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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Tenth anniversary of the bulletin: Thank you all very much!

With this issue, the WRM bulletin reaches its tenth year. This anniversary provides an opportunity to give visibility to the numerous people who, in one way or another have made it possible – month by month and year after year – to issue the bulletin.

It is important to start by saying that one of the most outstanding features of the bulletin is that it is produced through a wide network of people all around the world, who are willing to share the knowledge they have about local, national and international realities. It is those inputs that enable the bulletin to contain so much valuable and first hand

information. Only a few of these people are, or consider themselves to be, journalists, but in fact they fulfil – and very seriously – this function.

All these people, from the most diverse realities and cultures, have something in common: a shared vision regarding the essential things in life such as rights, equity, respect for nature and the search for a better future for humanity. In the specific case of forests, they share the idea that not only is their protection necessary, but that it necessarily requires the recognition of the territorial rights of the people who live therein and who depend on them.

This explains another feature of the bulletin: its articles are never neutral, but written from and at the service of peoples' struggles. The information they contain is objective, but the authors do not merely describe what is going on, but place themselves on the side of those who defend their rights.

Thus the bulletin is a tool, collectively produced and placed at the service of struggles. These – and not the mere dissemination of information – are the bulletin's most important objectives: collaboration and support to struggles.

The word "struggle" usually evokes images of people mobilized around concrete claims. For example, those of local inhabitants opposing the logging of their forests or the installation of a hydroelectric dam or opposing eucalyptus plantations. And of course these struggles are permanently brought to the forefront and supported by the bulletin.

However, the word "struggle" also includes wider scenarios, such as the struggle for the recognition of indigenous and traditional peoples' territorial rights, the struggle for changes in destructive production and consumption models, the struggle in defence of climate and biodiversity, and many others.

In every case, the bulletin attempts to provide information and serious analyses, but at the same time comprehensible to all, as a way of empowering people. The struggle for changes – both at local and global levels – requires people to be well informed. In turn, for this to take place the communication language must be within everyone's reach, without losing the necessary depth.

Of course for the bulletin to be disseminated every month, for people to have the opportunity to share their knowledge, for the language to be understandable, coordination and facilitation are required. This is what we at the WRM secretariat are doing and we feel very honoured to be able to fulfil this task.

However, the merit for the quality and usefulness of the bulletin not only rests with those who facilitate it or who write its articles, but also with its most important protagonists: the thousands and thousands of people whose struggles inspire and give life to the bulletin.

Thank you all very much!

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Benin: Large scale oil palm plantations for agrofuel

The race for agrofuels has reached Benin. With heavy support from the government and forming a key part of the "agricultural revival strategy" promoted by the IMF restructuring programme, millions of hectares of agricultural and forest land are to be turned over to agrofuel production for export, with no discussion or concern for the impacts that this will have on the Beninese, their food production and their environment.

The research undertaken by Josea Doussou Bodjrenou of Nature- Tropicale exposes how the discussion about new

agrofuel developments has clearly been about production for export and maximising profit. Information about specific development plans, land targets, or deals with foreign companies and governments have been difficult to obtain, and there is a virtual vacuum of legislation in which these developments are going ahead.

Benin's Agricultural Revival Programme will entail significant palm oil developments, as well as the scaling up of biodiesel from *Jatropha*, peanuts, and bioethanol from sugarcane, manioc and other crops.

Oil palm is native to the wetlands of Western Africa. There are already a number of palm tree monoculture plantations in the South of Benin, but these should only serve as a warning against future developments, due to the complications and difficulties experienced by communities attempting to sell their palm products. The community cooperatives that coordinate the palm sales with government have been plagued by a history of corruption and conflict. Into this scenario, private companies have stepped in, offering to buy the oil directly from the communities, at a higher price. But when the communities switched over, and gave their products to the industries, the companies failed to pay. Benin palm oil cooperatives found themselves in trouble, but without sympathy or help from government.

Now, the government aims to find 300,000-400,000 hectares of land in the humid Southern Benin areas of Oueme, Plateau, Atlantic, Mono, Couffo and Zou for oil palm plantations. This zone hosts 50% of the country's population on only 7.7% of the national territory. This suggests that agrofuels will be competing with food production in the prime agricultural lands of Benin. Much of the food crops will also be used for agrofuel production. Industrial companies will be supported to obtain land for these initiatives. Although policy is not clear on where, or from whom, this land is to come, it is likely that small scale farmers will be excluded where their interests conflict with industries.

Looking at demographic growth rates in Benin, especially in urbanised areas, it is obvious that maintaining food supply will call for an increase in food crops, especially root crops. But it is clear that the production of biofuels will drive farmers to allocate less land to food crops, leading to food insecurity. In Northern Benin, in the Banikoara region, farmers abandoned production of food crops for cash crops: cotton and peanuts. Today, food insecurity is rife. Where once they fed themselves, the World Food Program (WFP) and the Catholic Relief Services now feed populations. Most of the population's purchasing power is very low, and the increase in food prices due to decreased stocks, will favour imports and distribution of poor quality foods, food aid dependency, and possibly GMOs.

The government of Benin is not openly admitting that they will destroy any ecosystems for biofuel production. But it is obvious that encouraging large-scale industries as well as small-scale farmers to find hundreds of thousands of hectares of land to grow agrofuels, will involve huge increases in land under cultivation, for both food crops and agrofuels as well as expansion into the remaining wetlands, sacred and communal forests, fallow lands and rich biodiverse ecosystems in Southern Benin.

Josea Doussou Bodjrenou notices in his research that Benin differs from some of the other countries in Africa, in that the discussion about biofuels has barely touched on the idea of meeting national energy security needs. Instead, the government is clear that this is about maximising profits for both state-owned and private companies. However, those profits are unlikely to filter down to the rural poor of Benin.

The areas of land that are being talked about are enormous. Although it is not easy to know what portion of the proposed new land in the agricultural revival programme will be for agrofuels, it is planned that 3 million hectares of new land will be found for the scheme by 2011.

The scale of the plans for biofuel production in Benin leave no room for doubt that enormous pressures will threaten the food security, land rights, and ecological habitats of the Beninese. In a country already struggling to cope with the exploitation and poverty brought about by a focus on cotton production for export, a large-scale conversion to agrofuels can only exacerbate the problems facing Benin's rural poor.

Article based on: "Biofuel case study: BENIN", summary of research undertaken by Josea Doussou Bodjrenou of Nature-Tropicale for the report "Agrofuels in Africa – The impacts on land, food and forests", African Biodiversity Network, July 2007. <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/ABN%20Agrofuels%20Africa.pdf>

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- Bolivia: The Amazon peoples discuss their future

A forum has been opened in Bolivia to discuss the issues and the vision of the Bolivian Amazon and to give back to the indigenous peoples the dignity stolen from them by the conquest of America.

Last June in the Amazon city of Guayaramerin, the Ministry of the Presidency of the Bolivian Republic organized the First Amazon Forum on "Macro-Regional Identity and Development." One of the centres of the debate was local identity and the present situation of indigenous peoples that represent the country's greatest ethnic-cultural diversity and in particular, the critical situation of the most vulnerable originating groups. Some of these are threatened by strong acculturation processes and the violation of their human rights, others are in danger of physical extinction and some live in voluntary isolation.

At the opening session, Evo Morales Ayma, the first President of Bolivia to be born within an originating indigenous community, stated before some three hundred participants – where a motley group of indigenous and peasant leaders from the whole of the Amazon stood out – that "To defend the Earth is to defend humanity. To save the environment is to save humanity."

At a forum the previous day, indigenous peoples and peasant communities from the Amazon region had established the strategic outline for what they understand must be the Amazon development policy. Among its foundations, they affirmed that it "must be based on the special protection of indigenous peoples in a state of extreme vulnerability and particularly those who are at risk of disappearing, as they are the Amazon's cultural, historic and ethnic heritage."

These positions were expressed in a proposal, denouncing the attempts by transnational companies to pursue their avidity to privatize and monopolize the Amazon's natural resources, presently allying themselves with the Departmental prefectures of Beni and Pando.

Furthermore, the proposal defends the right of the indigenous peoples to an autonomous and communal territory within the region, considered to be one of the most important biodiversity reserves in the world.

The proposal also rejects the Brazilian government's intention of building mega dams on the Madera River, which would place at risk the environmental and social integrity of a large part of the Bolivian Amazon. The Brazilian government has just granted an environmental licence for dams at Jirau and Santo Antonio on the Madero River, going against the position of the Brazilian and Bolivian representatives of the Peasant Communities, Peoples and Organizations and other people affected by the dams, gathered in the "Social Movement in Defence of the Madero River Basin and the Amazon Region." The Madero River Complex is a pilot project for a new management of the South American territory, that intends to establish a kind of parallel state, with its private sovereignty, its own rules, beyond the sovereignty of national laws.

On this occasion, the political minister, Juan Ramón Quintana, stressed the fact that "it must be the indigenous peoples that, together with the state negotiate sovereignty and territorial control in the Amazon to end centuries of colonial exploitation and discrimination." According to the official, genocide and aggression towards the indigenous Amazon people has been a tool used to consolidate economic interests external to the region such as those that marked the rubber boom at the end of the nineteenth century. This continued through the second half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century with disregard for indigenous issues, projecting the power rationale of

vernacular right-wing political “caciques” and their present demands for an isolating autonomy, counter to the demands of the indigenous movements.

“The Amazon must become a linking and integrating factor in a country as diverse as Bolivia and within the Amazon, indigenous peoples must act along the same lines to overcome feudal and racist stigmas that still survive in the region,” stated Minister Quintana, who was responsible for reading out the “Guayaramerin Declaration” (available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Bolivia/Declaration_Guayaramerin.html), closing the first Amazon forum.

The following sentences are taken from this declaration, signed by all those present at the event: “from this forum is born an irreversible process that will help to heal the wounds of history, both those that bereaved our indigenous peoples and peasant communities, and those that degraded and ransacked our nature and our biodiversity.” Further on it adds “from today on a new history starts, the history of Amazon dignity.”

Article based on: “Primer Foro Amazónico en Bolivia defendió derechos de los pueblos indígenas más vulnerables de la región” (First Amazon Forum in Bolivia defended the rights of the region’s most vulnerable indigenous peoples) Pablo Cingolani, e-mail: pablocingolani@yahoo.com.ar sent by the author; “¿Liderazgo sudamericano de Brasil? La aprobación de las represas del río Madera viola los principios para la convivencia pacífica de las naciones” (South American leadership of Brazil? The approval of the dams on the Madera River violates principles for peaceful and harmonious cohabitation of nations), FOBOMADE, Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo, (Bolivian Forum on Environment and Development) e-mail: comunicacion@fobomade.org.bo, <http://www.fobomade.org.bo>

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- Central Africa: Deforestation brings HIV/AIDS to indigenous communities, mainly women

Indigenous peoples living in the tropical rainforests of Central Africa are widely dispersed and identify their groups by a variety of names. Numbering a total of 300,000 to 500,000 people, those members of communities from several ethnic groups characterized by their small stature are identified under the generic name of “pygmies” (see WRM Bulletin N° 119). Considered to be the original inhabitants of the continent, pygmy populations have lived as hunter-gatherers in the forests of Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Republic of Congo (ROC) since time immemorial. They have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the rainforest on which their livelihood, medicinal practices and culture depend entirely.

But now, this delicate balance may be about to disappear. Intensive commercial hunting, the opening of roads into the forests due to logging activities, and systematic deforestation have devastated the rich ecosystem of the tropical rainforest threatening the very existence of the community. According to the Rainforest Action Network, “Between 1980 and 1995, Africa lost more than 10 percent of its forests, or approximately 150 million acres. In the 1990s, the rate of deforestation increased.”

In keeping with their traditions, pygmies have used to turn to the rainforest in times of sickness. This relative self-reliance for health services has allowed many groups to remain isolated from major epidemics that have affected neighbouring communities, such as cholera, meningitis or even Ebola. However, as the forests have receded under mining and logging activities, its original inhabitants have been pushed into populated areas to join the formal economy, working as casual labourers or on commercial farms, thus being exposed to new diseases. This shift has brought them into closer contact with neighbouring ethnic communities whose HIV levels are generally higher. HIV/AIDS has spread in the pygmy community.

Studies in Cameroon and ROC in the 1980s and 1990s showed a lower prevalence of HIV in pygmy populations than among neighbouring ones, but recent increases have been recorded. One study found that the HIV prevalence among the Baka pygmies in eastern Cameroon went from 0.7 percent in 1993 to 4 percent in 2003.

Speakers at a recent conference held in Impfondo, 800km north of the ROC capital, Brazzaville, noted that impoverished Twa pygmy women of communities in Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and elsewhere were turning to commercial sex work to make ends meet, but ignorance about the pandemic meant many were unaware of the dangers of unprotected sex.

"Almost all indigenous women in Burundi are illiterate ... ignorant of the fact that HIV/AIDS can also attack them," said Léonard Habimana, Burundi's first Twa journalist and the promoter of a private radio station, Radio Isanganiro, which educates people about the dangers of sexually transmitted infections, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS in pygmy communities.

"Because of poverty, sexual exploitation of indigenous women became a common fact," said Kapupu Diwa, head of a network of local and indigenous populations advocating for the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in central Africa.

Commercial sex work has also been bolstered by logging and infrastructure building, which often place large groups of transient labourers in camps set up in close proximity to pygmy communities.

A widely believed myth that sex with a Twa woman has the power to cleanse men of the HI virus places Twa women at additional risk. Human rights groups have also reported widespread sexual abuse of indigenous women in the conflict-ridden eastern DRC.

Despite these risks, pygmy populations generally have poor access to health services and information about HIV. In 2006, the British medical journal, The Lancet, published a study showing that the Twa consistently had worse access to healthcare than neighbouring communities.

According to the report, "Even where healthcare facilities exist, many people do not use them because they cannot pay for consultations and medicines, do not have the documents and identity cards needed to travel or obtain hospital treatment, or are subjected to humiliating and discriminatory treatment."

Article based on: "Minorities Under Siege - Pygmies today in Africa", IRIN, <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=9&ReportId=58605>; Central Africa: HIV/AIDS a threat to indigenous forest communities, PlusNews, <http://www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72155>

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- Ecuador: Indigenous peoples close to extinction because of illegal logging

On 27 April 2007, following a visit to the Amazon region, the President of the Republic, Mr. Rafael Correa decreed a ban on timber extraction from this area because of the imminent disappearance of the country's native forests. In spite of this declaration, the extraction of cedar wood in the Yasuni National Park (YNP) and in the Intangible Zone continues non-stop.

The Yasuni National Park and the Intangible Zone are the territory of the Tagaeri/Taromenane Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation (IPVI). The invasion of their territories by oil and logging companies and tourists has placed these peoples in danger of extinction. To date, various measures have been set out on paper to avoid this happening, but have not been implemented.

In a visit to the Intangible Zone, members of the Huaorani People together with Accion Ecologica campaigners verified the presence of various crews of loggers extracting cedar wood from the dense forest. The situation of these men is

so precarious that they have no other alternative than placing their lives at risk in order to obtain an income to survive on. Those who benefit and control the timber business in Yasuni are not these daily labourers who risk their lives, but the logging companies safe in comfortable and influential positions, manipulating their strings of power.

At the bridge over the Shiripuno River, deep draught canoes loaded with crews of labourers, fire-arms, chain-saws and mules easily penetrate into the forest to extract cedar wood planks, a highly appreciated timber because of its quality and scarcity.

In this part of the Amazon region, Presidential Declarations or Delimitation of Intangible Zone Decrees or the ban on cedar and mahogany logging issued by the Minister of the Environment on 11 February 2007, do not count. They do not count because there is no-one to implement these measures. So far no coordination has been established between the responsible authorities and ministries, there are no checkpoints on the highways nor at the Park entrance, nor at the ports, the forestry system continues to be deficient and corrupt, and timber circulates merrily towards Guayaquil to be exported or to Tulcan for the Colombian market.

Navigating along the Shiripuno River we found two large canoes calmly going down river with their passengers towards the timber camps installed in the forest. The signs of invasion are visible and clear in the middle of the forest: plastic, trash and large blocks of cedar planks floating along the river-side and semi-concealed along its banks.

A clandestine sawmill is located near the Cononaco River, the planks were piled up waiting for "their owners" to come and collect them. Close to this place various attacks by the Tagaeri/Taromenane have taken place to defend their territory from the invaders. In spite of the risk of further confrontations, cedar continues to be extracted from this site.

The trip continued along the Shiripuno until reaching the Huaorani community of Boanamo. Opposite the landing stage was a canoe which was being loaded with wooden planks that arrived in a smaller vessel along the narrow Boanamo River. Three men unloaded the timber and then returned upriver.

The people from Boanamo stated that another Huaorani called Ike from the Tigüino community had ordered this timber to be removed. They had not negotiated with Boanamo and entrusted the guide for this trip to ask Ike when he came out whether it was true the timber was his.

Fifteen people live in Boanamo. The chief of the community is Omayegue. Neither he nor his wife speak Spanish. Nor are they in agreement with the extraction of timber from their territory. During the afternoon and the night we spent with the community, we spoke with Nantu Guaponi, our guide for this trip, about his disagreement with timber extraction and his willingness to find economic alternatives for the community.

According to the conversations held with this community, the Taromenane live a few hours trek away from Boanamo. Omayegue knows the routes and even spends whole weeks travelling over the territory, just as the Huaorani people have done for thousands of years.

We travelled some 15 minutes up-river along the mouth of the Tiwino until we found an inhabited loggers' camp. There were clothes hanging on a line and a campfire was burning. The camp had a black plastic roof and appeared to house a lot of people. The conditions were rudimentary: we could just see the roof placed on some logs. On the river close to the camp was a medium-sized canoe carrying barrels of fuel. Large quantities of planks were half-hidden about one hundred meters away from the camp.

On the way back, on the Auca route, no checkpoints were to be found to control the trucks loaded with timber.

These facts prove that illegal cedar logging is an unsolved problem within the Yasuni National Park, the Huaorani Territory and the Intangible Zone. Urgent action is required to put an end to this dangerous threat. The Intangible

Zone's specially protected condition is known by all the actors (except by the free peoples living in voluntary isolation) and even so, nobody respects it. Nor is there any desire to enforce existing legislation. As the loggers say "say what they will in Quito, here all is still the same."

Urgent measures must be adopted, including checkpoints at the entry of the Yasuni National Park, timber control points, permanent monitoring of truck traffic, awareness and economic alternatives for the indigenous communities involved in the trafficking, negotiations and job opportunities to enable the loggers entering the YNP to leave it peacefully, follow-up on complaints made to the prosecutor's office against middle-men, thus leading to the heads of this mafia.

It is very important to reach agreements with the local populations so that they become the main actors involved in the conservation of the YNP and its resources.

Policies must be developed for the protection of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation in coordination with the indigenous peoples' organization CONAIE. The Intangible Zone must be declared indigenous territory of the IPVI, preserving its condition of intangibility perpetually and measures promoting contact must be prohibited.

Additionally, no more licences must be granted for the extraction of oil within the Yasuni Biosphere Reserve and the international community should support the proposal to keep crude oil underground in the ITT block, as suggested by the Ecuadorian Government.

By Nathalia Bonilla, Forest Campaign, Acción Ecológica e-mail: foresta@accionecologica.org, www.accionecologica.org

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- India: A plan for the takeover of forest land by industry

In 2002, under the Tenth Plan, the Indian government set the national goal of having 33 percent of the country's geographic area under "green cover" by 2012. The plan was even presented as part of India's commitment towards the Millennium Goal on environmental sustainability. However, it is much more about industrial encroachment of forest land for tree plantations.

The proposal looks simple: India has large tracts of lands without tree cover. These are lands classified as forests but lying degraded. The country needs to plant trees. But the government says it lacks funds. Industry says that it needs raw material from forests. It has the capital to pay for planting trees and the technology and managerial ability to do massive afforestation. If trees are planted, the poor will get jobs. This is a win-win option and is called a multi-stakeholder partnership for forestation.

The proposal has been worked in close consultation with industry, in particular the wood-consuming pulp and paper sector which needs to grow -- according to estimates, in 10 years there will be a demand gap in paper and paper-board of 5-6 million tonnes. It needs 1 to 1.2 million ha of degraded forest land to grow its raw material. This will give it its competitive advantage and it can increase its share in the global market. If this happens, it will need another 1 million ha of degraded forest land to produce "surplus" for export. It wants large, contiguous areas so that it can achieve economies of scale.

The biodiesel industry is also a big player — its demand for forest land has been incessant. It is desperately scouting for large areas to grow its oil plants. Again, economics teaches it that the cheapest option is to grow captive plantations and that is what it wants. Already big players — Reliance, UK-based D1 Oil as well as British Petroleum — are lobbying hard to change laws, which will allow captive plantations on forest lands.

Also, there is the possibility of earning carbon credits, as trees sequester carbon. There is money in forests. And industry wants it.

The industry has asked for the rules to be relaxed further. For instance, it wants the criterion that the maximum parcel of land that can be bid on be limited to 50 hectares (ha) to be removed. "Economics of scale demand that industry should be given large parcels of land — 6,000-10,000 ha of contiguous lands," said David Gardner of Jaakko Poyry Consulting. In addition, the Confederation of Indian Industry wants a tax exemption on the grounds that "it is re-greening the country and bringing development". It forgets that it is getting the mother of all subsidies — free land — to underwrite its development.

There is an additional issue: Under existing laws, planting trees on "forest land" by industry is not permitted. A 'suitable' re-definition of forest land would help proposal proponents move ahead. The mission 'what-is-a-forest' started last year. A consultant to the ministry for this project proposed a definition of a forest that already promises to add new potholes in the already-bumpy road of forest management. This is the definition: "An area under Government control notified or recorded as 'forest' under any Act, for conservation and management of ecological and biological resources." In this definition, there is no space for the livelihood and ecological needs of local communities, who live on these lands, but whose rights are often not recorded or asserted.

Many in India know that the proposal to increase forest and tree cover had been pushed, each time with some changes in the detail of the scheme, each time with bigger and bigger players in the fray -- the last was in early 2000, when Reliance Industries almost secured rights over forests of Andhra Pradesh. Each time the proposal has been rejected because it is understood that it will do nothing for poor people who depend on the forests and nothing even for the forests it aims to protect.

"The forests do not belong to the state or industry and cannot be owned or traded," said Shankar Gopalakrishnan of the Campaign for Dignity and Survival, an umbrella organisation of forest community groups. More than 40 million people depend on the country's resource-rich forest areas -- which make up around 25 percent of the landmass -- eking out a living from cattle grazing, collecting firewood and simple farming, and they will lose their homes and their livelihoods if the big corporates move in and get their way.

For people crucially dependent on forest lands, this movement of enclosure would be devastating. More and more it would lead to tensions between the richer in the village — less dependent on the commons for survival — who can afford to 'agree' to private control and those who are landless and marginalised and have no alternative but to use these lands.

Article based on: "Indian plan to lease degraded forests sparks anger", by Nita Bhalla, 29 Jun 2007, Reuters, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/DEL303993.htm>; "Defining forest in Indian context", Archi Rastogi, Down to Earth, <http://www.centralchronicle.com/20070611/1106301.htm>; "Private Affairs", Down to Earth, A http://www.downtoearth.org.in/section.asp?sec_id=9&foldername=20060415;

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- Mangrove Action Day (26 July) - A Global Call to Action

Since the year 2000, every July 26th has become an annual global commemorative day for the mangroves. This year's theme is entitled "On Behalf of Indigenous and Traditional Communities and Food Sovereignty."

In reference to this year's campaign, the Latin American Mangrove Network, Redmanglar International states that International Mangrove Action Day "proclaims a call for the rights of the indigenous and traditional communities of the

mangrove ecosystem based on the recognition of our territory where we build our culture, our identity and the base for our food sovereignty."

Redmanglar explains that "The indigenous and traditional mangrove communities of Latin America, have millenary lived, in a vital way, related to the ecosystem. In this space we put dreams; we find our past, our present and future. Here we live together with our grandfathers and grandmothers, with our sons and daughters, with our brothers and sisters from all the Americas and the world. Here we stand up together for our territory, for our food, for our work, for our dignity.

This 26th of July we wish that the whole world hear our voices-- the voices of the indigenous and traditional communities of the mangrove ecosystem. We hope that these voices reach all of our societies, the indolent authorities, the depredator enterprises. We desire that we can hear each other-- all the voices of the South-- and that we continue walking together on behalf of our ideals."

Article based on information from: "On Behalf of Indigenous and Traditional Communities and Food Sovereignty!, July 26th - International Mangrove Action Day", by Lider Gongora Farias, President C-CONDEM, Executive Secretary Redmanglar International; <http://redmanglar.org/redmanglar.php?c=635>
Alfredo Quarto, Executive Director, Mangrove Action Project, mangroveap@olympus.net,
<http://www.mangroveactionproject.org>

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- **Brazil: Indigenous Peoples re-start actions to take back their land from Aracruz**

In an "Open Letter to the population and Brazilian authorities", the Commission of Tupinikim and Guarani Chiefs and Leaders state:

"Today (24/07/2007) we are starting to carry out several peaceful actions with the aim of retaking possession of the 11,009 hectares of lands that belong to us and that have already been thoroughly identified by the FUNAI [the Federal Agency for Indigenous Issues] as lands traditionally occupied by us, Tupinikim and Guarani.

Initially we plan to halt the cutting of eucalyptus trees and take the non-indigenous persons, who are illegally in our lands, out of the area. Then, we will organize collective working days to reconstruct some of our villages (Olho d'Água, Macacos and Areal), destroyed by Aracruz Celulose when it invaded our lands. We will build houses and plant food crops and native tree species in order to recover and reforest our lands.

Through a stop in the cutting of eucalyptus trees and taking out the non-indigenous people, we aim at protecting the eucalyptus plantations, so that they can be used as payments for due reimbursements to Aracruz Celulose for the existing 'improvements' in the 11,009 hectares. The halting of the eucalyptus cutting will also apply to us, indigenous peoples, as one more proof of our desire to cooperate with a quick and peaceful solution to the problem.

However, we want to reaffirm that our actions result from the delay of the federal government in solving a dispute that has been going on now for almost 40 years. We always complied with our commitments with the government, but the government not always complied with theirs. It is worth while to remember that the ex-Minister of Justice Márcio Thomas Bastos, during a public meeting in the Espírito Santo State Parliament in February 2006, promised to demarcate our lands by the end of 2006. However, in January 2007, just before leaving the Ministry, he irregularly sent back the land demarcation files to FUNAI, in spite of the fact that he had all the necessary elements to sign the demarcation decrees of our lands. Recently, 7 months later, the files returned to the Ministry of Justice. How much

more time will be necessary for signing the demarcation decrees and other necessary measures?

Finally, we want to make clear that our struggle aims at recovering our land and that we will not desist from this right. If the neglect and delay of the federal government persists, we will intensify our actions to consolidate the possession of the lands of our ancestors and of our children and grandchildren, including restarting the cutting of eucalyptus trees by the indigenous communities."

24 July 2007, Commission of Tupinikim and Guarani Chiefs and Leaders

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- Chile: The short-lived lies of a "successful" forestry model

Chile is where the "forestry model" introduced into the countries of the South – that is to say large-scale monoculture tree plantations, mainly aimed at producing pulp for export – has been "sold" best.

The 1973 military regime created a framework for the introduction of neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization and unilateral economic opening up, whereby the forestry sector was developed as one of the pillars of Chilean macro-economy. Forestry activities in Chile come second in importance to copper mining and are among the ten main products concentrating 50 percent of the total value of exports.

What is not said is that although the major forestry companies have contributed to create an outstanding macro-economy, it is also true that they have generated similarly outstanding levels of social inequality and the replacement of native forests by exotic monoculture tree plantations, impoverishing and evicting from their ancestral lands the people who lived there. They have also caused landscape and environmental degradation, in particular affecting water.

So, during the season of the year when there is the greatest demand for labour, in the commune of Los Sauces, Province of Malleco in the South of Chile, the Mininco forestry company gives work to only 19 people from the commune and pays them very low salaries. In a region where wheat once grew and there were native forests of oak, raulies and lingues, today the exotic plantations of Monterrey pine and eucalyptus occupy almost two thirds of the arable land. The largest timber companies -Mininco, Arauco, Cautín, Comaco, Casino and Tierra Chilena, among others- settled in this predominantly rural commune, where twenty per cent of the population are Mapuche indigenous people. Like in other parts of the country, their enormous profits are expressed in a loss of quality of life for the local people. Thirty-three point eight per cent of the population live in either poverty or dire poverty.

Agricultural activities declined 22 % over the past 10 years, gradually forcing over 1,400 people to migrate to towns where they build poverty belts amid the opulence of the forestry companies. One of the reasons is the lack of water as the plantations have dried up the soil. Every summer the municipality has to deliver water by truck for domestic consumption.

In addition to the lack of water is the problem of agrochemical contamination. The neighbours in the rural sectors of Porvenir Bajo and Porvenir Alto suffer from serious health problems due to plantation spraying by the Comaco forestry company. Agrochemicals, in particular herbicides (glyphosate and simazine), are mechanically or manually sprayed before plantation and at various times during the first stages of growth of the trees, polluting rivers, brooks and irrigation channels.

Maria Martinez lives with her husband on a small property next to a pine plantation and their only source of water is the nearby stream. They use it for family consumption, for the animals to drink and to water their crops. "I have had pains in my stomach," said Maria with concern. Ten of her twelve sheep died and she is convinced that they were

poisoned by pesticides, "because the company has sprayed the banks of the stream."

The neighbours denounced agrochemical spraying even along the border of the public highway. An irrigation channel running parallel to the highway drains murky waters of a suspiciously white colour and along its edges the vegetation looks burnt. In the summer the forestry trucks come and go at all hours, raising clouds of dust (with pesticide waste) that goes into the houses, damages the grass the animals feed on and makes the products of family vegetable plots inedible.

In Los Sauces there is a reason to fear chemical poisons. In 1997 a woman of 70 and a boy of 14 both died, intoxicated by an anticoagulant rat poison (bromadiolone) scattered by the Bosques Arauco company. At that time, various persons were intoxicated, and domestic animals and cattle died. Later a child died after having eaten wild mushrooms that his family, like many others, used to gather and consume without any ill effects. The father of this child was also intoxicated but managed to save himself. As a discussion started on this issue, the municipality entrusted a study to the Austral University of Valdivia, which indicated that "uncontrolled dispersion of large amounts of toxic substances such as pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, etc.) used in agriculture can make normally edible wild mushrooms poisonous."

In the Mapuche community of Lorenzo Quilapi Cabeton, in the Queuque sector of Los Sauces, most of the young people have emigrated in search of jobs. "We suffer a great deal because of the forestry companies," says Pilar Antileo. Her family no longer has a vegetable garden, because "you can't plant without water." They used to have up to 150 hens that laid eggs", some for use and some to sell, but now this is impossible because the foxes that the forestry companies released to catch the rabbits [that were affecting the pine trees], also eat the hens." After aerial spraying various people who consumed wild mushrooms were intoxicated. "A woman, Margarita Espinoza, died and a child of 13 found some dead rabbits and took them home. They eat them and were all sick. The child died and the mother continues to be sickly even now. Another woman, Mercedes Huenchuleo, went up to the hill to look at the animals and smelt a bad smell. She got sick and died. They said it was a heart attack," said Pilar. There are other cases of questionable deaths that people associate with pesticides.

In the Guadaba Abajo sector, spraying from planes was started three years ago in the Forestal Cautin plantations. Ireni Polma, from the Antonio Pailaqueo community says that her family's bees died and that since then she has had a permanent allergy on her face.

The most commonly used herbicides in Los Sauces are simazine and glyphosate (Rango and Roundup). The former is sold in Chile with a "green" seal (indicating supposedly low toxicity) but it has been restricted in the European Union since 2002.

It would now seem that the forestry companies are resorting to even more poisons as a hitherto unknown disease is attacking the large monoculture Monterrey pine plantations. It is a fungus that attacks the trees' needles, drying them up so they look "burnt." The gradual loss of leaves not only leads to a lower growth rate but also makes the trees prone to other diseases that eventually lead to their death.

The first attacks of "pine needle damage" were detected in 2003 but alarm only spread at the end of last year when from affecting some isolated plots only, the fungus covered nearly 100 thousand hectares. Most of the damaged plantations are located in the southeast of the Biobio Region, Province of Arauco, where half the area is covered with Monterrey pine plantations.

One of the main plantation companies –Forestal Arauco- has already started aerial spraying. This of course has caused various kinds of damage to the communities neighbouring the plantations. Some inhabitants affirm that following the spraying, adults and children showed symptoms of eye irritation, headaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Several bee-keepers even affirmed that the fungicides caused the death of almost half their hives.

This is the bitter reverse of the “successful Chilean forestry model”: destruction and environmental degradation, eviction, unemployment, disease and death for the local communities – all this to support the profits of a handful of companies.

The “successful” forestry model has very weak foundations and the lies about its success are short-lived.

Article based on information from: “Chile: ¿un caso modelo? Desafíos en los umbrales del siglo XXI”, (Chile: a model case? Challenges at the threshold of the twenty-first century) Claudio Maggi/ Dirk Messner, INEF1, <http://www.meso-nrw.de/modelo.pdf>; “Las plantas de celulosa y el sector forestal. Visión de la agrupación de ingenieros forestales por el bosque nativo (AIFBN)” (Pulp mills and the forestry sector. The vision of the association of forestry engineers in favour of the native forest), http://www.ecosistemas.cl/1776/articles-74477_recurso_1.pdf; “Venenos en las forestales” (Poisons in the forestry companies), Revista Enlace, N° 76, April 2007; “La misteriosa enfermedad que inquieta a las compañías forestales. La otra plaga de Arauco”, (The mysterious disease troubling the forestry companies. The other pest in Arauco), Nación Domingo, by Darío Zambra (http://ln.fica.cl/muestra_noticia.php?id=3010), sent by Lucio Cuenca, e-mail: l.cuenca@olca.cl

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- Congo, Republic: Thousands of hectares of land for eucalyptus, oil palm and mining

Between 1991 and 2001, Shell Renewables -a division of Shell Oil International- implemented a forestry operation based on the planting and harvesting of fast-growing cloned eucalyptus trees (see WRM Bulletin 46), with the aim of establishing a high-yield source of biomass for future energy generation.

Later on, Shell sold its plantations. Very recently MagForestry -the forestry division of MagIndustries, a Canadian company involved in industrial and energy projects in Central-Africa (most notably the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo)- took over control of the former Shell’s 68,000 hectare eucalyptus plantation through the acquisition of all the shares of Eucalyptus Fibre Congo S.A. (EFC), the lessee of the industrial plantation.

EFC currently holds an exclusive 50 year forestry concession agreement with the Government of the Republic of Congo, which is renewable by EFC for an additional 21 years. This enables MagForestry to appropriate thousands of hectares of land to carry out not only a forestry activity that produces very few jobs, but also to secure long term land rights for its mining branches: MagMining’s brine well mining field, MagMinerals’ potash plant and MagMetals’ magnesium smelter.

The eucalyptus plantations lay near the Congo’s Atlantic port city of Pointe-Noire, from where MagForestry can send its shipments to the seaports of Antwerp in Belgium and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, ready to be distributed all over Europe or to be re-exported to anywhere in the world.

Another budding business adds to the package. The biomass fuel boom prompted MagForestry to begin the construction of a 500,000 tonne per year wood chipping plant on those lands, aiming at becoming a major supplier for the rapidly growing global biomass market.

At the same time, the Spanish company Aurantia is investing in a cluster of palm plantations in the Republic of Congo with the aim of producing biodiesel from the oil. Feasibility studies are already underway to analyse the different plantation and mill sites, and to assess the state of the existing logistical infrastructure in the country.

The actual size of the investment has not been disclosed and the company did not offer any insights into how it sees itself within the context of sustainability and of the fragility of Congo’s environment, neither into how it would guarantee

its palm oil is produced in an environmentally friendly manner.

Meanwhile, dangerous outcomes from a study commissioned by the EU and carried out by the CIRAD, announce that Congo "has around 12 million hectares of land suitable for the establishment of woody energy crop plantations (such as eucalyptus and acacia)". This may entail that private groups take over those 12 million hectares of land to carry out their business.

Big business in the Congo's lands... for big companies.

Article based on: "500,000 tonne mill for energy wood chips in the Republic of Congo", Biopact, <http://biopact.com/2006/11/500000-tonne-mill-for-energy-wood.html>; "Une société espagnole veut investir dans l'exploitation de l'huile de palme au Congo", Congoplus.info, http://www.congoplus.info/tout_larticle.php?id_article=2269; "Spanish company Aurantia to invest in Congo's palm oil sector for biodiesel", Biopact, <http://biopact.com/2007/03/spanish-company-aurantia-to-invest-in.html>

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- Indonesia: Agrofuel from oil palm –the poor pay with higher edible oil prices

Despite announcements from the authorities, the cooking oil price in the Indonesian domestic market has not gone down. On the contrary, the first week in June has passed and the price continued soaring.

A year ago, the world's top palm-oil producers, Malaysia and Indonesia, decided to set aside nearly 40 percent --six million tonnes-- of their crude palm oil output for biodiesel production. Industry analysts had warned that the move could further boost edible-oil prices, making it expensive for both food and energy users to buy vegetable oils.

Increased demand for fuel use as well as high prices of other vegetable oils like soybean oil in the US has also pulled palm oil prices. This has led poor households in Indonesia to consume waste oil --the oil that has been used for cooking and is later reused. Ironically, "biofuel" will feed cars.

The agrofuel boom does not prove to trickle down on local people. The cooking oil price jumped up until it reached the highest rate of Rp9.000/kg. And the most serious condition is the case of an Indonesian village of Tebo district, an oil palm plantation center in Jambi Province, where the cooking oil price reached Rp 10,000 (USD 250)/kg in June.

Oil palm companies are bound to send a proportion of crude palm oil for it to be processed as cooking oil. However, in Riau Province, around 18 companies never complied with the rule. In the Sumatra region, the company is more interested in selling crude palm oil to the international market than to sell it at the cheaper domestic price.

Cooking oil is one of nine staple foods in Indonesia. The soaring price of edible oil has undermined peoples' livelihood, impacting on family industries like fried chips, fermented soybean cake, and tofu, which have started to go bankrupt.

Edible oil high prices have affected not only peoples' income but also their health. Poor communities which cannot afford to buy palm cooking oil buy oplosan edible oil -- cooking oil already used. In other cases, cooking oil sellers aiming at keeping their income levels mix the oil which has been used for cooking and will be reused with a chemical product to clear up the color of the oil. The result in both cases is far from health standards.

Indeed, it's a high price the poor have to pay for the agrofuel fever.

Article based on: "Biofuel for machine, 'Jelantah Oil' for human", SETARA, sent by Rivani Noor CAPP, e-mail: rivani@cappa.or.id, www.cappa.or.id

- Papua New Guinea: Women most affected by oil palm plantations

Extensive areas of PNG's tropical forests have been cleared to give way to export-oriented oil palm plantations, which have been established under the "Nucleus Estate Smallholder Scheme". This means that a central company having its own plantation also contracts small farmers to supply it with oil palm fruit. The structure of the Nucleus Estate Smallholder Scheme and the nature of oil palm itself are raising serious concerns amongst civil society.

Most of the social and environmental impacts of oil palm plantations have been well documented (see WRM bulletins 104, 86, 74). However, one issue that has received little attention is that oil palm plantations have differentiated gender impacts.

For instance, the oil palm companies only pay the men, although women –and even the whole family- also work in harvesting the oil palm fruit. This means that the men can spend the money they receive in whichever way they see fit, while women are left without payment. Additionally, the fact that women work long hours doing back-breaking work for little reward within oil palm plantations, means that at the end of the day they are too tired to carry out properly the extra burden of cooking and taking care of the children.

Growing, collecting and hunting of food is an important part of PNG culture. Women sell goods in the village markets, thus obtaining an income. At the same time, this activity provides for a valued time for socialising with other village women. When customary lands are converted to oil palm, many of these age-old traditions are lost and women find themselves left without both the income and the opportunity of socialising.

Concerned about the changes that oil palm is generating in their community and about pollution from the oil palm mill affecting their rivers and their children's health, local women established the Sorovi Women's Association. The Association aims at bringing women together to discuss and find practical solutions to these issues.

The activities of the Association includes capacity building regarding the social and environmental impacts resulting from oil palm plantations and palm oil processing. At the same time, the Association is also working to help women to develop small-scale income generating activities that they can undertake to reduce their reliance on growing oil palm to earn a living and support their families.

There is no need to convince local people of the value of their natural resources – they depend on them every day for their survival. They need land to make bush gardens, which still supply the majority of Papua New Guineans with their daily food needs. They need access to forests to gather fuel wood and timber for building houses and canoes. They depend on healthy rivers for drinking, cooking and bathing. The saying in Papua New Guinea is 'Graun Em Laip' – land is life! As long as you have land and forests you'll always have a roof over your head and you'll never go hungry! Unfortunately, oil palm plantations have negative impacts on all these aspects and it is women who suffer the most.

Article based on information from: Australian Conservation Foundation,
http://www.acfonline.org.au/default.asp?section_id=96, "Anatomy of a Campaign", by Andrea Babon,
http://www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res_Habitat_AP_3.pdf

NEW TRENDS

- 'Reduced Emissions From Deforestation' (REDD): Can Carbon Trading Save Our Ecosystems?

At the Climate Change Convention's COP13 in Bali this year the working group on reducing tropical deforestation is due to report back. It is expected from discussions conducted so far that proposals based on Costa Rica's Payments for Environmental Services (services contributed by forests such as carbon sequestration, sustaining biodiversity and feeding the rainfall cycle) will be advocated in a new policy proposal known informally as 'avoided deforestation'. 'Avoided deforestation' will be proposed under the title of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries or REDD. The 'reduction' figure has not been decided but a formula described as the 50-50-50 option; reducing deforestation rates by 50% by 2050 and then continuing deforestation at that rate until 2100, ultimately it is claimed saving 50 billion tonnes of carbon emissions (advocated by Dr Peter Canadell of CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research and the Global Carbon Project) appears to be gaining support.

One factor in the choice of a lower than 100% figure appears to be the size of the compensation payments; for example the 2006 Stern Review cited payments of \$5 to \$10 billion per annum for a 70% reduction in deforestation. Other factors include the vested interests of corporations and governments supporting 'avoided deforestation' who are simultaneously backing the ongoing use of old growth forests for forest products and monoculture plantations including the production of biofuel crops. 'Avoided deforestation' of course legitimises such destruction for all forests not covered by payments.

The World Bank is spear-heading the set-up of a \$250 million 'avoided deforestation' pilot project to pay governments for not turning parts of their forests into plantations. This is also part of a much bigger plan for a mega-fund called the Global Forest Alliance, a partnership between the World Bank, logging and plantation companies, science institutes, business donors and large conservation NGO's such as WWF, Nature Conservancy Council and Conservation International. WWF are already in negotiation with the Indonesian government to use similar funding to protect 1 million hectares of classified 'conservation forest' in West Papua as the remaining 9 million hectares of conservation forest by default become sanctioned for deforestation.

From a systems perspective such proposals deal with the surface or symptomatic problem – uncontrolled deforestation - without dealing with the fundamental problem that the biosphere is in a state of critical carbon sink deficit (we emit 50% more emissions than are absorbed by carbon sinks) and some ecosystems are on the verge of collapse.

The following 7 arguments summarise how such non-systemic thinking permeates the entire debate and risks making ecosystem destruction and climate change rapidly worse.

1. The Amazon, now in its third year of drought may well be on the verge of large-scale ecosystem collapse. This would trigger emissions of up to 120 billion tonnes of carbon along with abrupt and catastrophic climate change. Anything short of a complete halt to deforestation in the Amazon increases the likelihood of this outcome. This makes a mockery of the 50 billion tonnes of avoided carbon emissions projected under the 50-50-50 proposal discussed earlier.
2. A systemic view of the 'compensation principle' would include equity considerations. 35 to 65 million people stand to be displaced from their forest homes as a result of biodiesel plantations in Indonesia alone, yet 'avoided deforestation' would seek to compensate corporations and governments instead for their lost revenue!
3. Stern estimates that it would cost \$12-93 million per annum to administer, monitor and enforce a ban on forest destruction. This is less than one hundredth of Stern's estimated of \$5 to \$10 billion p.a. costs for protecting just 70% of global forests. Such large payments could only be maintained in a strong economic environment making such a protocol vulnerable to a global recession or inflationary pressures both of which are likely and either of which could make REDD impossible to sustain. The implications of dwindling 'avoided deforestation' payments are obvious. So far there isn't a single example of successful 'payments for environmental services' scheme that is based solely on

carbon trading or solely on market-based approaches. Schemes lauded as successful include at the most 10% carbon finance.

4. The REDD proposals are inherently incompatible with a maximum global emissions quota for carbon. Without a scientifically predetermined maximum or 'cap' on emissions, reductions are ad hoc and meaningless from a point of view of stabilising climate.

5. Assigning a monetary value to forests and carbon trading requires precise emission figures and carbon inventories. Assessments can have a 10-fold variability making them unreliable and open to abuse.

6. Setting a target for avoided deforestation is likely to thwart essential alarm calls from indigenous peoples, conservation organisations and scientists for greater forest protection as unfunded forests become legitimately open to land-use change.

7. Although undecided, if 'avoided deforestation' excludes 'selective' industrial logging it will again accelerate degradation. Selective logging can reduce the carbon held in forests by up to 70% and leads to major biodiversity losses, dehydration and susceptibility to fire.

In contrast to all the above, a systemic approach considers root causes and attempts to offer fundamental solutions. Guaranteeing the land rights of indigenous communities and supporting community ownership and forest management for example have each been shown to successfully halt deforestation. The role played by indigenous peoples and particularly women who have a long history in safeguarding forests acts as an amplifying loop, one which could be extended to include the restoration of degraded and deforested lands.

A ban on deforestation is also a systemic approach because it recognises that our reduced carbon sink capacity is already dangerously in overshoot i.e. is inadequate to maintain the majority of life on earth. When the Paraguayan government instituted a moratorium over the eastern half of the country, deforestation was cut by 85%. Successful moratoriums on deforestation have also been conducted by Costa Rica, China and Thailand.

Supporting land rights, funding restoration, introducing education and awareness raising initiatives and implementing penalties for violating a ban would both weaken the hold of corporations and skewed government policy whilst simultaneously generating the virtuous cycles necessary to restore ecosystems and stabilise climate.

Synthesis by Almut Ernsting <almuthbernstinguk[at]yahoo.co.uk> and Deepak Rughani, <dee.rughani[at]btinternet.com>, Full report on 'Reduced Emissions From Deforestation': Can Carbon Trading Save Our Ecosystems? by same authors, available at: http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/Avoided_Deforestation_Full.pdf, <info[at]biofuelwatch.org.uk>

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- Voices from North and South against agrofuels

While the promotion of agrofuels -wrongly called biofuels- continues increasing and resulting in the establishment of more and more plantations in Southern countries to produce them, many voices of representatives from North and South denounce their impacts and intend to influence those who are taking decisions to promote them.

One of the decisions that is already causing a considerable increase in the production of agrofuels, is the one taken by the European Union which established the target that by the year 2020, 10 % of transport should be using agrofuels.

It is important to underscore that this decision was taken in spite of the documentation provided to the European

Union proving that this decision would be affecting the majority of the world's population, that lives in Southern countries.

By the end of June this year, more than 15 representatives of non-governmental organisations, Indigenous Peoples' organisations and other social movements met with the European Parliament in Brussels, the Dutch Parliament in The Hague and with other representatives of European organizations and governmental representatives and participated at the XII Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the UN Convention of Biodiversity in Paris. Many were the testimonies about the direct and indirect impacts of agrofuel production on the global South.

Among others, representatives from Asia stated that oil palm plantations are a tremendous disaster for indigenous peoples and local communities in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea

Representatives from Latin America, described how sugar cane, soy and eucalyptus monocultures have caused massive migration, expulsion of small farmers from their lands and have increased rural and urban poverty in Brazil; how in Colombia agrofuel plantations are exacerbating the problems of sovereignty and land tenure, that are a key cause of conflict in the country; and how tree plantations -even the ones certified by FSC- are having negative impacts on people and the environment in Uruguay.

African representatives pointed out that water resources, biodiversity, local communities' security, health and economies are being affected in those African countries where monoculture tree plantations are already a reality.

During the same days, organisations from the North and the South called for a moratorium on European Union imports of agrofuels from large scale monoculture plantations; and on their promotion through targets and incentives, including tax breaks, subsidies, and financing through carbon trading mechanisms, international development aid, or loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Such a moratorium will allow time for the in depth study of the tremendous impacts of large scale monocultures already felt by their expansion serving other industries as pulp and paper.

In Paris, at a meeting of a UN scientific advisory body on biodiversity, the majority of government delegates expressed serious concerns about the risks of large-scale production of biofuels to forests, ecosystems, indigenous peoples and local communities. A large number of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples Organizations from around the world present at this meeting also expressed their concerns about the risks and made a call for their evaluation before continuing with the promotion of agrofuels.

While all this was hapenning in Europe, representatives from organizations at an International Meeting on Agrofuels and Food Sovereignty held in Quito from June 27 to 29 presented personally a letter to the Minister of Energy containing a strong message to his government:

"The present government faces two alternatives: to support a production model based on diversity, sustainability, that guarantees food sovereignty, the continuity of the way of life of Indigenous Peoples, afro-descendents and peasants and the conservation of the biodiversity, or support agri-business. We hope that the government's decision will be in favor of the people".

That same letter is valid for all governments –North and South- that are currently taking decisions on the issue of agrofuels. The decision they take will show if they are in favour or against the people.

Article based on information from the Report of the Debate "Biofuels – implications for the South" Dutch Parliament, The Hague, June 29, 2007, by GFC and CEO, available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy>; information published by WRM during the SBSTTA meeting in Paris available at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/SBSTTA/news_SBSTTA.html, and the Quito declaration at:
http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/Biocombustibles/Declaracion_Quito.html

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Editor: Ricardo Carrere

WRM International Secretariat

Maldonado 1858 - 11200 Montevideo - Uruguay

tel: 598 2 413 2989 / fax: 598 2 410 0985

wrm@wrm.org.uy

<http://www.wrm.org.uy>

