

**WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT
MOVIMIENTO MUNDIAL POR LOS BOSQUES TROPICALES**

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- FAO's net loss in credibility over global forest resources assessment

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recently published its "Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005". The accompanying press release begins with the worrying statement, "Deforestation continues at an alarming rate", but we are immediately reassured by the second line which states: "But net forest loss [is] slowing down". This may perhaps be slightly cryptic to many. We might ask the obvious question: how can forest loss be slowing down when deforestation rates continue being alarming? That, of course, would miss the subtlety of the FAO experts. They did not say that forest loss was slowing down. They said NET forest loss is slowing down.

Rainforest Foundation produced a critical report to coincide with the FAO's 2005 Global Forest Resources Assessment. In their report, Rainforest Foundation points out that "Using FAO's definition of forest, monoculture plantations, highly degraded forests and even clear-cut areas 'expected' to regenerate, are all counted as forests. Consequently, the FAO data obscure our understanding of the world's forests, and seriously underestimate the extent of their degradation."

One good thing about the FAO is that it repeats itself. We can simply go back to the April 2001 editorial of the WRM bulletin and repeat exactly the same analysis we made on its year 2000 Global Forest Resources Assessment. Back then, we summarized the report by saying that "The main message of the FAO's assessment is that the situation has improved compared to previous global forest surveys. Current deforestation is described as happening at 'a significantly lower NET rate compared to FAO's previous report for the period 1990-1995', and adds that 'NET deforestation has likely decreased since the 1980s at the global level'."

The wording is slightly different in 2000 and 2005, but the message is exactly the same: NET forest loss is decreasing. So let's go back to the 2001 editorial to see how the FAO managed then --and now-- to make mission impossible possible:

- 1) By changing the definition of forests. In its previous definition, a 20% canopy cover was necessary for defining an area as forest. The FAO decreased it to 10 percent canopy cover, thereby largely increasing --on paper-- the world's forest area.
- 2) By not including logging as deforestation. According to the FAO, "by definition, logging does not in itself result in deforestation, if the forest is allowed to regenerate." While they are regenerating they are still considered to be forests and defined as "temporarily unstocked areas." This means that a country may have logged most of its forest, but --unless it converts the area to other activities-- it will appear as having the same forest area as before.
- 3) By including even further types of plantations as forests --such as rubber tree plantations-- which were not included in previous FAO assessments and thus artificially increasing the "forest" area.
- 4) By continuing to include tree plantations as "forests" in the FAO definition. This is in fact the key issue for enabling the FAO to reach the conclusion that "net forest loss is slowing down". Given that any plantation is considered to be a forest, this implies that if, for instance, 1 million hectares of eucalyptus plantations are established in one country while at the same time 1 million hectares of forests are destroyed in the same country, the NET forest loss will be nil and the "forest" area will appear as not having changed at all.

Mission impossible thus becomes possible. The only problem is, of course, that it is untrue. Forests --and particularly tropical forests-- continue to disappear "at an alarming rate". Monoculture tree plantations are not forests and are taking over entire landscapes at an equally "alarming rate". Clearcut forests are no longer forests. Manipulating data will hide but certainly not solve the problem. The NET loss in credibility of the FAO as the UN expert body of forests is now total.

It is up to the FAO itself to either substantially change its assessment methodologies to produce realistic and useful reports on the world's forests or to continue playing the sad role it is now playing. We will support the achievement of the former while continuing to oppose strongly the latter.

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LOCAL STRUGGLES AND NEWS

AFRICA

- Democratic Republic of Congo: New logging thrust into rainforests

Among other direct and underlying causes of deforestation, Africa's rainforest ecosystems are threatened by logging, as are virtually all of the world's remaining large, contiguous rainforests. These biodiversity rich rainforests provide critical habitat not only to local indigenous but all of the Earth's peoples and species.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo the threat has become a reality. Despite efforts and demands from local groups such as the Alliance of environment, development and indigenous human rights organisations to stop re-zoning plans supported by the World Bank that could open up rainforest areas to logging companies, official information reveals that nearly 150,000 square kilometres of forest has been allocated to timber companies within the last three years, mostly during 2005.

The information was published on November 8th as a list of all logging concession areas in a "Communique de Presse" issued by the Congolese Ministries of the Environment and Finance. The list shows that 103 "concessions" have been handed to logging companies since the May 2002 logging moratorium, covering 147,526 square kilometers.

The opening up of new areas of rainforest for timber felling has been illegal in the Congo since May 2002 established through a "Ministerial Arrêté No CAB/MIN/AF.F-E.T/194/MAS/02 portant suspension de l'octroi des allocations forestières" passed on 14th May 2002.

In December, the World Bank will consider approving a new credit of \$90 million to the Congolese government, some of it to finance new forestry activities.

Last July, the well-known singer Sting had declared in a televised programme "G8 Debate: Making Poverty History": "There's a plan on the table, supported by the World Bank, to go into the Congo. Now the Congo has a population of 50 million people, 35 million of those people live in and depend on the resources of the forest. The plan is to go in there and an area the size of France, 600,000 square kilometres, is going to be opened to international logging companies who will go in there and completely clear cut it --rape it-- and leave the people who live there with absolutely nothing." "This is not making poverty history, this is poverty in the making. And I'm concerned that no one... no one knows about this, it's just happening under the table," he said as a member of the panel.

Simon Counsell, Director of the Rainforest Foundation, a world-wide organization which works in tropical rainforest areas with local indigenous peoples and non-governmental organization addressing the underlying causes of the destruction of tropical rainforests, said: "The Rainforest Foundation has been warning for several years that the timber industry in Congo is about to spiral out of control, and that international pressure should be brought to bear on the Congolese authorities to stop the handing out of vast concessions to logging companies. The Congolese government has acted in defiance of its own laws, and is set on a course that could have disastrous consequences for the many millions of people, as well as the wildlife, that are dependent on the country's forests. The World Bank should make it a strict condition of any new funding for forestry in DRC that all the illegally allocated concessions are immediately cancelled."

Article based on information from: "Africa's Rainforests For The Chop In World's Biggest Illegal Giveaway", 9th November 2005, Rainforest Foundation, sent by Simon Counsell, E-mail: simonc@rainforestuk.com, "Africa's Massive Illegal Rainforest Giveaway", Forest Conservation Blog, http://forests.org/blog/2005/11/africas_massive_illegal_rainfo.html; "Sting sounds alarm on carve-up of Congo rainforests during TV debate", 07/07/2005, The Rainforest Foundation, <http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/s-Campaign%20News>

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- Nigeria: A milestone verdict against oil flaring

Unsustainable production for unsustainable consumption. That's the case with crude oil, the pillar of industrialization and the so-called modern "growth" advocated by globalised free trade.

It has a huge cost though, that goes on invisible, "externalized" by the macro-economists. But for local communities the cost is far from external. They suffer it in their lungs, their skins, their eyes, their wombs, their daily lives and deaths.

In Nigeria, oil is found in relatively small fragmented pockets at the Niger Delta. The wells from several fields supply a single flow station through a network of pipelines. Major pipelines then transport the oil to refineries or to shipping terminals and are complemented by tank farms and pumping stations along the way. This infrastructure in itself occupies and traverses the land.

Vast tracts of mangrove forests are adversely affected by oil pollution and related developments. Oil spills, which are quite numerous and continue to plague the petroleum industry are a very serious concern in regards to the health of our planet's remaining mangrove forests. The leaked oil permeates the coastal waters and streams, coating the exposed, air breathing roots of the mangroves, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the plants' breathing lenticels to perform their essential functions, thus in effect slowly suffocating the mangroves.

As MAP's director Alfredo Quarto wrote in an edition of Late Friday News and following a visit to underscore the seriousness of oil pollution in Nigeria: "The Niger Delta contains the third largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world. Once rich in biodiversity and teeming with marine life, the area is now being rapidly degraded by petroleum production. The entire region is engulfed in what might be called a Petroleum War --a war fueled by the uncontrolled avarice of the multinational oil conglomerates too long wed to their ubiquitous cronies and mafia-style henchmen in government. During my second week in Nigeria, I was struck down by malaria --wounded in battle, you might say-- another victim in this unholy war against the planet. But the roads to oil riches in Nigeria are lined with countless other victims and environmental refugees, whose very source of life and sustenance is left in abject ruin. Yet, this is a war in which there can be no victors --only victims-- for in the end everyone who is native to this planet stands to lose. Those hundred and more uncontrolled gas flares burning continuously for decades are adding to global warming, eerily lighting the way towards imminent natural disaster, while those multifarious oil spills and pipeline leaks are saturating the land and water ways, until, as one local resident put it, "There are no fish near shore now, the mangroves are dying, our food crops will not grow, our well waters are contaminated, and even our rainwater is no longer safe to drink!"

However, not all is bad news in Nigeria.

On July 2005, the Iwherekani community in Delta State of Nigeria sued Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, and the Attorney-General of the Federation of Nigeria, requesting the Federal High Court, Benin Division, to declare that Gas Flaring is illegal, harmful to their health and environment and therefore constitutes a violation of their right to life as guaranteed by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and reinforced by the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.

A historic judgment was delivered on November 14. The Federal High Court of Nigeria has ordered the companies to stop gas flaring in the Niger Delta, as it violates guaranteed constitutional rights to life and dignity.

Justice C. V. Nwokorie ruled in Benin City that the damaging and wasteful practice of flaring by all the major companies, including ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, TotalFinaElf and Agip, as well as Shell, in joint ventures with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, cannot lawfully continue and must stop since flare gas in the course of their oil exploration and production activities in Iwherekan community is a violation of their fundamental rights to life (including healthy environment) and dignity of human person.

Once again, local resistance has proved an effective way towards changes.

Article based on information from: "Court Declares Gas Flaring Illegal In Nigeria!", November 14, 2005, ERA Nigeria, <http://www.eraaction.org>; "Whose energy future? Big oil against people in Africa", Groundwork Report 2005, www.groundwork.org.za; "Why Oil & Mangroves Do Not Mix!", Mangrove Action Project, <http://www.earthisland.org/map/oil.htm>

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- South Africa: Sappi Saiccor to expand its polluting pulp mill?

South African pulp and paper company Sappi is planning to increase the capacity of its Sappi Saiccor mill by more than 200,000 tons a year. Sappi Saiccor is the largest producer of chemical cellulose (dissolvable pulp) in the world. Its mill at Umkomaas, about 50 kilometres south of Durban Port currently produces about 600,000 tons of chemical cellulose a year. The chemical cellulose is used to produce things like cigarette filters, sweet wrappers, an additive to washing powder that stops dirt sticking to clothes and the stuff that makes vitamin tablets stick together. Almost all of Saiccor's cellulose is exported.

Saiccor (South African Industrial Cellulose Corporation Ltd) started operations in 1955, and was the first mill to produce chemical cellulose from eucalyptus. Sappi bought the company from Courtaulds (a UK chemical company) and South Africa's Industrial Development Corporation in 1988.

Sappi has hired a consulting firm, WSP Environmental, to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment of its proposed expansion. In November 2005, WSP produced a Draft Scoping Report as part of the EIA process. Sappi hopes that construction of the project, which would cost about US\$300 million, will start in January 2007 and be finished by October 2008.

Environmental and social NGOs, including TimberWatch, groundWork and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, are backing local opposition to Sappi's proposed expansion.

In the Draft Scoping Report, WSP states that after the expansion, Saiccor will require an additional 2,200 tons of wood a day. At a public meeting in August, WSP's Vicki King claimed that there will be no expansion of plantations as a result of the expansion. Sappi proposes to meet this demand by diverting timber to the Saiccor mill that it currently sells to wood chip mills. This claim is disingenuous. Saiccor's expansion will increase the overall demand for wood in South Africa. This increased demand will lead to new plantations, even if these are not owned by Sappi.

On 10 November 2005, I took part in a public meeting organised by WSP. I travelled to the meeting with Wally Menne from TimberWatch and Desmond D'Sa from the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance.

When we arrived, WSP's René Abrahams was working her way through a powerpoint presentation. After about two minutes, Menne asked whether we could ask questions during the presentation, or whether we should wait until the end. Shirleigh Strydom, Sappi's hired facilitator, answered that there would be no questions during the presentation, but that Sappi's experts would be available to answer questions one to one after the presentation.

Desmond D'Sa has spent many years opposing Mondi's proposed expansion of its paper mill at Merebank. He has developed a very low tolerance of bullshit. "This is bullshit", he said. "How can this be a public meeting, when the public cannot ask questions in public?"

Strydom had little choice other than to accept this argument. He allowed us to ask questions.

During her presentation, Abrahams showed a slide which indicated that CO2 emissions from Sappi Saiccor were "not measured". Yet she concluded that after the expansion, CO2 emissions were expected to decrease. I was curious to know more about the assumptions underlying this conclusion, particularly as another of Abrahams' slides showed that the numbers of trucks, trains and cars visiting the plant would increase. The number of trucks travelling to and from the site would increase by 35 per cent, for example. I asked whether this additional traffic had been taken into account in WSP's calculations of CO2 and other emissions.

Abrahams' presentation made no mention of the increase in shipping which would be necessary to export the increased output from Saiccor. I asked why these figures had been omitted.

Abrahams answered that the CO2 emission reductions related only to on-site emissions and WSP expected that emissions would be lower because of a reduction in coal burning after the expansion of the mill. She confirmed that WSP's calculations did not take into account any emissions caused by increased traffic or shipping, either in South Africa or internationally.

Strydom, Sappi's facilitator, explained that WSP's Scoping Report was a desk study and if Sappi did not give the figures for CO2 emissions then WSP could not include the figures in their report. Further research would be carried out during the next phase of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

After the presentation, I spoke to Andrew Hall, a Project Manager at Sappi. He told me that Sappi had in fact given the figures for on-site CO2 emissions to WSP. It was WSP's decision not to include the figures in their report, he said.

CO2 emissions may not be the worst problem that Saiccor causes. But, as Desmond D'Sa pointed out during the meeting, the fact that WSP has apparently fudged the results for CO2 emissions in its Draft Scoping Report does not inspire confidence in the rest of the report.

After the meeting, a local resident thanked me for coming to the meeting. She told me of her cough which just wouldn't go away. Her husband had what he called hay fever --all year round. And recently, when she asked her son who works in the fields not far from the Saiccor mill, whether the mill smelled bad that day, he replied that he didn't know. He couldn't smell anything any more.

We left the meeting and drove past the Saiccor mill. A dozen plumes of smoke rose into the evening air. The wind was blowing in the opposite direction, but still the mill stank. Although Sappi and their hired guns, WSP Environmental, claim that the expansion will reduce emissions, they are reluctant to consider Saiccor's record of more than 50 years of pollution. Instead of expanding its operations, Sappi Saiccor should perhaps consider reparations for the damage to livelihoods and health that its operations have already caused.

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- Uganda: BIDCO oil palm plantations at the cost of pristine rainforests in Bugala

The growing trend of establishing plantations of oil palm has taken its toll primarily on tropical forests, where this palm finds enough soil, water and solar energy to fill its needs (see WRM Bulletin 47).

The typical procedure is to log a certain area of forest and then establish the plantation aimed at the production of oil and kernel oil. But it also happens that plantation companies may "clear" the entire forest by setting it on fire – as has been the case with the notorious fires in Indonesia.

Palm oil is indigenous to West Africa, and semi-wild plants have been traditionally harvested in small scale and inter-cropped with food crops by local populations. The present push for oil palm is presented in the usual globalised package: export-driven large scale monocultures that excludes any other scheme. Quite far from diverse nature.

However, in his attempt to get Ugandan people enthusiastic about the business, their President Yoweri Museveni went to say that clearing of forests for the plantation did not pose environmental danger because the palm plantation would be a forest in its own. How could a "green desert" (only one tree crop) be equated with the intertwined diversity of the forest ecosystem?

There is no possible reply on "how" but there are some on "why".

BIDCO Oil Refineries Ltd., the largest and fastest growing manufacturer of vegetable oils, fats, margarine, soaps and protein concentrates in East and Central Africa is investing in a multi-million dollar oil palm plantation on Bugala islands in Kalangala. The project is planned to cover 26,500 hectares and produce 140,000 tonnes of palm kernel oil. BIDCO counts with investment partners including Archer Daniels Midlands of America, Wilmar Group of Malaysia and Josovina of Singapore. Within the Vegetable Oil Development Project (VODP) scheme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank have granted a \$10m loan to support the plantations and supporting infrastructure, while the Government will contribute \$12m in the form of land, electricity and roads, and BIDCO will invest \$120m.

Several interests coincide around the oil palm business. It is a foreign exchange source for an indebted country like Uganda; a lucrative business for conglomerates which benefit from the massive promotion that leads to reduction of world prices and stimulation of consumption; and a financial service to profit from for the World Bank. Local sources inform that increasingly local elite are also benefiting by providing political clout to secure favourable trade terms with the government and securing business deals such as lucrative outgrower concessions for themselves.

But the project encounters stiff opposition from Members of Parliament. Also some residents of the islands are deeply concerned about the oil palm project which is taking place on one of the only pristine natural large scale rainforests left in Uganda. A beautiful island called Bugala Island with one of the most unique eco-systems in the world. Over 5,500 hectares of rainforest are being destroyed, and the rare grey talking parrot is nesting in the capital city for the first time (180km away by road, 80km straight line) showing that something is wrong.

Large scale oil palm plantations (as well as in other monocultures) are typically related to violation of land rights and other human rights, since they take large areas of indigenous or peasant population's lands leading to conflicts.

The government is trying to convince the residents of the islands to lease their land to the plantation and "make money" but there are reports of many family conflicts developing because of the project. After losing their land, where will those people work? Presumably in the oil palm plantations, affected by the widespread use of agrochemicals in oil palm production, in temporary jobs, poorly paid, and in bad conditions as experience in other countries shows. What is certain is that the benefits won't go for the people but for large enterprises -increasingly foreign- which control production, industrialization and commercialization of palm oil.

No attempt is made to provide space for debate on the matter. This has led to distrust and dismay on the part of the islanders and indigenous land-owners. Maybe now is the time for them to put the pressure on the government to put forward their concerns.

Article based on information from: "BIDCO to undertake largest private Project", The New Vision 2000-2005, 10th November, 2005, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/220/464984>; "Museveni Launches Bidco", New Vision (Kampala), November 2, 2005, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200511020416.html>, and personal local sources.

ASIA

- Indonesia: Proposed UFS pulp mill threatens forests and nearby communities

The existing Indonesian pulp and paper industry is currently generating a tremendous strain on forests. In that context, a new \$1.2 Billion huge pulp and wood chip mill is planned to be built in the province of South Kalimantan.

The project is owned by the company "United Fiber System (UFS)" which is owned, among others, by Swedish capital investors. The new pulp mill would worsen the current depletion of forests in Indonesia, and the national and local problems connected to it.

Currently pulp industry feeds mainly on tropical forests and rampant illegal logging. Approximately 75-80% of wood used in pulp industry in Indonesia originates in forests, and recent reports by international research agencies and international donors have indicated that the majority of timber harvested from Indonesia's forests -- up to 73%-- is illegally logged.

As long as the rate of deforestation and associated illegal logging caused by the pulp industry has not been eliminated, any investment in a new pulp mill would only compound the structural problems of deforestation. Every major pulp mill in Indonesia has caused either major social problems, pollution or deforestation -- in most cases all of these. Research indicates that the proposed pulp mill in South Kalimantan will be no exception.

Within the concession area of UFS alone there are 73,000 hectares of highly endangered forest, and the wood chip mill threatens another 40,000 hectares of precious lowland forests. As UFS admits, an expansion of the facility's capacity to 1,2 million tonnes of pulp production per year is projected for the near future, most likely destroying additional forest.

Furthermore UFS states in their Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) leaked to the public --despite efforts by the company to keep it secret-- that a complete loss of aquatic sea life in the area of the pulp mill is to be expected, resulting in the loss of hundreds of livelihoods in traditional fishery. Also a massive regional increase in acute respiratory diseases as well as skin diseases and malaria is forecasted in the company's EIA. The construction of the deep sea port for the wood chip mill will destroy rare and precious mangrove forests and will significantly harm the aquatic sea life in the area.

CAPPA, the Community Alliance for Pulp-Paper Advocacy, an Indonesian NGO network, documented four fishing villages, including those dependent on shrimp farming which are likely to have their fishing grounds impacted by waste from the proposed mill. The shrimp breeding grounds utilized by the local communities are a mere 400 meters from the proposed mill site. In addition, CAPPA's findings indicate that the proposed location for the mill is on an ancestral gravesite. According to CAPPA, the initial phase of obtaining land for the mill has led to community conflicts.

The proposed UFS pulp mill and wood chip mill do not contribute to the sustainable development of Indonesian Borneo, but, on the contrary, contribute to widespread deforestation, and to a further degradation of nature and human living conditions in the region.

Article based on information from: "Environmental organisations oppose the building of the new pulp mill in Indonesia", Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, Friends of the Earth and Finnish ECA Reform Campaign, <http://www.vientiluotto.net/Eprext.html#070604>; Letter to James D. Wolfensohn Concerning proposed MIGA Guarantee for the Controversial \$1.2 Billion United Fiber System Pulp Mill in South Kalimantan, WALHI, https://www.mpi.org.au/kampanye/hutan/strukturisasi/lamp_sp_wkssel_150304/; Joint international NGO letter to

Austrian companies involved in the pulp mill project, disseminated by Daniel Hausknost, Friends of the Earth Austria, E-mail: daniel.hausknost@global2000.at

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- Malaysia: MTCC certificates logging concession disregarding Penan's rights and will

The Penan in Sarawak have been struggling for their rights to land and forests for more than twenty years, not only by setting up logging road blockades, but also by legally claiming their Native Customary Rights (NCR) in court. In spite of their ongoing resistance against logging and plantations on their native land, the Sarawak government and its concessionaries --logging and plantation companies-- continue to disrespect the Penan's rights on their land.

In an unprecedented move, the Malaysian Timber Certification Council MTCC issued a certificate for Forest Management to Samling Plywood (Baramas) Sdn. Bhd. for a logging concession on which a Penan landright case has been pending since 1998. This means that Samling now sells its timber from the area as being harvested "sustainably" and "legally"--timber extracted from Penan territories against the declared will of the communities. Despite repeated protests by the Penan, MTCC has refused to live up to its own (pretended) standards and to withdraw the abusive certificate granted to Samling in October 2004.

As the European Union is currently discussing to accept MTCC, and the Dutch Keurhout Foundation has already accepted MTCC (for timber from Peninsula Malaysia) as being of "legal" origin, the European NGOs Bruno Manser Fonds, Rainforest Foundation Norway and FERN have felt that governments should urgently be informed about the disregard of indigenous peoples' rights by MTCC and should be urged not to accept MTCC as a proof of sustainability or legality.

Consequently, they have issued the following statement which has been circulated among NGOs for their signature, urging governments and industry not to accept Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme MTCC based on its disregard for indigenous peoples' rights:

"We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations (NGOs), urge the European Union, European governments and the European timber industry not to accept the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCC) as a guarantee for sustainable or legal timber forest management because the MTCC does not respect indigenous peoples' rights. We are particularly concerned about the recent certification of a Forest Management Unit in Sarawak, which openly disrespects the Penan people's rights. The undersigning NGOs support the Penan communities' call for an immediate withdrawal of this certificate.

The Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC) prides itself for guaranteeing the sustainable and legal origin of timber products marketed under its certification scheme. However, Malaysian NGOs have criticized MTCC's disregard for indigenous peoples' rights for years. The recent certification of Samling Bhd. --both the first private company and the first Forest Management Unit in Sarawak to be certified-- confirms MTCC's disrespect for indigenous communities in an appalling way: one of the most disputed forest areas in Sarawak was certified without consulting all of the affected Penan communities.

Large parts of the recently certified Samling Sela'an-Linau Forest Management Unit in the Ulu Baram area of Sarawak are in an area in which the Penan claim to have Native Customary Rights (NCR) and have submitted this to the Court in 1998. The case is still pending at the Sarawak High Court. By certifying the area, MTCC is in breach of its own certification standards according to which "long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established".

Samling first entered the area in the early 1990s, relying on police force to break the indigenous peoples' resistance to logging. Ever since logging began, the Penan have been protesting against the destruction of their forests, on which they depend for hunting as well as for gathering wild sago, medicinal plants and rattan for their handicraft.

In January 2005, more than 600 sedentary and semi-nomadic Penan living in the area protested against the certification, a protest confirmed by a meeting of the community representatives on 18 August 2005.

In a letter of 25 January 2005, to MTCC, headman Bilong Oyau of Long Sait (Miri Division, Sarawak) wrote: "We strongly reject this certification (...) We have been living here in peace until the timber companies came to disturb our life and encroach into our forest.(...) Many of us have suffered due to the Samling logging operations: our rivers are polluted, our sacred sites damaged and our animals chased away by people who deprive us of our livelihood and culture."

While MTCC continues its worldwide public relations efforts, it ignores the Penans' protest and refuses to withdraw the abusive certification of an area which is being logged against the will of the affected indigenous population.

Acceptance or rejection of MTCC as a standard of legality is truly important and can be seen as a barometer of what standards European governments will establish for "acceptable" tropical timber. This is particularly relevant in the light of decisions being made in the FLEGT licensing process and timber procurement policies of EU member states.

The NGO community disagrees with assessments made by EU member states, such as the UK and Denmark, and by the timber industry, such as the Dutch Keurhout Association which have deemed MTCC to be a guarantee of legality.

In terms of indigenous peoples' rights, the certification of the Samling Sela'an - Linau concession in Sarawak is totally unacceptable and a further proof that MTCC's "sustainability" and "legality" does not include the basic rights of the affected indigenous population.

We urgently encourage the responsible ministries and the timber industry to reconsider the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme MTCC in the light of this new evidence.

[Firms follow]"

For more information a report about the MTCC concession can be found at: <http://www.bmf.ch/en/pdf/selaan-linau-report.pdf>

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- Sri Lanka: The Wanniyala-Aetto make use of their right to return to their forest

The Wanniyala-Aetto ("forest beings") are the indigenous people of Sri Lanka, gentle hunter-gatherers who have lived in a sustainable relationship to their tropical forest environment for the past eighteen thousand years.

Having survived 2,500 years of settlement of their island, first by Sinhalese and later by Tamil migrants from India, five centuries of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisation, and two world wars, the Wanniyala-Aetto were evicted from what was left of their ancestral forests by the Government of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka became independent in 1948. The new Government set about reorganising the country. With funding from the World Bank in 1955, it began construction on the Gal Oya Dam, which flooded the Wanniyala-Aetto's best hunting-and-gathering lands, including their best honey-bee sites and favourite forest caves.

Most of the people were resettled in rehabilitation villages in agricultural areas. But their wisdom keeper and spokesperson, Uru Warige Tissahamy, led many of his people deeper into the forest. In 1977, the World Bank provided the Government with funding for the construction of a huge hydro-electric irrigation project involving the country's largest river system, the Mahaweli Ganga. The river's water was diverted for hydro-electricity, and

channelled into reservoirs and irrigation canals. Vast areas of the rain forest were logged, and 11,000 hectares of the Wanniyala-Aetto's last hunting-grounds were clear-cut. Thousands of Sinhalese and Tamil settlers moved in.

Then, at the stroke of midnight on November 10, 1983, the Government evicted the Wanniyala-Aetto from the last remaining stand of their forest homeland, declaring it a catchment area for three new reservoirs financed with Official Development Assistance (ODA) from various foreign donor agencies including USAID. These reservoirs were created to provide irrigation water for so-called "green revolution" intensive agro-production of rice in paddy fields at the edge of the forest. The Government designated the area of forest between these reservoirs as the Maduru Oya National Park which was then set up under the World Conservation Strategy jointly managed by WWF International - World Wildlife Fund for Nature, IUCN - The World Conservation Union, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Wanniyala-Aetto were forced to resettle into three different districts, splitting up their community and destroying the highly-integrated social structure on which they traditionally depend. These resettlement areas are situated outside the forest, in rice-growing areas totally unfamiliar to and unsuitable for their traditional swidden agriculture, which has become impossible and it is hard for them to grow enough food in the tiny plots they have been allocated. Suffering human rights abuses and maltreatment of every kind, they have also been banned from hunting and gathering in the forest. Presently, a few men have a hunting permit in a small area of the park, but those who do not have it risk fines or prison sentences if they are caught hunting. Over the past few years, three hunters, all with permits, died from shots received from park wardens.

Today only 2,500 Wanniyala-Aetto survive. Their very ancient culture, spiritual traditions, ethnobotanical medical knowledge, and ecological expertise in the management of tropical forest fauna and flora are on the brink of being lost forever. But they have not lost the recall of their land. "I was born in the forest. My ancestors come from here. We are the forest beings, and I want to live and die here. And even if I were reborn only as a fly or an ant, I would still be happy so long as I knew I would come back to live here in the forest" (Uru Warige Tissahamy, 97-year old elder Wanniyala-Aetto wisdomkeeper).

For this reason, over twenty years after having been evicted, one hundred indigenous Wanniyala-Aetto have resorted to their legal right to return to their own land. The park wardens have threatened to take to court those who have returned to the park in an attempt to make them leave once again.

Various organizations are appealing for support for the Wanniyala-Aetto people and propose writing to the President of Sri Lanka asking for the Government to allow those Wanniyala-Aetto who so desire to return immediately to their lands, to hunt for their personal consumption and gather the fruits of the forest in the park without fear of eviction, harassment or violence. (The letter should be addressed to: Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike-Kumaratunga, Presidential Office, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka, Fax: +94 112 4333 46)

Article based on information from: "Los wanniyala-aetto regresan a la selva", 21 Oct 2005, Survival, <http://www.survival.es/news.php?id=1114> ; "The Wanniyala-Aetto", Global Vision, <http://www.global-vision.org/srilanka/>

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- Thailand: Big conservationism at odds with indigenous peoples' lives

In a recent outburst of "environmental enthusiasm" stimulated by generous financial offerings from the Global Environment Facility, the Thai government has been creating national parks as fast as the Royal Forest Department can map them. Ten years ago there was barely a park to be found in Thailand, and because those few that existed were unmarked "paper parks," few Thais even knew they were there. Now there are 114 land parks and 24 marine parks on the map. Almost twenty-five thousand square kilometers, most of which are occupied by hill and fishing tribes, are now managed by the forest department as protected areas.

The Karen are the most populous of six tribes found in the lush, mountainous reaches of far northern Thailand. Khon Noi, a matriarch of a remote mountain village, huddles next to an open-pit stove in the loose, brightly colored clothes that identify her. Her village of sixty five families has been in the same wide valley for over two hundred years. She chews betel, spitting its bright red juice into the fire, and speaks softly through black teeth. "The government has no idea who I am," she says. "The only person in the village they know by name is the 'headman' they appointed to represent us in government negotiations. They were here last week, in military uniforms, to tell us we could no longer practice rotational agriculture in this valley. If they knew that someone here was saying bad things about them they would come back again and move us out."

"Men in uniform just appeared one day, out of nowhere, showing their guns," Kohn Noi recalls, "and telling us that we were now living in a national park. That was the first we knew of it. Our own guns were confiscated . . . no more hunting, no more trapping, no more snaring, and no more 'slash and burn.' That's what they call our agriculture. We call it crop rotation and we've been doing it in this valley for over two hundred years. Soon we will be forced to sell rice to pay for greens and legumes we are no longer allowed to grow here. Hunting we can live without, as we raise chickens, pigs, and buffalo. But rotational farming is our way of life."

In November 2004, six thousand conservationists attended the World Conservation Congress in Bangkok. At that conference and elsewhere, big conservation has denied that they are party to the evictions while generating reams of promotional material about their affection for, and close relationships with, indigenous peoples. Financial support for international conservation has in recent years expanded well beyond the individuals and family foundations that seeded the movement to include very large foundations like Ford, MacArthur, and Gordon and Betty Moore, as well as the World Bank, its Global Environment Facility, foreign governments, USAID, a host of bilateral and multilateral banks, and transnational corporations. During the 1990s USAID alone pumped almost \$300 million into the international conservation movement, which it had come to regard as a vital adjunct to economic prosperity. The five largest conservation organizations, Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) among them, absorbed over 70 percent of that expenditure. Indigenous communities received none of it. The Moore Foundation made a singular ten-year commitment of nearly \$280 million, the largest environmental grant in history, to just one organization -- Conservation International. And all of the big international NGOs (BINGOs) have become increasingly corporate in recent years, both in orientation and affiliation. The Nature Conservancy now boasts almost two thousand corporate sponsors, while Conservation International has received about \$9 million from its two hundred fifty corporate "partners."

With that kind of financial and political leverage, as well as chapters in almost every country of the world, millions of loyal members, and nine-figure budgets, CI, WWF, and TNC have undertaken a hugely expanded global push to increase the number of so-called protected areas (PAs) --parks, reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and corridors created to preserve biological diversity. In 1962, there were some 1,000 official PAs worldwide. Today there are 108,000, with more being added every day. The total area of land now under conservation protection worldwide has doubled since 1990, when the World Parks Commission set a goal of protecting 10 percent of the planet's surface. That goal has been exceeded, with over 12 percent of all land, a total area of 11.75 million square miles, now protected.

More and more conservationists seem to be wondering how, after setting aside a "protected" land mass the size of Africa, global biodiversity continues to decline. Might there be something terribly wrong with this plan—particularly after the Convention on Biological Diversity has documented the astounding fact that in Africa, where so many parks and reserves have been created and where indigenous evictions run highest, 90 percent of biodiversity lies outside of protected areas?

Market-based solutions put forth by concerned groups, which may have been implemented with the best of social and ecological intentions, share a lamentable outcome, barely discernible behind a smoke screen of slick promotion. In almost every case indigenous people are moved into the money economy without the means to participate in it fully. They become permanently indentured as park rangers (never wardens), porters, waiters, harvesters, or, if they manage to learn a European language, ecotour guides. Under this model, "conservation"

edges ever closer to "development," while native communities are assimilated into the lowest ranks of national cultures.

It should be no surprise, then, that tribal peoples regard conservationists as just another colonizer --an extension of the deadening forces of economic and cultural hegemony.

If we want to preserve biodiversity in the far reaches of the globe, places that are in many cases still occupied by indigenous people living in ways that are ecologically sustainable, history is showing us that the dumbest thing we can do is kick them out.

Adapted from "Conservation Refugees", by Mark Dowie, The Orion Society, November December 2005, <http://www.oriononline.org/pages/om/05-6om/Dowie.html>

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SOUTH AMERICA

- Bolivia: Guarani People's Assembly denounces REPSOL-YPF for violating its rights

During the present month of November, the Guarani People of Itika Guasu, who inhabit the Province of O'Connor in the Department of Tarija, the location of the Margarita mega gas field, gathered in Assembly. The reason was to denounce before national and international public opinion the REPSOL-YPF company's arbitrary treatment of the Guarani communities that inhabit the TCO (Original Community Territories) Itika Guasu territory, in violation of the economic, social, cultural and environmental rights established in the State Political Constitution, ILO Convention 169 (Law 1257) and the Hydrocarbon Law (3058). The following communiqué was issued by the Assembly:

"The Itika Guasu Assembly of the Guarani People [APG] denounces before national and international public opinion that the REPSOL-YPF company in Bolivia is violating the rights we have as indigenous people. It also denounces the fact that the REPSOL-YPF company, on launching new works in our TCO without prior and informed consultation, is violating Hydrocarbon Law No. 3058 of 17 May 2005 and its articles concerning indigenous peoples' rights.

We wish to make known that REPSOL YPF, showing no respect for the Guarani culture, has entered the territory of Itika Guasu located in the Province of O'Connor, Department of Tarija, causing damages to our environment, destroying our forests, driving away the wild animals that are the source of our subsistence and violating our form of community life. That is to say, REPSOL YPF is killing our culture.

We denounce that the Spanish company REPSOL YPF has entered our TCO Itika Guasu territory to carry out prospecting, exploration and exploitation operations and it has done so systematically violating our right to prior and informed consultation, established in ILO Convention 169, a Law of the Republic since 1991, Law 1257.

Since 1997 REPSOL YPF has been violating our rights because instead of respecting our organizational structure in communal, zonal and regional authority, it promotes the division of our communities using for this purpose its community relations officer, its social relations officer and the manager himself of Communication and Foreign Affairs.

For this purpose REPSOL YPF uses misleading propaganda that seeks to make people believe that the Guarani people are satisfied with the oil company's action, when in fact there is rejection in the TCO of the company continuing to operate in this manner.

In March 2003, after much pressure on our part, REPSOL YPF established an agreement with the Guarani People of Itika Guasu, an agreement that has not been kept by the company, because in spite of the commitment to respect our TCO, the oil company has continued damaging our territory, dividing our communities, thus

violating its commitments, not only with the Guarani People but also with the Bolivian State, as established in the environmental impact assessments and in national laws.

Today, although the indigenous monitors of TCO Itika Guasu have prepared a dozen reports requesting the company to comply with environmental protection, modify its behaviour of arbitrary treatment of our communities, and stop violating national laws and international agreements, the arbitrary treatment of our territory continues and increases, with the company taking advantage of the permissive attitude of the Bolivian State which -- although aware of our complaints-- has done nothing to protect the indigenous rights that REPSOL YPF is violating.

A new Hydrocarbon Law (Law 3058) entered into force in our country on 17 May 2005, which clearly establishes in its articles VII and VIII the way in which oil activities should be carried out in indigenous territories.

In spite of this, REPSOL YPF continues to operate against the provisions of the Law in the TCO of Itika Guasu and therefore, it is violating our rights.

For all the above, we bring to the knowledge of national and international public opinion that REPSOL YPF is an oil company which, in the territory of Itika Guasu, has practices that are contrary to those it publicises in the newspapers, radio and television.

It is not true that REPSOL-YPF has brought benefits to the Guarani people, on the contrary, it is destroying our territory and it is doing so openly, violating national laws and international agreements.

For the above, we are appealing for solidarity with the Guarani people to demand that the company changes its actions in our TCO and withdraws from all the mass media the misleading propaganda it publicises that says very little for its commitment with the ethics and transparency established in its company mission and vision.

We demand that REPSOL YPF complies with Bolivian laws and international conventions!
We demand that REPSOL YPF no longer misleads its shareholders with false reports on the Guarani People.

Assembly of the Guarani People of Itika Guasu..
TCO Itika Guasu, 8 November 2005, Tarija, Bolivia."

Article based on: "Bolivia: la empresa REPSOL YPF viola los derechos indígenas y la Ley de Hidrocarburos", Biodiversidad en América Latina, <http://www.biodiversidadla.org/content/view/full/20273>

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- Brazil: Worked to death by Aracruz

Wherever the pulp and paper industry operates, it brings with it the promise of jobs. Unfortunately, for the people living in the area that the industry takes over, these promises rarely bring work. In a recent report for World Rainforest Movement, Alacri De'Nadai, Winfridus Overbeek and Luiz Alberto Soares, record how Aracruz Celulose, the world's largest producer of bleached eucalyptus pulp, has failed to provide work for local people.

The report, titled "Promises of Jobs and Destruction of Work: The case of Aracruz Celulose in Brazil" documents that since the 1980s when 9,000 people worked for Aracruz, employment at the company has fallen steadily. Increased mechanisation had led to large numbers of layoffs. Aracruz has outsourced many of its jobs, leading to less job security and lower salaries for those workers who managed to keep their jobs. Today, Aracruz directly employs only about 2,000 workers.

In 2002, Aracruz opened a new pulp line which increased the company's pulp production from 1.2 million tons to 2 million tons a year. The US\$600 million investment created 173 new jobs. That's about US\$3.5 million per job.

The jobs that the company and its subcontractors do provide are often dangerous and have serious impacts on the health of workers. In 2003, during an Open Trial in the Commission for Human Rights of the Federal Parliament in Brasilia, an Aracruz worker called the company a "murderer". He had seen several colleagues die as a result of health problems caused by working at Aracruz.

Last year, dozens of former Aracruz workers with serious health problems formed a new movement: the Movement of Injured Workers of Aracruz Celulose. The Movement also includes the widows of former Aracruz workers. None of these people have received any sort of compensation from Aracruz for their injuries.

The Movement has documented in detail the cases of 33 former Aracruz workers. Workers suffered spinal injuries caused by carrying heavy boxes of seedlings or chemicals. In the 1980s, workers were transported in trucks with wooden boards as seats. Many workers sustained spinal injuries as the trucks drove along roads full of potholes. Accidents with chain saws were common and included loss of toes, feet and cuts on the body and face. Some workers were crushed by falling trees. Other workers suffered spinal injuries while removing eucalyptus trunks. Workers responsible for maintaining and refuelling chainsaws and machines suffered from eye irritation and a disease called leucopenia, a reduction of the number of white blood cells in the blood.

Particularly at risk were workers in Aracruz's plantations who apply pesticides and herbicides to ensure that the monoculture plantations remain just that: monocultures. Among the symptoms observed in these workers were headaches, vomiting, pain in the mouth and stomach, spongy nails and impaired vision (including the risk of blindness).

Injured workers reported few accidents and illnesses to officials at Aracruz. Aracruz's medical services refuse to accept outside doctors' reports of illnesses as genuine proof of illnesses. Aracruz sacked all of the 33 people injured while working for the company.

Today, many of the manual jobs at Aracruz, particularly those of chainsaw operators, have been replaced by machines. But illnesses among workers handling dangerous chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides are still common.

The report "Promises of Jobs and Destruction of Work" includes an interview with a 59 year old man who used to work for Plantar, one of Aracruz's outsourced companies. He worked for fourteen months applying pesticides in 2000 and 2001. After four months of working, he fainted while he was working: "My friend pulled me into the shade, grabbed a hat, and fanned me for about ten minutes until I recovered again," he told the researchers.

"Then I worked all afternoon long. Another two or three months went by and I fainted again." He became ill, but when he complained to his supervisor rather than receiving treatment, he was fired.

Another man who had worked in Aracruz's plantations described the death of a co-worker, Junio. Junio had complained of feeling sick during the day. When the workers finished work they noticed that Junio wasn't there. They went to look for him: "When they got back he was lying down, with the pump on his back."

In 2003, two people became ill while mixing three pesticides on one of Aracruz's plantations. They were employed by Emflora, another of Aracruz's outsourced companies. After a few days of working without boots, overalls or protective clothing they started to suffer headaches, dizziness, shivering fits and stomach aches. They were diagnosed with leucopenia. One of them is suing Emflora for bodily injury.

Aracruz claims to be "improving the quality of life of its employees". In fact, by using subcontractors like Plantar and Emflora it is attempting to evade its responsibilities. The report "Promises of Jobs and Destruction of Work" concludes that "Aracruz Celulose manages to find a way around proceedings and liability, and while the workers continue to risk their health and very lives without having their rights guaranteed, the eucalyptus plantations are growing."

The report "Promises of Jobs and Destruction of Work: The case of Aracruz Celulose in Brazil" is available here: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/fase.html>

By Chris Lang, E-mail: chrislang@t-online.de

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- Colombia: Oil palm plantations on usurped communal lands

The forests of the Colombian Pacific, the Pacific Region Territory, one of the areas of greatest biodiversity in the world, have been inhabited for many years now by Afro-descendent riparian communities. Their members were the last Colombian citizens to gain recognition of their right to the ownership of the territories that they possessed and used for centuries. The 1991 Constitution recognized their collective rights over the traditionally occupied territories but was accompanied from the start by a ferocious and systematic process of forced internal displacement that still continues in many places in the region and that has become even more serious with the increasing number of communities that are prevented from mobilizing and that have their entry of food, medication and fuel monitored.

As stated by Carlos Rosero, Candidate to the Chamber of Representatives of the Afro Communities "forced internal displacement is functional, not only to the war but also to the progress of mega-projects and monoculture tree plantations, such as the oil palm, that advance with the support of the national government in the north and the south of the Pacific Region Territory and other settlements of Afro-descendant communities in the country. Initial recognition by INCODER (the Colombian Institute for Rural Development) in March this year of the illegal advance of monoculture oil palm plantations in the collective territories of the Afro communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó and the recent reversion depriving these communities of part of the lands that had been granted by deed to them collectively --unseizably, indefeasibly and inalienably-- is a clear example of the model of inclusion and insertion in the region, in their territories and their peoples of the predominant economic rationale; of the serious incoherence of the State in defining the protection and conservation of biological diversity versus simple and vulgar developmentism. What is even more serious, it is a further demonstration that the Colombian State has been unable to protect the rights of Afro-Colombians, bowing to those responsible for violations of rights. Not only does it leave them unpunished, but on top of it all, rewards them."

In the year 2000, three years after having been displaced, the communities of the Jiguamiandú and Curvaradó river basins (the Choco region), received the deeds on 101,000 hectares that they had ancestrally occupied before their displacement. However, on their return these communities found that their territory had been invaded by industrial oil palm plantations.

Attempts made by the real owners to recover their farms were answered by death threats from the para-military personnel and the staff linked to the oil palm growing companies (URAPALMA, Palmas De Curvaradó, Palmas S.A., and Palmadó) in the midst of military operations that have endeavoured to get them to give up working the lands that the Government has allocated to the plantation of oil palms.

At the end of April this year, the preparation of land to sow oil palms was intensified, with the deforestation of native forests in the settlements of Caño Claro and La Cristalina in the Curvaradó Collective Territory and in the Urada sector in the surroundings of Jiguamiandó. For its part INCODER ended up by affirming that it had made a mistake by granting collective deeds and that consequently 10,162 hectares of private property should be deducted from these deeds.

The Inter-Ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace considered that "it is alarming to observe that following more than 13 displacements suffered by the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó Communities, following over 110 murders and disappearances, and having verified the illegality of oil palm plantations in the collective territories of the Afro communities, today the National Government contradicts its own conclusions to favour the economic interests of the oil palm growers."

From a diametrically opposing standpoint, the communities' social movement in the whole area of the Pacific rainforest conceives their territory as a "region-territory of ethnic groups," that is to say an ecological and cultural unit amalgamated by the communities' daily practices. The region-territory is conceived in terms of "corridors of life" that unite the communities, their activities and their natural environment. The corridors of life can connect mangrove ecosystems or extend from the middle of a river to the interior of a forest. Some are built around specific activities, such as traditional gold mining or the gathering of shells by women in the mangrove zones.

Furthermore, the territory-region is conceived as a political construction for the defence of the territories and their sustainability. Sustainability cannot be conceived in terms of scraps or of individual activities or only in economic terms: it must respond to the multidimensional nature of the ecosystem's effective appropriation practices. Thus, it may be said that the region-territory hinges the life-project of the communities with the political project of the social movement. In the same way, the definition of biodiversity includes local principles of autonomy, knowledge, identity and economy. Nature is not "something which is out there" but is deeply rooted in the collective practice of human beings who feel connected to it in a comprehensive way.

The Afro communities have the conviction that the earth, as a living entity, must be collective. And they express it thus: "for us, the earth is mother and a crime is being committed against her giving rise to all the ills and miseries. Our mother, the mother of all living beings, is subjected, according to the law imposed, she has owners, she is private property. On subjecting her as property to be exploited, they took away her freedom to engender life and to protect and teach the place, the relationships and the time of every living thing... All we people are slaves together with animals and the beings of life, while we do not achieve our mother's recovery of freedom."

Article based on information from: "Decisión de INCODER, reversa y violación de los derechos de los afrocolombianos y la Constitución", Carlos Rosero, sent by Tatiana Roa Avendaño, Iniciativa Ambiental Colombia, e-mail: bosques@censat.org; "Comunidades negras de Colombia: en defensa de biodiversidad, territorio y cultura", Arturo Escobar, GRAIN, <http://www.grain.org/biodiversidad/?id=87>; Comisión Intereclesial De Justicia Y Paz, Bogota, October 2005, <http://www.pasc.ca/dever/dever211.pdf>

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- Uruguay: World Bank Ombudsman confirms pulp mill risks

The project for the installation of two pulp-mills in Uruguay on the river of the same name, has given rise to firm opposition, both in the country and among civil society in the neighbouring Argentine province of Entre Rios, across the river a few kilometres from the location where the pulp mills are to be installed by the Spanish company Ence and the Finnish company, Botnia.

Sectors of the Uruguayan population are very concerned over the social and environmental impacts caused by the production of what will become one of the largest pulp mill complexes in the world in one of the smallest countries (see WRM bulletins 83 and 94). For their part, the Argentine neighbours would also be harmed insofar as the environment knows no frontiers and both the atmosphere and the shared river run serious danger of contamination, as demonstrated by the neighbouring Chilean and Brazilian experiences (see WRM bulletins 83 and 91).

As the Botnia and Ence companies requested credits from the World Bank to carry out their projects, the Uruguayan Guayubira Group, in the framework of a campaign to resist the installation of these mills, promoted the dispatch of a letter to this entity. The International Financial Corporation, the branch of the Bank responsible for granting credit to private projects, received the letter that had circulated and been signed by hundreds of organizations in Uruguay, Argentina and throughout the world, appealing to the World Bank to avoid getting involved in the Metsa Botnia and Ence projects and not to grant them credit because the installation of the pulp mills will generate serious environmental and social impacts that will not solve, but only worsen the problems of the country and its people.

In reply, the World Bank sent an assessment team from the Office of the Ombudsman and Compliance Advisor of the International Financial Corporation – responding directly to the president of the World Bank – to gather information on the conflict as set out.

Recently, the Office of the Ombudsman of the World Bank confirmed many of the concerns brought up by the Guayubira Group.

In a communiqué dated 16 November 2005, the group announced:

“The World Bank’s Ombudsman’s Office has just confirmed the relevance of many of the concerns that the Guayubira Group has been bringing up for some time now. In the meanwhile the previous government and the present one affirm that all is well, that all the studies have been done, that all is under control, but now it is this Office of Compliance Advisor (OCA) to the World Bank that says that it is not so.

At the time, Guayubira seriously questioned the Environmental Impact Assessments made by the Ence and Botnia companies. However, DINAMA (National Environmental Office) ended up by rapidly approving them. What does the report by the World Bank’s Office of Compliance Adviser say? It textually says that “based on its own revisions, OCA has found that the EIAs for the pulp mills do not adequately address the concerns of the potentially affected persons. In particular:

- The EIAs do not provide sufficient evidence that the concerns related with potential impacts on tourism and agriculture have been addressed;
- There is very little evidence in the EIAs that potentially impacted companies or individuals have been consulted (such as tourism operators, fisher-people, particularly in Argentina);
- The EIAs do not consider broader accumulative impacts, added to environmental emissions, such as social and environmental consequences on land tenure and social equity as a result of the two mills promoting the development of large-scale eucalyptus plantations in Uruguay.”

It is sad to see that OCA is able to perceive the social and environmental impacts of large scale tree plantations and to link its expansion with the pulp mill projects but that these major issues have never been assessed or recognized by our governments. What is more, the OCA report adds the need to study the “potential impacts of eucalyptus plantations...on water availability,” thus joining the concerns voiced by Guayubira on the impacts of plantations.

On the basis of all the omissions observed by OCA, the report sets out the need to:

- a. “Assess these projects’ technology and projected emissions” and that “It should be demonstrated that the Best Available Technology is being applied to both projects;
- b. Assess the potential receptors of the impacts, both in Argentina and in Uruguay. Specifically, it should identify:
 - i. Potential impacts of water emission on the water quality and on the local communities as well as on the tourist fishing communities;
 - ii. Potential impacts on agricultural productivity of emissions into the air;
 - iii. Potential impacts of eucalyptus plantations on land tenure equity and on water availability;
- c. Definitively address the issue of whether tourism and the pulp mills are compatible, given the on-going proposals;
- d. Assess whether it is possible or not to design appropriate mitigation measures, taking into account adaptation of existing regulatory processes to manage possible trans-boundary impacts”.

Summing up, what the World Bank's Office of Compliance Advisor is saying is that the Environmental Impact Assessments were totally insufficient and that therefore the State's controlling mechanisms have failed even before the pulp mills have entered into operation. At the same time, the report also points out a series of social and environmental impacts that will occur, both due to the expansion of monoculture tree plantations and to the industrial process involved in pulp production. These points coincide with the position of the Guayubira Group on both issues. Will it still be insisted that these pulp mills will not contaminate?

Article based on information from: "Comunicado de prensa – 16 de noviembre de 2005, Banco Mundial y plantas de celulosa: se confirman impactos", Grupo Guayubira, e-mail: info@guayubira.org.uy, <http://www.guayubira.org.uy>

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GENERAL

- Oil-palm plantations: No sustainability possible with Paraquat

Initiated by WWF in cooperation with business partners --a group of producers, buyers, retailers and financial institutions-- in 2003, the initiative called Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has held its third meeting in Singapore this month where 8 Principles and 39 Criteria were adopted.

The IUF and the Berne Declaration had called for fundamental changes to the proposed "Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production" --which were finally adopted without any change--, for permitting the use of highly toxic pesticides that are extremely harmful to human health and the environment. In their current form, the criteria ensure the interests of the pesticide industry --co-sponsors of the initiative-- rather than the health of oil palm plantation workers.

The Principles, while requiring producers to look for alternatives to pesticides designated as class-1-toxins, ultimately do not ban the use of these substances. They also permit the continued use of paraquat, a full-range herbicide widely used on palm oil plantations and known to poison thousands of plantation workers and small farmers every year. Paraquat is responsible for a substantial number of the tens of thousands of annual pesticide-related deaths. Once absorbed through the skin or lungs or orally ingested, its effects are irreversible. Several countries have already banned the substance, with the latest ban set to take effect in Malaysia in 2007.

The International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (IUF) and agricultural workers' unions across the world have been calling for a paraquat ban for years. "There is no room for Paraquat in a socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture", declared IUF General Secretary Ron Oswald.

There is a trend in certification of sustainable production in the agricultural sector to rule out the use of the most highly toxic pesticides including paraquat.

As the IUF and the Berna Declaration expressed: "Yet the criteria for sustainable palm oil do not reflect these concerns about paraquat in any way. No other label is as weak on pesticide criteria as the new Palm Oil Principles and Criteria. One reason for this might be RSPO's link to the agro-chemical industry. After all, the official dinner at the RSPO-meeting in Singapore is sponsored by none other than the Syngenta Corporation, the world's leading manufacturer of paraquat."

Several considerations are being discussed around whether palm oil can actually be sustainably produced. Certainly not with paraquat.

Article based on Press communiqué dated 17 November 2005 issued by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Catering, Tobacco and General Workers (IUF), e-mail: : iuf@iuf.org, www.iuf.org; and the Bern Declaration: info@evb.ch; www.evb.ch

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