since the last few years where the tribal and dalit people and other poor sections under the leadership of women are asserting their rights and demanding their land back which had been illegally taken over by the Forest Department after independence. The struggle was further intensified after the enactment of Forest Rights Act 2006 and last year a big movement was launched in this region where thousands of acres of land are in possession of tribal people. This has created a big debate on the issue of land reform in this region where especially the upper caste, landlord dominant sections, feudal lords, industrialists, land mafias and mining lobby have felt threatened. They are using all measures to sabotage this movement.

The land dispute in this area is famous at the national level. All the committees formed to solve the disputes have enumerated in detail how the tribal land was robbed off in this area. These reports also mentioned how the tribal lands were transferred to the outsiders which still hold them. Later on, various commissions have also reported the root cause of evolution of Maoist activities in land disputes and non implementation of proper land reform and appropriation of land by the land lords, feudal lords and upper caste sections of society. However the movement around land has done a heavy churning in this region.

The spontaneous movement launched by poor people of this area has become a challenge to the authority of the administration especially the Police and the Forest Department who want Maoist activities to continue, as it is easy for them to crush the movement with the excuse of a law and order problem and also because there are lot of funds for elimination of Maoists. This movement has reduced the Maoist activities and the administration now has to face the uncomfortable matter of having to address --against their wishes- the land and forest issues.

The women who have been badly beaten in the incident are:

1. Manmati devi w/o Bhutan Kharwar
2. Tejmani devi w/o Mukund Chero
3. Tejmani devi w/o Rakesh urao
4. Jaso devi w/o Bigan Urao
5. Biswa devi w/o Jokhu Panika
6. Bachia devi w/o Rangilal Gond
7. Fulmatia devi w/o Lachuman urao
8. Indri devi w/o Birbal Gond
9. Kalpatia devi w/o Narayan Dusadh
10. Kalawati devi w/o Phulchand Urao

11. Phulkumari devi w/o Naresh Biyar
12. Bhukli devi w/o Ramkishun
13. Vidhyawati devi w/o Devchand
14. Asha devi d/o Lakku (10 month old child)

The officials who were involved in this attack :

1. Station Officer, Vindhamganj, Sheshdhar Pandey
2. Baleshwar Yadav, Forest inspector, Vindhamganj
3. Chandrika Prasad, Forest Inspector, Vindhamganj
4. Jhagro Ram, Forest guard, Vindhamganj
5. Santosh Kumar Tripathi, Forest Guard, Vindhamganj
6. Ashapati Ram, Forest guard, Vindhamganj
7. Ramesh Kumar Gupta, Forest guard, Vindhamganj
8. Premnath, Beat watcher, Vindhamganj
9. Subedar Bhargav, Mali, Vindhamganj
10. Jadunath Yadav, Pradhan pati, Harna Kachar
11. Ashok Yadav s/o Basdev yadav
12. Vivek s/o Bal Mukund
13. Keshwar s/o Prayag
14. Manmati w/o Ramgati gond.

We have demanded that:

1. A high level judicial enquiry should be set up on this matter, in line with assurances made by District Magistrate Mr. Ajay Shukla.
2. All the officials in this incident should be punished and suspended.
3. The villagers who instigated this caste violence should also be arrested and cases of Scheduled Cast and Scheduled Tribe Act, human rights violation, women violence should be implicated.
4. The forest rights act 2006 act should be implemented in the right spirit.
5. A high level dialogue should take place to resolve the matter of land dispute in Kaimur region.

By Roma, NFFPFW (Kaimur) / Human Rights Law Centre, e-mail: romasnb@gmail.com

[index](#)

- Mexico: Massacre of indigenous people and peasants safeguarding their territories

The organization Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, A.C. reported in a recently issued communiqué that on 3 October, a brutal police operation took place, violating the most basic human, individual and collective rights, involving the federal and state police, against the indigenous and peasant Tojolabal inhabitants of the Miguel Hidalgo community, Municipality of Trinitaria, Chaipas. Since 7 September, this community had been managing the Maya archaeological and ceremonial site of Chinkultic.

This operation was carried out by hundreds of police officers from the Ministerial Police, the Federal Investigation Agency and the State Preventive Police, who entered the village with vehicles, on horseback and on foot. They found resistance on the part of men, women and children, to which the repressive forces reacted – according to reports by journalists who witnessed the operation – with brutality, “indiscriminately hitting children, women and senior citizens, executing three seriously injured people and murdering the driver who was taking them to the hospital in Comitán.”

The repression against the Miguel Hidalgo community was added to another repression that took place a few hours earlier, against groups of indigenous Tojolabal people from the communities of Santa Rita, Ojo de Agua, Nuevo Porvenir, Venustiano Carranza, Antela, San Nicolás, Tierra Blanca and Nueva Rosita, who last September had also peacefully taken over access of the National Lagunas de Montebello Park. Up till then, the Park had been controlled and managed by the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas.

The result of these disproportionate acts of violence against the civilian population was at least six people dead, two dozen injured in addition to the arrest of over fifty people.

With this repression the Mexican State (both federal and State governments) has flagrantly violated not only the human individual rights of those attacked regarding integrity and life – set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and the International Pact on Political and Civil Rights – but also their rights as indigenous people, regarding their territory and to recover, safeguard and manage their ancestral natural and cultural heritage, as recognized in the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights (article 11) and ILO Convention 169 (article 14), as has already rightly been pointed out by the Fray Bartolome de las Casas Centre for Human Rights and the International Commission for the Observation of Human Rights (CCIODH).

This brutal repression and massacre constitute a despicable act and a justified demand for justice and exemplary punishment is compulsory, not only regarding the material authors but also and more importantly, of the intellectual authors who gave the orders at the highest level.

However, this is only a sample of the type and magnitude of the interests behind the ambition to take over and privatize the indigenous and peasant territories of Chiapas and the Southeast of the country, rich in natural resources of a strategic nature (biodiversity, genetic resources, uncontaminated fresh water and rivers potentially producing hydroelectricity; wind – as wind energy – and forest cover to capture carbon), and also possessing unsurpassed scenic beauty and sacred ceremonial centres – not "ruins" - and archaeological sites.

In this case, the brutality of the official operation in Chinkultic would seem to be a sign that it was executed as an exemplary lesson, with the aim of weakening and dismantling possible resistance and further attacks by the Indigenous peoples, who – no matter what their political affiliation: Zapatistas, Perredistas or Priistas/Panistas – endeavour to autonomously defend, recover, safeguard and manage their cultural and natural heritage. The aim would be to guarantee multinational private investment (that is, among many others: Monsanto; Sanofi Aventis; Glaxo; Ford Motors Co.; Iberdrola; Repsol; Femsac-Cocacola; the Carso Group; and the Melia; Riu and Barcelo chains of hotels) the "social and political tranquillity" it has been demanding no doubt with increasing impatience.

For this reason, in this case -as in so many other similar ones in Chiapas and the rest of the country- what are at stake are not only the rights, territories and natural resources of the struggling and resisting Indigenous peoples and communities but the rights of the entire Mexican people and the very sovereignty of our Nation.

Article based on information from: "Comunicado by Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, A.C.," e-mail: m_a_zules@hotmail.com, www.maderasdelpueblo.org.mx, sent by Miguel Angel Garcia Aguirre.

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: Fisher-folk affected by Aracruz Celulose close the company's private port

A pulp mill seriously alters the micro-region where it is installed and generates a series of problems that mainly affect traditional peoples.

Aracruz Celulose S.A. (ARCEL) built the Barra do Riacho unit in the State of Espirito Santo in a place that had previously been the site of the indigenous village of Macacos. The building of this pulp mill attracted a large number of workers from other regions and states, causing much disruption in the neighbourhood of Barra do Riacho, which was basically a fishing community located one kilometre away from the mill. The neighbourhood suddenly grew from 900 to 10,000 inhabitants and today, Barra do Riacho still suffers from the consequences: a high rate of unemployment, child prostitution and drug trafficking.

Added to this is the fact that in order to guarantee enough water to supply the enormous consumption needed for the production of pulp – a demand equivalent to the consumption of water in a city of over 2 million inhabitants – ARCEL closed the outlet to the sea of

the River Riacho, diverting it in addition to four other rivers in the region, thus resulting in sedimentation.

This caused enormous damage to the Barra do Riacho and Barra do Sahy fisher-folk, who have repeatedly insisted that ARACEL address their legitimate demands, but are persistently ignored by the company.

Finally on 10 October 2008, over 100 fisher-folk from the Fisher-folk's Association of the Barra do Riacho and Barra do Sahy, closed for the whole day access by land to the port of Portocel, ARCEL's private port preventing the entry of pulp for export.

The fisher-folk submitted a long list of claims to the company and to the Municipality of Aracruz. Among these claims the main one demands "the immediate opening up of the four water-gates built [by ARCEL] on the river [Riacho] to increase its volume of water, as this has decreased the amount of water in the river, causing sedimentation and the blocking [by a growing sand dune] of the river's exit to the sea."

The closure of the river mouth has left the families of fisher-folk in a desperate situation because it prevents their boats going out (and returning) to high sea, making subsistence increasingly difficult for these people who depend on fishing. On the other hand, the vessels loaded with pulp to produce disposable paper in Europe, the US and Asia have not stopped leaving the port of Portocel.

The fisher-folk demanded the presence of the city mayor, Ademar Devens, who visited the site and on observing the situation of the river mouth, decided to take the fisher-folk's claims to the company. The company informed the fisher-folk that it was prepared to open the four water gates on the Riacho River provided the tide went down, in the understanding that this would facilitate the opening of the river mouth.

With the promise of opening the water gates, the fisher-folk decided to withdraw until the result of a forthcoming meeting with the municipality and the company, during which the situation would be assessed and other claims would be discussed. Based on these results they would decide whether to take further action. They are tired of promises and measures that do not solve the problem.

It is ironic that the company asked for the fisher-folk's "comprehension" of the difficulties they are facing: lack of water at the mill due to a prolonged drought in the region – a situation made worse by the company's own eucalyptus plantations - and a "difficult financial situation" due to the increase in the dollar rate – although it is public knowledge that ARCEL undertook financial operations of a speculative nature, resulting in losses amounting to millions of dollars.

And what about some understanding for the fisher-folk and the distressing situation in which they have been left on not being able to fish and address their basic needs?

Article based on information from: "Pescadores fecham porto de exportação da Aracruz Celulose"(Fisher-folk close Aracruz Celulose's export port), Winnie Overbeek, Rede Alerta contra o Deserto Verde, sent by the author, e-mail: woverbeek@terra.com.br; "Promises of jobs and destruction of work. The case of Aracruz Celulose in Brazil", by Alacir De'Nadai, Winfridus Overbeek, Luiz Alberto Soares, 2005, <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/fase.pdf>

[index](#)

- Indonesia: Pulp mill impacts on health of local population

It has been 63 years after Soekarno-Hatta proclaimed the independence of the Indonesia Republic on August 17, 1945. Every August especially on the 17th, Indonesians all along the archipelago celebrate this nation's anniversary.

Sadly, for people of Siantar Utara, in the Municipality of Toba Samosir, Siruar region, North Sumatra, it will be somehow impossible to have such a celebration. Almost all of the around 300 families here suffer skin disease which is quite itching and painful. This skin disease is suspectedly caused by the waste of the pulp mill Perseroan Terbatas Toba Pulp Lestari (PT TPL).

Just recently, people of Siruar came to dialogue with PT TPL; they came with their children who suffer suppurating skin disease all along their body especially most at their hips.

With tears flowing down their eyes, Rev. Sumurung Samosir and his wife Indira Simbolon witnessed the pain of these sisters and brothers of Siruar. Dimpos Manalu, a social worker as well as a young intellectual here in North Sumatra who is engaged and works together with marginal people in the region was deeply sad. The three of them couldn't say a word in front of the suffering of these people. There are babies with suppurating lumps on their head; a middle-aged woman said that all the women in Siruar have painful eczema but they are too ashamed to show it up. Suddenly, in response to this statement another woman came up saying that her husband also suffers itching skin disease mainly at his hip and genitals.

Indira Simbolon could take a picture of a woman who badly suffers painful itching skin disease all along her body: she has lumps in her tight, hip, bottom, belly, chest, and back. Many men said too they had painful itching lumps on their hips and genitals.

It came as an ironical fact indeed that just a few days ago the Minister of Environment awarded a green-award to PT TPL which means that the company has been managed in an environmentally friendly way.

PT TPL representative Leo Hutabarat told me that the itching skin disease of the people of Siruar has nothing to do with the company. Isn't it weird that PT TPL did not bring a doctor to help the people of Siruar? Doesn't this mean that they admitted what they try to deny? Since the beginning, PT TPL has not been consistent. In every dialogue where many people were involved they have talked politely but in practice they are arrogant. They keep a distance from the people around. Some journalists and I could see that: we were standing close to the river bank where the company's waste is poured. An employee of PT TPL accompanied us and told us how inconsistent the company has been. They throw their waste early in the morning often when it is raining. They manage to make things neat when they know that guests --especially from Jakarta-- are going to come. They did their best so that the smell caused by the PT TPL is not so bad. They bring doctors just when people around are angry with the unbearable situation, especially the impacts on health.

The water in the river where PT TPL throw their waste is brown-dirty while at the other part relatively far away from this company, it looks clean. The staff of PT TPL who came to talk with us said: " Many fishes near PT TPL can suddenly die". "I have been a farmer for a long time," said another person from Siruar, " but I never saw banana die before producing fruit." He pointed out to a banana which was almost dying: "Look at those bananas. Their leaves are wilted while they are still young."

People are powerless, and who cares? Those who work at the health office are also civil servants and they do not report what is going on with the impacts of PT TPL on the people's health condition. How come they keep silent?

PT TPL's huge profits have been at the expense of the people.

Some important concrete actions should be implemented to tackle this problem: the government should form an independent team to research the skin disease of the people of Siruar while PT TPL should acknowledge that their waste processing is not according to a proper environmental conduct; maybe PT TPL should stop their operations. The suffering of the people of Siruar is a human tragedy that we all need to pay attention and to take action; we all who side with them should take action and give them support.

By Gurgur Manurung, Environment scholar, doctoral student at Jogjakarta National University, UNJ. E-mail: gurgurmanurung@yahoo.com (This piece has been translated from Indonesian into English by Limantina Sihaloho).

[index](#)

- Malaysia: Indonesian children and migrant workers enslaved in oil palm plantations

Oil palm firms are making a fortune in Malaysia particularly with the current agrofuel rush. But none of it goes to those who put their blood and flesh to make the money come out from oil palm plantations (see WRM Bulletin N° 134). Migrant workers from Indonesia appear to be among those who get the worst deal.

At least 103 oil palm plantations in Sabah employ about 200,000 legal migrants as well as 134,000 considered illegal workers from Indonesia. An article from Erwilda Maulia, published in The Jakarta Post on September 17, 2008, reports "slavery practices" at oil palm plantations in Sabah, Malaysia. The National Commission for Child Protection revealed that thousands of Indonesian migrant workers and their children have been "systematically enslaved".

Denunciation came from a group of local Indonesian teachers who reported "an alleged case of child exploitation as well as several cases of physical and sexual harassment of children of Indonesian migrant employees". They also said that "children between the ages of six and 18 had to work for hours collecting sacks of oil palm seeds scattered on the ground, in return for a minimal amount of pay. The children were often forced to work by their own parents or by plantation managers", he added.

Arist Merdeka Sirait, a member of a fact-finding team sent to plantations in Sabah said: "They are placed in isolated barracks with no access to transportation, making it impossible for them to leave the plantations. Nor do they have access to clean water, lighting and other facilities."

The article reported him as saying that about 72,000 children of Indonesian migrant workers at the Sabah plantations were forced to work without regulated employment hours, meaning they were made to work all day long. The children were not provided with birth certificates or any other type of identity documents, effectively denying their right to formal education, among other rights.

"We call this 'bonded labor' (a means of paying off debt by direct labour rather than by currency or goods), and it is a modern kind of slavery," Arist added. According to him, "Bonded labor" was common at all the plantations, and Malaysian authorities deliberately allow such conditions to persist.

It is very convenient for the ambitious corporations to have a way of maintaining "illegal" workers and by enslaving children of migrant workers they secure a future low-paid labour force, just like their parents. To make matters worse, "illegal" workers are often extorted by Malaysian security officers who check their documents, Arist denounced.

The bitter fruit of oil palm plantations seems to become even more sour for the workers.

Article based on information from: "RI workers, children 'enslaved' in Malaysia, commission says", Erwida Maulia , The Jakarta Post , 09/17/2008, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/09/17/ri-workers-children-039enslaved039-malaysia-commission-says.html>

[index](#)

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