

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

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## OUR VIEWPOINT

### - A modest proposal for Earth Day

In 1729, Jonathan Swift –who devoted much of his writing to the struggle for Ireland against English rule-published his satire “A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public” (he suggested that they should be well fed and then eaten). Had he been alive today, he would have probably had something satirical to say about the US government and Earth Day (April 22).

According to the US government’s Earth Day web page (<http://www.earthday.gov>), “Earth Day is a time to celebrate gains we have made and create new visions to accelerate environmental progress.” The same page tells us that “The Bush Administration is focused on achieving meaningful results –cleaner air and water, and healthier lands and wildlife habitats.” Although lacking Swift’s literary genius, we would like to make a Swiftonian contribution to those amazing statements.

To start with, we would like to say that it is clear that we can celebrate all the gains achieved in the past decades under the wise leadership of the US corporate government. Many dark and threatening forests have been cleared to let the sun’s rays reach the soil. Numerous dangerous or simply useless animals have been driven to extinction. Water has been enriched –for free- with high doses of expensive chemicals. During the night, forest peoples are now illuminated by gas flaring by oil companies. Forest areas are strictly protected from the Indigenous Peoples and forest communities that threaten logging companies, mining companies, plantation companies, shrimp farming companies and other environmentally-friendly corporations.

Environmental progress has also been highly successful and what appeared to be impossible has become true. For instance, changing the Earth’s climate might have seemed to be utopian. However, the difficulties were overcome and now we can celebrate a much warmer future. Making the sea level rise was also perceived by pessimists as impossible but, as usual, the US corporate government has proven them wrong. In coming years, instead of living in vast continents, some lucky people will be able to live in small paradisiac tropical islands –formerly the tallest peaks of those continents now covered by water- under the shade of genetically engineered palm trees.

Implementation of “new visions” has also achieved success and in this respect oil is a paradigmatic example. To achieve climate change and raise the sea level it is necessary to burn much oil. Unfortunately, most oil lies outside the US borders. The old vision meant that corporations needed to control oil-rich country governments, which were not always willing to collaborate. The new vision makes things easier: the oil-rich country can be occupied to prevent it from using weapons of mass destruction.

Following Jonathan Swift’s approach, we would like to make a Modest Proposal for Preventing the Corporations behind the US Government from Being a Burden to their Country and Others, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public. The proposal is simple: that those –and other similar transnational corporations- are driven to complete extinction.

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## LOCAL STRUGGLES AND NEWS

### AFRICA

#### - Ethiopia: Dutch conservation organization involved in eviction of thousands of tribal people

The Omo National Park in Southern Ethiopia is being taken over by the Dutch conservation organization, African Parks Foundation (APF) and 50,000 tribal people are in danger of being displaced and/or of losing access to their vital subsistence resources.

The 1570 square mile Omo National Park is home to the Suri, Dizi, Mursi, Me'en and Nyangatom tribal peoples. These tribal peoples live in or use nearly the entire park for cultivation and cattle grazing. They have made this land their home for centuries.

The boundaries of the Omo National Park were recently legalized (gazetted) to pave the way for a management contract between African Parks Foundation and the Ethiopian Federal and Regional Governments. This gazettlement was accomplished by Ethiopian Park officials persuading tribal people to sign away their land, without compensation, on documents they could not read.

One Mursi tribal member reported that he "saw the police grab three Mursi people and force them to sign the paper with their thumbprints."

The gazettlement of the Omo Park will make the Omo peoples illegal squatters on their own land. African Parks Foundation was aware of the way the 'agreement' of local people to the park boundaries was obtained, and was asked repeatedly to include a 'no evictions' clause in its contract with the government. They went ahead, however, and signed a contract, which makes no mention of the tribal peoples, in November 2005.

Several Ethiopian government officials have said they plan to move the tribal people and African Parks Foundation says it cannot interfere with the plans of a 'sovereign government'.

People have been evicted from a park African Parks Foundation has taken over, before. In February 2004, APF signed an agreement to manage Nech Sar National Park, near Arba Minch. In November 2004, 463 houses of the Guji people were burned down by Ethiopian park officials and local police, to coerce the Guji to leave their land, inside Nech Sar.

"We usually hear news on the radio even when a single house is burned down by criminals. We hear all different kinds of crimes reported. In our case we lost 463 houses, but it was not reported at all," said one Guji tribal member.

In 2004, ten thousand people of the Guji and Kore tribes were resettled from within Nech Sar to fulfill a contractual agreement between the government and APF that all people would be removed before APF took over management.

"We didn't want to be involved in the resettlement, so I put a clause in the contract that said we wouldn't take over the park until the resettlement was completed," said Paul van Vlissingen.

African Parks Foundation was founded by Paul van Vlissingen, Chairman of the global retail giant Makro Retail and Calor Gas, a liquid petroleum gas distribution company. Rob Walton, Chairman of the board of Wal-Mart, is on the board of African Parks Foundation. The Walton Foundation has donated large sums of money to APF and is listed as one of two major funders to African Parks, along with the US Department of State.

African Parks Foundation manages parks in Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Ethiopia and is reportedly looking at managing more. The revenue from these Parks accrues to their projects, and put towards opening more parks. "National Parks must become virtual companies," Paul van Vlissingen has said and this corporate philosophy for his conservation organization makes sense, with the business tycoon Rob Walton on board.

The environmental impact of this plan could be disastrous, if people, who have managed this land and its wildlife for centuries, are removed. Tribal people have formed this landscape over thousands of years of agriculture and grazing. The most radical change to the ecosystem would be the removal of humans, whom the wild animals have evolved behavior patterns with over millennia. Hungry, angry peoples surrounding the park would be detrimental to the success of the park and to the biodiversity.

If the tribal peoples of the area are removed, there is great risk of both violent conflict with the government and with any tribes whose land they are moved onto. There is no unused land in the area; fights would ensue over too little land for too many people.

"The Ethiopian government should be very worried about the prospects of even more violence if they go ahead with their apparent policy of removal in the Omo area" said David Turton, a British anthropologist with over 30 years experience working among the Mursi, one of the tribes living in the boundaries of the Omo National Park. "Any attempt to encroach on Mursi territory will ratchet up the existing pressure on resources in the lower Omo area."

If you wish to support the struggle against this happening, please visit  
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Ethiopia/actionalert2006.html>

Article based on information provided by Native Solutions to Conservation Refugees, a fiscally sponsored project of Global Justice Ecology Project. For further information on Native Solutions to Conservation Refugees, contact Will Hurd [hurd@hailmail.net](mailto:hurd@hailmail.net). Sent by Global Justice Ecology Project, [info@globalecology.org](mailto:info@globalecology.org),  
<http://www.globaljusticeecology.org>.

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#### - Nigeria: Tree plantations at the expense of forests and forest peoples' livelihoods

The Omo Forest Reserve –located in the South west of Nigeria- was legally constituted as a forest reserve by Order No. 10 of 1925 and the Order was amended in 1952. The forest was practically unexplored by then. The forest was ceded to Government for reservation on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 1918. The agreement was made between the District Officer, Ijebu Ode on behalf of the British Colonial government and the Awujale of Ijebu Ode on behalf of the Ijebu Native administration. The Omo Forest Reserve, which is 1305.5km<sup>2</sup>, is divided into Area J1 –J3 (519.3km<sup>2</sup>), Area J4 (565.8km<sup>2</sup>), Area J6 (220.4km<sup>2</sup>), and enclaves (65km<sup>2</sup>) (Ola-Adams, 1999).

A survey conducted in the reserve between 1916 and 1918 reported the existence of 5 villages, a total of 30 settlements and a human population of 610 (300 males, 190 females and 120 children). Settlements have continued to increase in number and sizes, and the present population of the reserve cannot be less than 25,000; and the number of people deriving benefit from it estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000 (Karimu, 1999).

The reserve lies within a tropical lowland rainforest (otherwise known as high forest). The forest in its undisturbed form had the most complex and productive vegetation type in the country. The high forest is part of the Guinea-Congolean tropical moist forest zone and it is estimated that the system supports about 8,000 species of plants. Part of the southern portion of the reserve falls within the original mahogany belt in the system.

As a result of continuous human activities especially logging and establishment of monoculture tree plantations by the Ogun State Forestry Plantation Project, the vegetation pattern in Omo has changed remarkably. The original vegetation of the reserve now occupies about 0.3 % of the total area, with the disturbed (logged) forests,

monoculture plantations and farming areas occupying about 60%, 30% and 10% respectively. Not less than 35,775 logs of sixty-five tree species are removed annually from Omo Forest Reserve (NFWSG, 1994 cited by Ola-Adams, 1999).

The precursor of the Ogun State Forestry Plantation Project started in 1966 as *Gmelina* Pulpwood Plantation Project. The purpose of the Project was to raise *Gmelina arborea* plantations for pulpwood that would feed Iwopin Pulp and Paper Mill.

The Western State Government funded the project up to 1972 when a total of 2,000 hectares of *Gmelina arborea* plantation was established in Area J6 of the reserve. Between 1973 and 1979, the Federal Government of Nigeria sustained the project with grants for additional 6,000 hectares of plantations of *Gmelina*.

Ogun State through the Federal Government of Nigeria then took a loan from World Bank and utilized it to raise a further 10,000 hectares of *Gmelina arborea* from 1980 to 1987.

At the approach of the termination of the World Bank loan in 1987, African Development Bank (ADB) was contacted for a continuation loan to proceed with the project. The loan was granted and became effective as from 1989. By the end of the ADB assisted portion of the project around 1995/96, the project had established 23,130 hectares of plantation. The ugly trend still continues till date with funds from Ogun State Government.

The resultant effect of these unsustainable practices is increased hardship on the forest communities. In a recent study conducted by the Indigenous Peoples Rights Crusaders (IPRC), forest dwellers interviewed in most of the enclaves reported a fall in the quality and quantity of forest resources with continuous forest degradation through over exploitation. The resources mentioned include bush meat (which constituted their major source of animal protein), timber and non-timber forest products.

Even with the presence of World Bank and ADB in the reserve, the Ogun State Government has not made concerted effort to ameliorate the sufferings of the forest dwellers either through the provision of infrastructural facilities and social amenities like accessible roads, electricity, good water supply, or the provision of alternative means of livelihood for them.

Due to the very poor state of roads in the reserve, movement of goods and people within the reserve and the nearby towns is always very difficult and expensive. This has culminated in a very high cost of living in a community dominated by very indigent people.

In the enclaves visited by the IPCR, there was no good source of drinking water. The enclaves depend on contaminated perennial streams which are becoming seasonal because of the deleterious effect of vegetation modification on watersheds. With respect to electricity, the only place that is electrified is the Grace Camp, where the Project has its offices and residential quarters.

The unacceptability of the unsustainable and non-participatory approach of Ogun State Forestry Department to forest resources management was made clear in an ugly incident that took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2006, when the State Government Squad led by the Commissioner for Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Dele Odulaja went to destroy Cocoa, Plantain and Cola nut farms owned by the indigenous farmers at Ebulende enclave (along Iho area) of the reserve, claiming that the farmers destroyed their monoculture plantations to establish their farms. The farmers who came out to fight the government officials, were overpowered, their farms destroyed and some of them arrested.

It is high time Ogun State Forestry Department stopped this act of brutality and injustice. It is also high time they recognized the importance of the involvement and the integration of the indigenous people in the management of their forest resources as being preached the world over. There is an urgent need for the government to review her activities in the reserve with a view to ameliorating the sufferings of the forest dwellers and improving their standard of living.

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### - The FSC Plantations Policy Working Group's field trip in South Africa

As part of a two-year process to review FSC policy on the certification of timber plantations, members of the policy review working-group (PWG) recently visited South Africa for their final meeting. What follows are some quotes from the report on the field trip to visit plantation areas, produced by Wally Menne (member of the local Timberwatch Coalition).

In keeping with FSC policies, local environmental organisations, as represented in the Timberwatch Coalition, were invited to participate during the field trip, and even to make suggestions for items to be included in the field trip programme. Before very long it became clear to Timberwatch that there were some problems with this situation, the most important one being that the organisation of the field-trip programme was in the hands of a member of the PWG who also happened to be employed by the timber industry association 'Forestry South Africa'.

This issue was not easily resolved, and it soon became apparent that the request by Timberwatch for an equal allocation of time (one day for Industry and one day for NGOs) would not be agreed to. The PWG FSA representative seemed to be pushing for a programme that was strongly biased in favour of industry interests, and it would be up to the NGO participants to find ways to level the playing-field.

The first opportunity came on the day the PWG members arrived in Durban, and there was some time available before they would need to leave by bus for the meeting venue. Timberwatch arranged for those that were interested to meet with members of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, that operates in an area where local communities are negatively affected by industrial pollution, including that from a large pulp mill situated in the midst of a residential area. The object of this exercise was to demonstrate to PWG members that industrial timber plantations have far wider impacts on people and the environment than just in the areas where they are grown.

The field trip included a Eucalyptus plantation where an industry-funded organisation 'The Institute for Commercial Forestry Research' (ICFR) was conducting research to demonstrate 'sustainability' in timber production. It soon became obvious that the outcomes of this project, which is run as part of an international programme together with CIFOR, had been pretty much pre-determined using a very narrow set of criteria that hardly considered any issues other than crude wood production. The presenter from ICFR made the amazing claim that natural grassland would recover fully within ten years (with appropriate management) if the Eucalyptus plantations were to be removed. He also claimed that the plantations would enhance soil quality and fertility!

The next item on the programme was a demonstration of herbicide application within a young pine plantation. There seemed to be no need for weed-control here as the trees had already grown past a height where competition from weeds might have presented a problem, and very little fresh weed growth was evident. It also became obvious that there were some issues around how the spraying could affect the workers involved who were mainly women employed indirectly through a contractor. One of the concerns that there was no health monitoring after people stopped working for the contractor. If they leave due to health problems or allergies, and later fall ill or die, there is no system in place to monitor their situation. One interesting aspect of the use of pesticides is that this provides a way to see how plantations and forests are different. The very thought of using chemical poisons in a biodiverse forest, where all creatures exist in harmony should be rejected outright. Though, in a plantation situation, the unnatural monoculture of usually alien tree species is in conflict with the natural environment, and that is why it is necessary to use chemicals to control Nature.

The trip continued onwards through certified pine plantations that clearly failed to comply with the timber industry's own guidelines in terms of distances from forest margins, riparian zones and wetlands. In some

instances plantation trees could be seen growing right in wetland zones, and evidence of adequate attention to invasive alien plants was very hard to see.

After passing through the sterile and depressingly monotonous pine plantation area, the road led the group to an elevated vantagepoint within an area of grassland that had mercifully escaped destruction by plantation. The tour stopped at this point for lunch. The view from this spot took in a varied landscape in which the dark green timber plantations stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb, but from which something also appeared to be missing. Naturally it was that signs of human habitation were almost completely absent. It appeared for a moment that the grasslands, farmlands and plantations before us were miraculously able to exist without people. Not so of course, but where were all the people hidden away?

Those who continued with the tour and were able to visit the tribal area known as Ozwatini were able to see where some of the people now live. In isolation and poverty, communities displaced under apartheid remain displaced and are very unlikely to ever recover their social status or self-respect. Not even FSC certified woodlots purporting to give formerly disadvantaged people a share of the timber industry cake could ever change that. There is more than enough evidence that industrial timber plantations, large or small, do little if anything to uplift rural communities and if anything undermine their livelihoods and traditional culture.

Back at the hotel, John (Blessing) Karumbidza treated the group to a stirring slide-show and presentation on a recently completed research project. Blessing had truly ventured where none had dared go before in documenting the way industrial timber plantations in South Africa have impacted and still continue to impact on rural communities in timber growing areas. Copies of his research report were distributed to all the PWG members, who mostly responded appreciatively. Blessing's presentation was able to explain where some of those missing communities had gone. It also showed how timber plantations continue to exploit, terrorise and displace rural people even in the present time. During his talk he had emphasised the point "Plantations are not Forests", and hopefully those listening were able to internalise this fundamental truth!

Excerpts from: "Did the FSC Plantations Policy Working Group get it right?" By Wally Menne, Timberwatch Coalition, e-mail: [plantnet@iafrica.com](mailto:plantnet@iafrica.com)

The full report is available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/SouthAfrica/filedtrip.pdf>

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## ASIA

### - Dams as ethnic cleansing: The Burmese junta's war against the Karen people

Aung Ngyeh, a 31 year old Karen, fled to Thailand in 2002, forced out of his home in Karen State by the Burmese military's war against ethnic populations. He now lives in the refugee camp along the Thai border working with the Karen Development Research Group (KDRG) campaigning to stop foreign investment in the Burmese regime's "development" projects.

For Aung Ngyeh and thousands of other displaced people like him, the Burmese military dictatorship's "development" projects such as the planned dams on the Salween River (as well as railway lines, highways, mines and natural gas pipelines) are tools of war used by the junta to harass and evict ethnic peoples.

When he was 16 years old, Aung Ngyeh worked as forced labour building the railway lines not far from the area of the Mobye dam that feeds the Lawpita hydropower plants. Built with Japanese funding in the early 1960s on the Lawpita Falls in the Balu Chuang River in Karen State, the Mobye dam was Burma's first hydropower project.

About 12,500 Karen people permanently lost their homes and fields to the dam reservoir covering about 207 square kilometers. Those living near the power plants were forced to leave at gunpoint and their fields were planted with land mines.

Since 1960, largely in efforts to control the Lawpita area, the Burmese military increased its presence in Karenni State to over 24 permanent battalions resulting in a constant terrorization of the population by the marauding soldiers. Forced labour and portering, harassment, extortion and random killings are common as well as sexual violence specifically targeting ethnic women including military gang rape.

Despite the hardship endured, the Karen themselves derive little benefit from the Lawpita dam. At least eight percent of Karenni State does not get the electricity that is routed to Rangoon and Mandalay; anyway for most of the rural residents, the price of power is unaffordable. Moreover, as the water from the Balu Chaung River is diverted to the dam's turbines, villagers cannot get water for their fields when they need it and suffer chronic water shortages.

Karenni State is located on the eastern edge of Burma, between Thailand's Mae Hong Son province in the east, Shan State in the north, and Karen State in the south. The highly culturally diverse state has seven townships with a total population of about 300,000 that also includes "internally displaced populations".

Kayah peoples are the majority inhabitants of the state but there are other ethnic groups such as the Gekho, Geba, Karen, Kayan (Paduang), Kayaw, Bre, Manumanaw, Shan, Yinbaw and Yintalai. Each group has its own language, customs and beliefs; different dialects and other differences may also exist within each group. The majority of the people practise upland and lowland rice farming together with fishing, hunting and collection of forest products.

The seven townships of Karenni State roughly equate to the former kingdoms under Karenni kings or Sawphyas that ruled independently. In what is a reflection of existing tensions today with the Burmese dictatorship, the Karenni kingdoms were never subjugated even under British colonial rule and remained separate and independent until 1948 when Burma gained independence from the British.

After independence, the Burmese set up the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) government while the Karen formed a parallel government, the Karen Resistance Government (KRG), led by U Be Tu Re.

In 1948, Burmese troops invaded the Karen states and assassinated U Be Tu Re. Ever since then, many armed Karen groups such as the Karen Nationalities People's Liberation Front or KNPLF have fought the Burmese. As of 2002, all groups except the Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP) – formed in 1957 from the KRG – had signed ceasefire agreements with the Burmese junta.

The junta used the ceasefire as a pretext to move into more strategic positions for greater control over Karen area. After the ceasefire, the junta also collected the names of people involved in various Karen liberation groups.

This is why, Aung Ngyeh says, he cannot yet return to his home in Karen State as he is a marked man by the Burmese military. However, it still did not stop him going back sometime ago to other parts of the state, hiding in the forests and walking or hitching rides with villagers, traveling all the way up to Shan State in order to look at the present conditions.

He says that huge numbers of Karen have already left the state: some to the border areas in Thailand, some hiding in the forests near their destroyed villages, and the vast majority forcibly moved to relocation camps where they are used as labour by the junta.

The villages affected by the forced relocations cover at least half the area of Karen State and are home to at least 20,000-30,000 people. The junta gave them no more than a week to move to the specified sites and stated that, if found outside the relocation sites after that week, they would be considered as enemy troops and shot on sight.

During resettlement, the military went around looting and burning granaries, killing livestock and forcing everyone including children, pregnant women and elderly to walk through the hills to distant relocation sites.

Near the crowded relocation camps, there is little arable land to grow crops. Lacking proper food and medical care, people suffer from malnutrition and diseases such as malaria; women are constantly raped by armed soldiers and those who are captured escaping are killed.

Given the impacts of the Lawpita dam and the continuing war and forced relocations by the junta, Aung Ngyeh says that future projects such as the dams on the Salween River can only worsen an already unbearable situation for the Karen peoples.

Presently, Thailand and Burma have agreed to build at least four dams along the Salween River in Burma, at Tasang in Shan State and Hatgyi, Weigyi, and Dagwin in Karen State. The Salween dams in total will produce 15-20,000 megawatts of electricity that will be sold to Thailand. The Weigyi dam, slated to begin construction in 2007, is at least ten times higher than the Mobyte dam, and will have the biggest impacts on the Karen. Although sited in Karen State, the dam reservoir would flood over 640 square kilometers of Karen State, including most of the area's lowland forests and agriculture land and disrupt riverine fisheries.

Although no studies are available about the forests in the Salween area of Karen State, it is known that the hundreds of square kilometers of lowland forests to be submerged by the Weigyi reservoir lie within an ecoregion considered rich in biodiversity.

The Weigyi dam would completely submerge 28 villages in four Karen townships including the entire towns of Pasaung and Bawlake, and although many villagers have already been forcibly relocated over the years, the dam would still directly affect an estimated 30,000 people. This includes the entire tribe of the Yintalai – about 1,000 people – a sub-ethnic group of the Kayah whose ancestral lands are in Pasaung and Bawlake.

Meanwhile, an estimated one third of the population are already forcibly resettled or displaced and over 22,000 Karen refugees registered in camps in Thailand. If the Salween dams go ahead, many of these people will never be able to return home.

The Karen groups are urging Thailand and other investors like China to halt all plans for dams on the Salween including the Weigyi dam. For the Karen, already ravaged by half a century of war and violence waged by the Burmese junta, the Salween dams only promise more suffering.

By Noel Rajesh, e-mail: [rajesh@sea-user.org](mailto:rajesh@sea-user.org)

The information on the Karen peoples and the Lawpita and Salween dams are based on the report "Dammed by Burma's Generals: The Karen experience with hydropower development – from Lawpita to the Salween" published by the Karen Development Research Group (KDRG). The full report is available at [www.salweenwatch.org](http://www.salweenwatch.org) or contact [kdrg05@yahoo.com](mailto:kdrg05@yahoo.com).

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#### - Creating 'manageable' forests: Plantations and Plantation Workers in India

When the British invaded India 250 years ago, they found the sub-continent covered with a mosaic of vegetation they did not comprehend. Tall dark trees, gnarled and knotted creepers, wild grasslands...the sheer tropical abundance of India's forests shocked, overwhelmed them. Ultimately, forests came to signify a number of simpler issues (or things): snakes, tigers, barbarians/rebels, pests, and adventure. British colonizers/traders never neglected the mundane and practical, though, which lay beyond this 'exotic' and 'orient'. The East India Company went on 'empirebuilding' and the first 100 years of British rule witnessed a colossal plunder of half of India's forest vegetation. Resultant timbers went to feed the railways and the new and old shipyards in both India and England.

The 'cleared' land were settled to white planters (tea, coffee, indigo and sugarcane), and the native 'zamindars', the new class of feudal lords that the British created.

The carnage would not stop before 1860, when a century of empire-building and associated political stresses and compulsions would make the rulers wiser, and in many areas —for instance, areas under administrative control of 'native' Kings and Nawabs— forests would be let alone. A different fate awaited forests within the empire. In 1864, the first forest administration for the British Empire (Imperial Forest Service) was created. In 1868 and 1878, India was 'endowed' with its first forest policy and forest act, which, prescribed, among other things, banishing indigenous communities from the forest and restricting forest usage by them. In the interests of the queen and empire, the British proclaimed all 'unsettled' and 'ownerless' common property resources like pastures and forests 'eminent domain', which meant that the colonial state would 'manage' the forests as it saw fit. 'Management' of resources (the British called it scientific forest management) was the key, which, the Indian forest policy claimed would make forests more homogenous and productive.

'Homogenisation' was the magic word with which every working plan of India's forests started (till as late as 1988!). Perhaps the real urgency lay in the colonial mindset of domestication or 'wilderness taming' —to make something civilized out of a pagan landscape. Accordingly, in between 1864 and 1947 (when the British left India), Indian forests were taught 'order', with neat rows of tall and elegant pines filling up the hillsides, and sal (*Shorea robusta*) and teak (*Tectona grandis*) monocultures replacing the rifraff (in vernacular Hindi 'jhara'). In fact, forests were increasingly being managed as estates and forest villages (new colonies of plantation workers) were being set up inside forests. Later, when Dietrich Brandis, the 'father of Indian forestry', developed the 'taungya' system of plantation, many of these villages came to be known as 'taungyas'. Taungya became the premiere plantation method not only in India, but also several Asian and African countries.

Ecologically, taungya brought the much-needed fire component back both to tropical and temperate forest systems. Socio-politically, it offered a temporary solution to the problem of increasing tribal unrest in forest areas of British India. Taungya villages had some sort of 'rehabilitation' space for displaced 'jhumiyas' (shifting cultivators), where they could clearfell forests and burn the area to raise food-crops. The cultivators then had to raise plantations in that land. During initial years of taungya, this labour was mandatory 'beggar' —the cultivators received no wages. Despite this, taungyas showed some improvements on pre-taungya forest villages. In Bengal for instance, 'permanent' forest villages started to come up from 1910 onwards, where settlers signed agreement papers or bonds with the Department. These agreements spelt out some privileges for forest villagers, like free timber and other implements for building quarters, firewood and fodder —in addition to cultivable land.

In independent India, the forest department continued with the task of homogenizing forests, and the 1952 forest policy legitimized this by saying that forests would be managed to meet the 'paramount needs' of the nation. These needs translated into aggressive commercial forestry, and, according to Planning Commission of India and Forest Survey of India estimates, more than 17 million hectares of plantations came up in next 38 years, till the new Forest Policy of 1988 prescribed a moratorium on clearing natural forests. Plantations continued in the post-1988 period, however, and in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 5-year plan periods, about 16 million (!) hectares of new plantations were created. Though the 1988 policy talked about integrating livelihood and biomass needs of forest communities in future forest management strategies and plans, plantations programmes in India continue to be governed by industrial and urban consumers' needs. This becomes clear from the choice of species. According to a 1999 Forest Survey of India estimate the forest department has created 15 million hectares of plantations till 1997, which include large blocks of pulp and timber plantations (Eucalyptus and Teak account for about 16 % of total area). About 20 million hectares of plantations came up in agricultural land under firm or social forestry programmes.

According to the FAO's Forest Resources Assessment (2000), India has 34 million hectares of plantations, and going by plan targets, another 30 million are on the cards. This makes, by 2020, a whooping 65-70 (add 4+ millions between 2000 and 2005) million hectares of plantations, about 36 % of the world total! Expectedly, the Indian Government advocates the World Bank PPP (public-private partnership) formula to meet costs, which means that the State would enter into contracts with corporates (or International Financial Institutions or

whatever) on behalf of user communities mobilized through the Joint Forest Management Programme. Such experiments have already been practiced in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where entire communities were driven out of their lands (officially, 'encroached'). The strong paper/pulp lobby in India demands that 'degraded' forest lands be leased out to companies to raise 'protected' plantations, and for the time being they are demanding a 'tiny wee' amount of 1.6 million hectares! This is happening despite several recommendations and reports by government agencies that such moves can impact forest communities adversely.

While plantations grow and cover the country, original plantation workers of India, the forest villagers, continue to languish in their ghettos, deprived of all privileges, and bereft of all rights. Because forestry now is a thoroughly mechanized and capital-intensive industry, and forest management practices in the country show a much-vaunted paradigm shift in favour of 'biodiversity conservation', importance of forest labour has decreased. For forest villagers, this translates into perpetual unemployment, untold economic hardships and misery. The villagers have no access to various development schemes or bank loans and any ownership rights over their agricultural landholdings or homesteads. In many areas, the Forest Department threatens them with eviction. There can hardly be better instances of a sovereign state declaring a whole body of its citizens *persona non grata*, and waging a war against them.

The stage set for a full-scale market invasion in terms of carbon trade and ecosystem services trading, Indian forests, and forest communities struggle against the twin menace of production and protection forestry.

By Soumitra Ghosh, e-mail: [soumitrag@gmail.com](mailto:soumitrag@gmail.com)

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### - Indonesia: FSC dilemmas in the heart of Borneo. Step-wise sand bag or sell out?

Another new FSC certificate of a major logging operation, this time in Indonesia, has got forest watchers scratching their heads. Near the top of the Mahakam River in East Kalimantan one of four logging operations of the Jakarta-registered company PT Sumalindo Lestari Jaya has been awarded an FSC certificate by SmartWood, the forest certification arm of the New York-based Rainforest Alliance, (as well as a complementary certificate issued under the Joint Certification Protocol by the Indonesian certification body, PT Mutuagung Lestari, under the national Lembaga Ekolabel Indonesia certification scheme).

Sumalindo Lestari Jaya (SLJ) is a large corporation with four active logging concessions, additional areas of timber plantations, a plywood mill and a facility producing medium-density fibreboard (MDF). The company is 75% owned by PT Sumber Graha Sejahtera, which is part of a major plywood manufacturing conglomerate, the Hasko Group. The other 25% of SLJ is shared between PT Barito Pacific, another major timber company, and the general public.

Whether the SLJ II certificate is seen as great news for the forests of Borneo, or not, in part depends on your vision of what is possible and what you think the main threats to the region are. Borneo has already experienced extensive deforestation through ill-regulated and plainly illegal logging, and clearance for agriculture, timber plantations and oil palm estates. Over half of the areas that have already been cleared are now 'abandoned' land, though much of these areas are still encumbered with claims from communities. The large chunks of remaining forest in Borneo are, for the most part, now in the more remote upland regions, in the headwaters. Although most of these areas have long been allocated to loggers, until now they have been only lightly exploited because of the prohibitive costs of access and transport and the availability of more accessible and lucrative areas downstream.

The major international conservation agencies active in Indonesia are trying to save 'the heart of Borneo' by establishing as a mosaic of protected forests, national parks and large forest concessions under 'sustainable forest management', while keeping to a minimum land clearance for community and industrial use.

The threat of massive forest clearance in the headwaters is not imaginary. Indeed in July 2005, the Indonesian President announced plans to establish the world's largest oil palm plantation in the area. According to the

announcement some 1.8 million hectares of forests all along the border between Sarawak (Malaysia) and Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) are to be converted to oil palm plantations financed by China's International Development Bank. The SLJ II concession lies astride this proposed oil palm corridor. The local government in Malinau district also has plans to convert large chunks of forests there to oil palm. Conservation organisations like WWF, which has loudly denounced the oil palm plans, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are keen to encourage companies to invest in long term logging in these forests rather than see them permanently cleared. The question is how credible are these plans for sustainable logging by large corporations? Can you 'sand bag' frontier forests against the rising tide of forest clearance by certifying logging operations or will this just encourage further pillage in the interior first by loggers and then others?

*A quest for sustainability:*

Industrial scale logging on Indonesia's outer islands got going on a large scale in the 1970s and since then has contributed to a massive depletion of the country's forests. Over-harvesting, poor forest management, lack of replanting or managed natural regeneration, and plainly illegal operations and clear-cutting have been widespread. Timber production has rocketed to five to six times the annual allowable cut, driven by massive over-capacity in pulp, wood chip and saw mills, while illegal raw log exports continue. The combination of ill-regulated forestry, logging roads, government promoted migration and conversion to plantations and tree crops has driven rates of deforestation to as high as 1.5 million or even 3 million hectares per year, though exact figures are contested.

In recent years, Indonesia has experienced an overall shift towards increasingly illegal logging and smaller scale operations. The national environmental forum, WALHI (Friends of the Earth-Indonesia) has called for a moratorium on all large-scale logging, and the promotion of certified community-based operations in their stead. The larger conservation NGOs, however, have been working with a small handful of the larger logging companies, like SLJ, that are trying to buck the trend to illegality, by helping them get certified.

For a number of years, SLJ has been seeking to upgrade its forest management standards to meet the demand from the US market, notably The Home Depot, for certified timber, with a focus on the largest of its four concessions, the so-called SLJ II concession, which it commenced logging in 1991. The 270,000 hectare concession is currently being logged from its southern end near the Mahakam river in West Kutai district, from the log pond near the community of Long Bagun, but the majority of the concession stretches over into the headwaters of the Kayan river in Malinau district, reaching almost to the border with Malaysia. As its logging advances, SLJ plans to extend its network of logging roads northwards over the watershed into the major part of its concession in Malinau.

In SLJ II, Sumalindo has been using high tech timber inventory techniques, zoning its concession for High Conservation Value Forests and applying reduced impact logging, as part of a coordinated effort by TNC and WWF-Indonesia called the Alliance to Promote Forest Certification and Combat Illegal Logging in Indonesia, mainly funded by USAID and The Home Depot. The system was also designed to complement an existing programme of collaboration between TNC and large-scale timber corporations, aimed at promoting responsible forestry by building market incentives for good practice.

Since the SLJ plywood and MDF processing plants in Samarinda use timbers from a number of concessions, developing a technique that can distinguish between the SLJ II timbers and other woods is crucial to the success of this sustainable management and marketing effort. To this end TNC and SLJ, with technical advice from SGS and URS, have been experimenting with bar-coding to assist timber tracking. The idea is that the bar codes can be stapled onto the logs when timbers are cut, traced by bar code-reading devices all along the 'chain of custody', applied to products made only from these timbers in the processing plants, and so allow timbers to be securely traced from stump to the point of import in the USA.

In January 2005, local forest watchers in Kalimantan calling themselves the 'East Kalimantan Working Group on Forests' (Pokja Hutan Kaltim - EKWGF), who have links with local communities at the headwaters of the

Mahakam, alleged that timbers from outside the SLJ II concession were being laundered through the log pond and getting bar codes stapled in inappropriately. Whereas in its audit report, SmartWood notes how it looked carefully into these concerns and assured itself that the timber tracing procedures are now being adequately applied, EKWGF asserts that timber mixing is still going on.

*Community concerns:*

Competition between loggers and planters for control of Kalimantan's forest lands has been carried out with relatively little regard for the rights and priorities of the indigenous peoples who are the rightful owners of these forests. However, the whole of the SLJ II concession lies in the traditional territories of indigenous Borneans, now commonly referred to as Dayaks. Those in the south of the concession now resident near Long Bagun, used to be referred to as Long Glats, while in the north the peoples are Kenyah and Punan, who have been living in these headwater forests since the earliest historical records, but who apparently settled in their present five villages, currently only accessible by week-long canoe rides or by missionary planes, between the 1950s and 2002.

FSC Principles and Criteria require that forestry operations are legal, recognise and respect the legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples and only go ahead with their free and informed consent. A detailed look at the SmartWood audit of SLJ II shows that the company still has a long way to go before it can be said to be meeting these conditions fully.

In common with most logging operations in Indonesia, the boundaries of the 'State Forest Areas' in which the SLJ II concession has been granted have not yet been duly surveyed, agreed and gazetted. This is important as the boundary delineation process is the main way that the government checks that proposed forest concessions do not overlap communities' lands. In the case of SLJ II, only a very small part of the boundary has yet been gazetted, making the concession technically illegal. SmartWood however has decided that the company has done its best to persuade the government to regularise these boundaries and has granted the certificate on condition that the company continues to use its best efforts to get them sorted out.

Likewise, instead of waiting for SLJ II to comply with other FSC requirements, the auditors instead decided to grant the company its certificate as long as, within the next six months or two years, it sorts out its arrangements with the communities - including finalising maps of community territories, agreeing areas of community tenure, negotiating agreements about employment and compensation for the use of traditional knowledge and agreeing methods of conflict resolution. All this seems very back to front.

In effect, the FSC certificate is being awarded to Sumalindo for its SLJ II operation not so much because the operation already complies with the FSC standards but in order to encourage the company to gradually bring itself up to the mark. 'Step wise certification' it seems is being introduced by the back door.

Some may argue that in the circumstances this is not altogether a bad thing. The major threat to the forests in the 'heart of Borneo' now come from plans to clear the forests for oil palm estates, compared to which logging operations may seem like a better land use choice. But shouldn't the decision to waive legality requirements, for example to gazettlement, be made at a policy level rather than pushed through by certifiers acting on their own? And how can indigenous peoples negotiate from a position of strength with the company if the auditors have already shown they are reluctant to insist on full compliance with protections of community rights if that will delay certification?

It seems a pity that these issues were not candidly discussed through debate with civil society, or FSC and LEI members, before the certificate was granted. It is now almost inevitable that the new certificate will become the focus of a protracted dispute between different NGOs, the auditors and the FSC.

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For details of the audit see: SmartWood, 5th January 2006, Forest Management Public Summary for PT Sumalindo Lestari Jaya II. <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/forestry/smartwood/public-summary-reports.html#indonesia>

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### - Malaysia: Women plantations workers' conditions in oil palm plantations

In Malaysia, women plantation workers appear to have been neglected in the Government's plans to eradicate poverty and enhance the status of women. The progress achieved so far in empowering women has been unequal. Women plantation workers still lag behind, since they are unable to free themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty they find themselves in.

The plantation industry is a crucial part of the country's development. Malaysia is a world leader in palm oil and natural rubber production and the cultivation of these crops is a major agricultural activity in the country. Apart from smallholders who depend on these commodities for their livelihood, there are also waged labourers employed by plantation companies. In 2005, an estimated 1,268,500 people were employed in the agriculture and fishery sector, which includes farm workers, plantation workers and forestry workers. Large segments of the population involved in the agriculture and plantation sector are poor.

In recent years, the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) has been working with labourers on oil palm and rubber plantations on the Peninsula. We have been involved in occupational health and safety issues, the fight for better wages, securing basic needs such as housing, health and sanitation, and other social issues such as domestic violence and alcohol abuse. In the area of occupational health and safety, the primary concern has been the use of highly hazardous herbicides such as paraquat, which was only recently banned in Malaysia.

Currently women make up nearly half the workforce on plantations where spraying a variety of herbicides is an integral part of plantation work. The reason why plantation companies employ women as herbicide sprayers is because women are readily available since they are unable to find other jobs. They are also considered timid, docile and compliant workers, as they do not question management and are easy to manipulate.

Most women on the plantations were born and raised there, as were their parents and grandparents. The environment on the plantation is hardly conducive to attaining a decent education or acquiring the critical skills needed in more specialized sectors of the economy. Studies have shown that women in poor rural households attain lower levels of education. This fact added to the prevailing poverty places women on plantations in a very vulnerable position.

Lack of education, age and social exclusion therefore diminish women's opportunities and limit their possibilities for joining mainstream jobs in the industrial and service sector. Since most companies provide housing for their workers, this is a further incentive for women to continue living on the plantation.

In 2004, CAP conducted a study of 11 oil palm plantations located in the northern states of Malaysia. The study focused on women herbicide sprayers, their working conditions and the consequent health impacts. Work on an oil palm plantation is back-breaking and hazardous. Women herbicide sprayers are expected to carry an 18-litre (4-gallon) drum containing herbicide and complete 14 to 16 rounds of spraying per day. Tractor spraying is also conducted on some plantations, where big drums of herbicide are placed on both sides of the tractor. Two women carry the pumps and spray as the tractor moves.

In either case, the sprayers themselves are engulfed in a fine mist of herbicide. Recommended safety measures are rarely employed. The use of protective masks, gloves and boots is often impractical owing to the hot and humid tropical climate. Due to the widespread lack of awareness of the hazards of herbicides, inhalation and skin absorption are the major causes of occupational poisoning cases among women sprayers.

On the plantations, management decides which pesticides or herbicides to use as well as their frequency of application. The majority of workers interviewed did not even know what herbicides they were using while others identified them only by colour or odour. The women obligingly carried out their supervisors' instructions on proportions and mixing of the herbicides. Most of the women were not even aware of the toxicity of the chemicals and the dangers that they were being exposed to.

The only protection women wear are safety boots and maybe a handkerchief or towel to cover their mouth and nose. The women complain that management is reluctant to replace worn personal protective equipment and demand that workers show them the damaged equipment. Even so, they only replace equipment periodically. Most women must purchase their own safety boots since they cannot get replacement for torn boots from their employers. Others do not replace their boots since they cannot afford to do so.

The women work six days a week on a rotational basis and receive menial wages in return for their work. Earning their full weekly wage usually involves working long hours in the blazing sun. Furthermore, fear of losing their job makes them put up with unpleasant conditions including offensive remarks and undue pressure, while at times being subject to sexual harassment.

Workers are paid between MYR 15 to MYR 18 (USD 3.95 to USD 4.75) per day. Each herbicide sprayer earns MYR 350 to 450 (USD 92 to 118) per month. Some plantation companies give an extra MYR 2 (about USD 0.50) per day to herbicide sprayers. This is a clear indication that danger lurks in herbicide spraying compared to other work. On some plantations, electricity and water bills are deducted from salaries.

The survey results found that women sprayers are often not in good health. They suffer from acute and chronic ailments related to their work. Most plantations provide medical facilities for their workers although most of the time these facilities are inadequate and ineffective. If the women suffer from major illnesses that the plantation paramedic cannot treat, they must visit a medical doctor in the nearest town. Ill health affects productivity directly, so many illnesses go unreported.

Another disturbing revelation is that, as they are not provided with protective equipment, workers who are employed on a contractual basis work in worse conditions and are expected to manipulate more potent and harmful herbicides, and do not have medical coverage.

Why do the women remain on the plantations despite the poverty they experience and exposure to poisons? During the 1980's many plantations replaced rubber trees with oil palms due to higher economic returns. Therefore women plantation workers who were previously skilled rubber tappers lost their source of livelihood. Some of the women had tapped rubber all of their working-life and were therefore left in a difficult employment situation. In order not to be evicted from the plantation, the women had no choice but accept any job offered by management. Hence the women became herbicide sprayers even though it was not their choice of work.

As palm oil commodity prices increase in coming years, we can expect Malaysian production also to increase since it is one of the country's major crops. This will further intensify women's involvement in the sector. Women will find it increasingly difficult to escape this vicious cycle of poverty and their increasingly poor health will be the price they pay.

It is difficult to break out of a poverty situation and education is one of the means by which families on plantations can escape poverty. For this reason, there is a need for policy and programme interventions to assist and encourage the children of plantation workers to pursue their education.

Excerpts from: Plantation workers face poverty and poison, by Mageswari Sangaralingam, Consumers' Association of Penang, <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/informesNacionales/437.html>

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## SOUTH AMERICA

### - Bolivia: Indigenous Toromona in voluntary isolation in serious danger of disappearing

The world is becoming aware of the situation of the Indigenous Peoples living in isolation in the Amazon. It seems incredible, but some animals are better protected than the human groups seeking to preserve their isolation. There is no doubt that this is a basic human right that the peoples in isolation have the faculty to exercise and defend and we to respect. However, and in spite of the recommendations made by the UN, the OAS, the COICA, the IUCN and other global and regional institutions, the situation of these peoples inhabiting the continental Amazon –the greatest world reserve of uncontacted peoples– is alarming. All these peoples, without exception, are in danger of forced disappearance. Urgent action must be encouraged to avoid further genocide. The Indigenous Peoples in isolation still existing in the Amazon are a unique human and cultural heritage that should not follow the same path as that of hundreds of forest peoples: slow extermination, violent and silent disappearance, a shameful and sinister genocide.

In spite of the fact that the country has an indigenous majority, the situation in Bolivia is no different from what we have just described. There is little awareness of the dramatic situation, efforts are isolated and there is a lack of a comprehensive vision to mobilize those who can help provide solutions. Although the peoples living in isolation are included in official reports, addressing their problems is limited by bureaucracy and by a lack of understanding of how serious they are.

This is in contrast with the strength shown by the Amazon Indigenous organizations, whose capacity for action has been demonstrated since 1990 with the March for Territory and Dignity, a landmark in the history of Bolivia when the issue of the country's Indigenous Amazon peoples was placed on the national agenda. However, 16 years later, the issue of peoples living in isolation continues to be secondary, anecdotic and almost invisible, including for many of the organizations working in the Amazon itself.

The Toromona are an archetypical case of the above. They are part of the Tacana linguistic family and their unquestionable historic past is barely known or valued. Today, it is presumed that indigenous people from that ethnic group are living in a sector of the Rio Colorado valley and at the headwaters of the Sonene or Heath River, inside the Madidi National Park in the northern Amazon part of the Department of La Paz. This presence should be certified forthwith to enable actions for strict protection to be undertaken.

As the Madidi Expedition, we have been struggling for this to happen since 2000 when we were made aware of the issue while working in the mestizo communities adjacent to the alleged Toromona territory. In October last year, we observed with alarm and publicly denounced that the region was seething with logging companies which, in their eagerness to find precious wood, could come into violent contact with the group living in isolation, and thus seriously threaten their existence. In this respect we are preparing a further expedition to the region in the dry season to complete our field work and present the indications and/or sufficient material and/or visual evidence to prove the survival of the historic Toromona people, respecting their right to isolation, that is to say, avoiding any physical contact either by us or by anyone else.

This new expedition is inscribed in a different context. Bolivia as a nation is going through a time of historic changes. For the first time, an indigenous person has become President of the Republic. In this respect we feel sure of the understanding and support of Evo Morales, the country's highest authority. At the same time we hope that the issue of the Indigenous Peoples Living in Isolation and the Indigenous Peoples in Highly Vulnerable Situations is included in the text of the new Bolivian State Political Constitution that will start to be discussed as from 6 August in the city of Sucre in the framework of a Constituent Assembly.

Through this article, not only do we want to warn about the risk involved for the isolated peoples of Bolivia, but also to convince those who want to help the Toromona that they should contact us. They may do so through the following e-mail: [pablocingolani@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:pablocingolani@yahoo.com.ar). The struggle for the protection of the last of the peoples living in isolation in the Bolivian Amazon can wait no longer. It is now or never.

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Those wishing to learn more on this subject can do so at [www.bolpress.com](http://www.bolpress.com) or at the blog [www.cingolani.ssolucion.com](http://www.cingolani.ssolucion.com) containing the document "Sobre antropología de urgencia en Bolivia: Pueblos étnicos de tierras bajas en situación de alta vulnerabilidad y en aislamiento voluntario" prepared by the anthropologist Alvaro Díez Astete. . The document is also available at WRM's web page at: [http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Bolivia/ANTROPOLOGIA\\_URGENCIA\\_BOLIVIA.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Bolivia/ANTROPOLOGIA_URGENCIA_BOLIVIA.pdf)

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#### **- Brazil: Paper pulp companies must remove eucalyptus plantations in Bahia's national parks buffer zones**

According to Recommendation no. 01 of 18 November 2005, the Federal Public Ministry, through the Attorney of the Republic in Ilheus-Bahia, is demanding the removal of eucalyptus plantations in a radius of 10 (ten) kilometres in the buffer zones of the Conservation Units of the Do Descubrimiento, Monte Pascoal and Pau Brasil National Parks, as determined by Brazilian legislation. The document also sets out that in order to restore the environment these enterprises, that is to say the pulp companies, must prepare a Plan for the Restoration of Degraded Areas (PRDA), immediately following the removal of the eucalyptus plantations.

For almost fifteen years now, the Centre for Studies and Research for the Development of the Extreme South of Bahia (CEPEDES), together with other bodies, has been lodging complaints regarding the irregularities committed by pulp companies in Bahia and Espírito Santo. In Bahia, among many other irregularities are the eucalyptus plantations surrounding Conservation Units, violating Federal Law No. 9,985 of 18 July 2000, which sets out stipulations regarding the National System of Conservation Units – SNUC and establishes buffer zones surrounding the parks. These buffer zones should be used as ecological corridors to guarantee the survival of local species of flora and fauna and maintenance and strengthening of biodiversity.

This decision of the Federal Public Ministry is a result of the public hearing held in October 2005 at the Porto Seguro Convention Centre. On that occasion, civil society organizations demanded that measures be taken regarding the irregularities committed by the pulp companies, through formal petitions addressed to the Federal and State Public Ministry and to IBAMA (the Brazilian Environmental Institute) and CRA (the Centre for Environmental Resources), which are responsible for authorizing and following up on plantations.

The recommendation emphasizes that the "Mata Atlântica [Atlantic Forest] is a national heritage, as established by the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil in its article 224, item 4, and its use must follow legally established rules in order to ensure environmental conservation and Decree 750/1993 strictly forbids logging, exploitation and removal of the primary vegetation or of vegetation in an advanced or intermediary state of regeneration." It also adds that the replacement of thousands of plant species by a single species of economic interest, aimed at the pulp industry, promotes risks for the local fauna and flora.

Administrative file nº 1.14.001.000046/2001-67 is being processed which monitors the authorization for the location of the illegal plantation of 45,000 hectares of eucalyptus trees by Aracruz Celulose in the extreme south of Bahia.

Between 1970 and 1985 Bahia lost 70% of its native forests with the arrival of the paper and pulp mill companies Suzano Bahia Sul, Aracruz, CAF Santa Barbara Ltd. and Veracel. According to recent studies by the Ministry of the Environment, there is only 4 per cent left of the original Mata Atlântica in reserve areas in the extreme south of Bahia. It is estimated that in this region over half the arable land is in the hands of the companies. Approximately 12 thousand families are camping along the highways. The eviction of rural workers, *quilombolas* (descendants from slaves), small farmers and rural Indigenous People has led to a significant increase in *favelas* (shanty towns), the disintegration of groups and families, violence and extreme poverty.

The development model imposed by governments for this region has destroyed entire systems of plant and animal life. The wealth generated by the economic model favouring concentration of income and land, has not prevented the growth of extreme poverty and hunger. To face this, demonstrations and movements have arisen reflecting the awareness of a significant part of the population regarding environmental and social violence caused by the vast stretches of monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the region.

Therefore, in view of this resolution by the Federal Public Ministry to have IBAMA, the Environmental organization, take measures in making the pulp companies remove the eucalyptus plantations surrounding parks, once again it is evident that the declarations of an environmental nature made by the pulp companies through the mass media, are being demolished. The meetings promoted by the pulp companies, aimed at masking the truth and discussing ecological corridors, now have no sense. What we have here in the extreme south of Bahia is not a central corridor for the Mata Atlântica, what we have here is a central corridor of an extensive monoculture eucalyptus plantation with small patches or isolated mosaics of degraded Mata Atlântica.

The decision by the Federal Public Ministry is an unusual event and a very significant one for organized civil society in the extreme south of Bahia, as for a long time now they have been asking for the responsible authorities to take measures to prevent the total destruction of this biome. Now it is not only up to IBAMA and to the NGOs to monitor the activities of these companies, but also up to the population, the most interested party in preserving what is left of the Mata Atlântica.

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#### - Colombia: The Forestry (logging) Bill was adopted without discussion

Following the adoption of the Forestry Bill in Congress, it was sent for presidential sanction on 13 December 2005. President Alvaro Uribe objected to 12 of the articles of the Law and it was expected that the text would be returned with the objections for discussion by Congress as set out in the procedure. Although the government's objections – in the case of being adopted – do not solve the problems involved in this Law designed to hand over the country's forests to the logging companies, it was expected that these objections would at least be given time for debate by the members of parliament. However, this was not the case.

The Forestry Bill was adopted on 28 March during the Chamber plenary meeting. The session took place in an accelerated, confused and unintelligible way and the presidential objections were enunciated. They were all adopted without discussion in just a few minutes, without providing the interested parties with the opportunity to know what was being adopted. The most shameful thing was that while it was being adopted, the parliamentarians were holding lively discussions in the corridors using their cell phones or laughing in a grotesque performance. Many of us who attended the Chamber premises as observers and who had been waiting for the debate were unaware that it had taken place. The following day, during the Senate Plenary, the way in which it was adopted was even more aberrant, because it was a Plenary with scant participation of the Senate. Without checking the quorum the Forestry Bill was addressed during one session lasting a few minutes where it was rapidly presented and with absolutely no discussion of the adoption of the government's objections to the Bill. These facts reiterate the shady interests in deceitfully passing a totally illegitimate law, evading public debate.

The unfortunate way this bill was adopted leaves us with serious questionings and the feeling that the procedure followed was illegal or at least non ethical.

This shows once again the government's eagerness to implement a perverse and ill-intentioned strategy to dissuade growing criticism of the Forestry Bill and to leave the legal framework unaltered in substance thus enabling the large logging investors to have easy access to the country's forests while enjoying privileges. This was made evident throughout the process with the main private companies exerting pressure as lobbyists to have

the Bill adopted, in close collaboration with *Chemonics* (USAID) and the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, overriding the serious and repeated criticism expressed by various sectors of Colombian society.

There is also evidence that it is only now that the parliamentarians have been given Congress Gazette No. 50, dated 24 March 2006, containing the Government's objections. Therefore there was no preparation for the debate. Even with the acceptance of the 12 objections, the Bill was adopted just as it came from Chamber Commission V, which in essence did not change the structure, the objectives or the scope of the Bill, as in fact work was carried out on "cleaning up and adapting the language" to overcome formal difficulties regarding the unconstitutionality involved in this regulation.

The objective was to mask some of the Bill's perverse aspects, particularly those related with the future both of public forests and of those belonging to Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The lack of responsibility of most of the Congress members and of the national Government is clearly manifest when addressing an issue that is as transcendental for the country as the preservation and sustainable management of the nation's natural heritage, one of the planet's most important forest ecosystems. Following this aberrant procedure during Congress plenary meetings, the only step pending is presidential sanction of the Bill.

We appeal to Indigenous, peasant, Afro-Colombian and environmental organizations and to those who feel that the heritage rights of the Nation's forests and the rights of the Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities are being violated to express their rejection of the injurious Forestry Bill and to carry out action to enable the forests to be preserved for the country's present and future generations. Likewise, to obtain recognition of the importance of appropriate, sustainable, responsible, participative and autonomous management by the true owners, who conserve and enrich the forests of Colombia.

Various Colombian organizations are promoting a campaign against this Bill. Those wishing to join in the campaign should please send your support to the following e-mail address:  
[bosques@censat.org](mailto:bosques@censat.org)

Grupo Semillas – Censat Agua Viva, Friends of the Earth - Fundación Swissaid - Paula Álvarez - Consejo Comunitario de la comunidad negra del río Cajambre – Cecoin – Consejo comunitario del río Naya – Consejo Comunitario de Cupica – Cabildo Embera Katío del Alto San Jorge – Mesa de manglares del Pacífico – Unión Territorial Interétnica del Naya – Consejo Comunitario del Naya – Fundación Jenzerá – REDJUAN – Removilidad Sustentable – Proceso de Comunidades Negras PCN – Friends of the Earth International – COECOCeiba AT Costa Rica –Friends of the Earth International Forest Program– World Rainforest Movement WRM – RAPAL Uruguay – REDES Friends of the Earth Uruguay – Eco La Paz Argentina – Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia ONIC ...signatures follow

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#### - Guyana: Controversial Barama certificate further tarnishes FSC's reputation

A new FSC certificate of a major logging operation has again raised eyebrows among foresters, environmentalists and human rights activists. In Guyana, the Swiss certification company SGS Qualifor has just granted an FSC certificate to the Malaysian-Korean logging giant, Barama Company Limited (BCL), which operates a 1.69 million hectare concession in North West Guyana. BCL is co-owned by the South Korean trans-national Sun Kyong and by the controversial Malaysian logger, Samling Timbers Sdn Bhd, whose logging on the ancestral lands of the Penan people in Sarawak, Malaysia, continues to spark protest.

When BCL was first awarded the concession in Guyana under less than transparent circumstances in 1991, the agreement granted it an extensive tax holiday on terms that were so generous that besides being loudly denounced as a sell out by opposition politicians, amidst allegations of corruption, also led to it being questioned by institutions like the World Resources Institute. Even the British government, which later gave support to the 'development' of Guyana's forestry sector, admitted that the contract was too generous and should be revised.

During the 1990s, BCL ran its logging operations from the northern end of its concession driving roads south into the forests around Arakaka and Matthew's Ridge and shipping the extracted logs by barge out of Port Kaituma, downriver, east along the coast and then having them processed nearer the capital, Georgetown, at its plywood factory at Land of Canaan. The logging operations were denounced by the Amerindian Peoples' Association, the main national indigenous organisation, which documented how BCL operations had ignored indigenous rights, bulldozed gravesites, forcibly relocated Amerindian villagers to make way for the log pond and allowed the local environment to be depleted by hunters and wildcat miners entering along the logging roads. It took ten years for the government to regularise the tenure of the Carib Indians at Baramita on the western edge of the concession but a number of other Amerindian settlements in the concession remain untitled and unrecognised to this day. Meanwhile the plywood factory near Georgetown has suffered a constant rumble of intractable labour disputes.

BCL alleged that it had trouble making money out of its massive concession in the North West as the forests there just yielded relatively small diameter baromalli trees. It began buying higher quality timbers from other concessionaires including entering into controversial and ill-regulated deals with Amerindian communities that led to documented over-harvesting and community divisions.

In the past three years, however, BCL has shifted its base of logging operations out of Port Kaituma. It acquired additional rights in a further 300,000 hectares along the banks of the Essequibo river and began cutting new logging roads from near Buck Hall on the east, across these additional areas and into its own huge concession. It also approached certification bodies with a view to getting its operations certified.

Local foresters were alarmed at the hasty way that BCL was going about getting a certificate. While BCL joined other forestry companies and conservationists in a national initiative to develop Guyanese FSC standards, BCL simultaneously sought certification under the FSC generic standard, locally adapted to Guyana by SGS Qualifor through consultations,. There was a fracas in 2003 when allegations were circulated that BCL had insisted on Amerindian complaints about BCL's operations being expunged from the minutes of a multi-stakeholder meeting. Guyanese foresters also questioned the good faith of BCL in the national standards development process. Why wasn't the company waiting for the national interpretation of the Guyana National Initiative for Forest Certification and was instead pushing for a certificate under the SGS Qualifor generic one, they asked ?

SGS Qualifor issued its certificate of BCL's operation on 17th February 2006 and shortly after posted the public summary on the web. It's an odd document. Instead of reviewing the management plan and performance for the entire forest management unit, the certificate only applies to the 570,000 hectares in the 4th and 5th of the 7 subunits into which the concession has been divided. The audit thus excludes from consideration the first three logging areas where the company ran into so much contention, in the Port Kaituma area in the north of the concession. It also excludes from consideration the final two cutting blocks which will also bring the company into contact with Amerindian communities on the Cuyuni river to the south. The audit seems to ignore completely the concerns that have been raised about the disputes at the plywood factory and the company's controversial buying of timbers from off concession. 'Partial certification', it seems, has been taken to a new level.

Announcing the FSC certificate to a press conference on 26th March in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, BCL claimed that its operations have not turned a profit in 15 years of operation! (Reminding cynical observers of the famous Japanese and Malaysian logging operations in Papua New Guinea which have likewise managed to show no profits, mainly by the auditors' trick of 'transfer pricing'). BCL's alleged lack of profitability begs the question, so how come the company got certified when one of FSC's key principles is that operations should be 'economically viable'? And if the company has not benefited from logging nearly 1/5th of Guyana's 'permanent forest estate', then who has? The tax holiday enjoyed by the company means that Guyana's exchequer has got next to nothing. The Amerindians have been vociferous in their complaints since the operation started. For their part, Port Kaituma residents lament that the temporary boom in local jobs of the 1990s is already over and they are left with depleted game, ruined forests and crumbling infrastructure. Is this the 'sustainable forest management' that the FSC is meant to promote?

The BCL certificate has been loudly, maybe not correctly, trumpeted as the 'single largest block of tropical forests in the world certified by the FSC'. Please pass the sick bag.....

By Marcus Colchester. Forest Peoples Programme, e-mail: [marcus@forestpeoples.org](mailto:marcus@forestpeoples.org)

For SGS audit see: [http://www.sgs.com/9205-gy - barama\\_ma2005-10 - ad36a-03\\_gm.pdf](http://www.sgs.com/9205-gy - barama_ma2005-10 - ad36a-03_gm.pdf)

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## OCEANIA

### - Aotearoa/New Zealand: Absolutely positively NOT forests

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry is organizing its 2006 conference under the title of "absolutely positively forests". Although the title is open to discussion about its true –and probably very profound- meaning, our understanding is that it could either mean that the meeting will: 1) be absolutely and positively focused on forests or 2) will try to convince everyone that Radiata pine plantations are absolutely and positively forests.

Unfortunately, the latter appears to be true. As usual, the forestry industry and its supporters try to confuse the uniformed public by mixing forests and plantations. For instance, the brochure produced by the organizers explains that "forests provide soil and water conservation, biodiversity and wildlife habitat", which is of course absolutely true. But then it goes on to say that forests also produce other services and goods among which "timber and paper".

However, the fact is that New Zealand's forests are not very much used for timber and not at all for the production of paper. Most timber and all paper pulp come from the 1.8 million hectares of plantations –mostly alien Radiata pine- that have occupied the place of native forests. The organizers are therefore including these plantations as forests, thus hiding that not only do they not conserve soils, water, biodiversity and wildlife habitat, but that they impact negatively on all of them.

In such context, it is important to learn about the extent of deforestation in New Zealand. The country occupies approximately 27 million hectares of land and -according to official sources- it is "estimated that in pre-Polynesian times 78 percent of the total area (21 million ha) was under forest cover." It would of course be more honest –and less racist- to say what percentage was still under forest cover "in Pre-European times". While estimates vary, it is averaged around 65% forest cover at the arrival of the European, a loss of 13% in around 800 to one thousand years of occupation by Maori. Compare this with the current situation, where only 23.5 % of the total landmass is currently covered in forest (and less than half of that is truly primary forest area) and we begin to get a picture of the aggressive nature of the deforestation of this country. That most of this deforestation occurred within 100 years of European settlement provides us with an interesting contrast.

In any case, the current situation is that only 23.5% of the land area is still in Indigenous forest, while 51% is pasture and arable land and 7.7% monoculture tree plantations (so-called "planted production forest").

The above would imply the urgent need of a forest conference focused on the rehabilitation of native forests and not on the further expansion of alien tree monocultures. However, this is not the case in the 2006 conference. Looking at the programme, at the invited participants and at the issues to be discussed, it is clear that much of the discussion will be focused on plantations and not on forests.

Of course this makes much sense for industrial interests that are planning to increase the plantation area to 2.5 million hectares by 2010, which would see 9.5% of the total landmass under alien tree plantations. The conference will provide them with the necessary good image –and "scientific" backing- to move ahead with their plans.

To make matters worse, the plantation industry has also managed to influence young forestry students, who have also been made to believe that plantations are forests. For instance some of the presentations at the "forum for students and recent graduates" organized as part of the conference are "Environmental and social values of plantation forests in New Zealand", "Some physiological bases to explain the influence of nutrition and genotype on growth of Pinus radiata D.Don", "The ecological requirements of New Zealand bush falcon in plantation forestry" and "Management of plantation forests for biodiversity".

All very sad.

However, there is always the hope that during the conference someone –a student, a forester, an environmentalist, a Maori, a woman or a man- will stand up and tell these people what is pretty obvious: that Radiata pine plantations are absolutely and positively NOT forests!

By Sandy Gauntlett, Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition, Aotearoa/New Zealand, e-mail: [sandygauntlett@hotmail.com](mailto:sandygauntlett@hotmail.com)

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## PULP INC.

### - The corporate power of the pulp and paper industry

This month WRM is launching a new occasional section to the bulletin: "Pulp Inc". The series will consist of profiles of companies involved in the pulp and paper industry.

In order to campaign effectively on the industry (and certainly before NGOs start talking about collaborating or cooperating with companies), we need to take a careful look at how the industry is structured and the nature of the companies involved in the industry: what they are and what they are not.

Corporations are becoming increasingly powerful. This is true of all corporations, not just those involved in producing pulp and paper. But the pulp and paper industry provides one example of how corporations are attempting to wield their power over governments.

In Uruguay, for example, the government is unable to order the Finnish Metsa Botnia to halt construction of its pulp mill in Fray Bentos, because of an agreement that the Uruguayan government signed with the government of Finland: "Agreement with the Government of Finland regarding the promotion and protection of investment". In effect this is an agreement with Botnia. Under the terms of the agreement, Botnia is assured of the constant support of the Uruguayan government. The agreement even forces the government to pay compensation to Botnia for any losses, caused by, among other things, demonstrations.

"The most important conflict of the twenty-first century will be the battle between corporations and democracy," writes George Monbiot in the foreword to a book about corporate influence in Europe. "As companies tighten their grip on national governments and international institutions, ordinary people will discover that, unless they are prepared to confront big business, their residual democratic rights will disappear."

"The critical weapon in this battle will be information: those who know most will win," says Monbiot. "Our power lies in our ability to expose the machinations of society's corporate enemies, to embarrass the governments which have surrendered to them, and to use our knowledge to wage incisive, informed campaigns against both the companies themselves and, even more importantly, the institutional failures which have allowed them to hold sway."

The aim of this series is to provide an insight into how pulp and paper corporations work and to help explain how and why these firms are always in conflict with local communities.

The series "Pulp Inc" starts off with a profile of Mondi. WRM would be pleased to receive contributions of profiles of other pulp and paper companies.

### *South Africa: Mondi and Environmental Racism*

Mondi was founded during South Africa's apartheid regime in 1967, by Anglo American, one of the world's largest mining companies. Mondi now has operations in 46 countries. With sales in 2004 of US\$6.9 billion Mondi is the thirteenth largest pulp and paper company in the world. The company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of UK-based Anglo American, although recently Anglo American announced that it plans to list Mondi on the London Stock Exchange before the end of 2007.

Mondi's international expansion started in the early 1990s. Mondi has expanded through buying companies, mainly in Europe. By 2001, only about one-third of Mondi's revenue was generated in South Africa. Over the last six years, Mondi has tripled its turnover.

After a corporate restructuring in late 2004, Mondi's operations are run by two companies: Mondi Business Paper and Mondi Packaging.

Mondi Business Paper employs 17,000 people and incorporates Austrian paper company Neusiedler and Mondi South Africa. The company's 16 paper machines have a total capacity of 2 million tons a year. Mondi Business Paper has pulp operations in Austria, Russia, Slovakia and South Africa and forestry operations in Russia, South Africa and Swaziland. The company manages about 400,000 hectares of plantations in South Africa and Swaziland.

Mondi Packaging employs about 16,000 people and has about 120 production plants in Europe and 18 in the Americas, Asia and Africa. The company is the result of a merger of Austrian industrial packaging group Frastachach (which was already wholly owned by Anglo American) and the existing Mondi Packaging group.

While generating profits for Mondi, the company's expansion has often been bad news for workers. In 1996, Mondi bought shares in Swiecie, the largest pulp, paper and packaging mill in Poland. Under Mondi, annual production has increased from 450,000 tons a year to 737,000 tons a year, while profits increased from R25 million in 1996, to R65 million in 2002. Meanwhile employment fell from 3,300 to 1,500 people.

In South Africa, Mondi has contracted out a large part of its workforce. This has had serious implications for workers. "Incomes are insecure and inadequate, there are no financial safety nets in the form of health insurance or pensions, and workers are exposed to risk of permanent injury that could further impair their ability to secure a livelihood in future," note researchers Jeanette Clarke and Moenieba Isaacs in a recent report which documents problems for forestry workers. The report, which was carried out as a project with the International Institute for Environment and Development, concludes that forestry contracting jobs will not lift workers, who are mainly women, out of poverty or even prevent them falling further into poverty.

Mondi's plantations in South Africa and Swaziland are certified by Forest Stewardship Council as well managed. In September 2000, WWF announced that "Mondi has committed itself to responsible forestry management, for example by improving the quality of biodiversity conservation throughout its enormous forest estate". Mondi also funds a wetlands conservation project, called the Mondi Wetlands Project. The project is run by South Africa's two largest conservation organisations, WWF South Africa and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa.

In November 2005, South African NGO TimberWatch organised a meeting with local communities and NGOs in Mtubatuba, KwaZulu-Natal province. When asked whether there were any benefits to communities from plantations, none of the community representatives present could think of any benefits. "Since the plantations came, few people are employed. Farms have been destroyed. The impact from tree plantations has been very negative," said one villager. "Plantations have caused starvation not benefits," another villager added.

The villagers produced a list of problems caused by industrial tree plantations, including a reduction in the availability of water, a reduction in grazing and arable land, a reduction in natural forest, fruit trees and medicinal herbs, damaged soils and the fact that plantations provide a hiding place for criminals.

One woman explained that even people who have worked for 20 years for the plantation companies have not benefited. "They cannot show you good things and assets they have from their salaries, there is nothing," she said. "We should do away with these plantations."

Under South Africa's racist apartheid regime, black people lost all their rights, including rights to land. "Timber plantations have forced thousands of people off the land in the past, and continue to do so in the present time," explains Wally Menne of TimberWatch. Mondi expanded its plantations in the 1980s, buying up hundreds of farms to become one of South Africa's largest land owners. The white farm-owners took the money and moved away. Black farm workers received nothing and lost what little they had.

Mondi's paper mill at Merebank in South Durban is a classic example of environmental racism. During the apartheid regime, blacks and south Asians were forcibly relocated to South Durban to provide cheap labour for the oil, paper and chemical industries. Toxic chemical pollution from these industries means that South Durban is one of the worst examples of industrial pollution anywhere in the world. One in four South Durban residents suffers from asthma.

I visited South Durban in October 2005 and went of SDCEA's "Toxic Tour". The day I was there, the sky was blue and clear and a strong wind came from the sea, but Mondi's paper mill still stank. According to the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), Mondi is the third largest polluter in the area, behind two oil refineries. In 2003, Desmond D'Sa, SDCEA's chairman, traveled to London to voice the community's concerns at Anglo American's AGM.

For several years, the local community has opposed Mondi's plans to build an incinerator at its Merebank mill. Rajah Naidoo, the chair of the Merebank Resident's Association told the South African Sunday Times that the incinerator would result in more pollution in the area and could increase the high incidence of asthma and cancer in south Durban.

During a tour of South Durban in 2003, Zodumo Mbali, a spokeswoman for the Deputy environment minister, told the South African Press Association, "My nose is painful from inhaling the air here. I just can't believe how people exist here like this. This is not normal air."

By Chris Lang [[chrislang@t-online.de](mailto:chrislang@t-online.de)]. A version of this profile was first published in "Alternativer Waldschadenbericht", by Urgewald, ARA, Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung, January 2006 (in German): [https://www.urgewald.de/media/docs/Studie\\_13\\_Web.pdf](https://www.urgewald.de/media/docs/Studie_13_Web.pdf).

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## GENETICALLY ENGINEERED TREES

### - UN Convention on Biological Diversity: Important decision on GE trees

The Eighth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity ended on March 31<sup>st</sup> with two important and related decisions: an upholding of the moratorium on the use of so-called "terminator technology," and a recommendation that countries exercise caution when approaching the potential use of genetically engineered trees. The issues became related during the deliberations over the issue of extending the moratorium on the use of the dangerous "terminator technology," the genetic engineering of plants to produce sterile seeds that cannot be replanted. The connection emerged when industry made the argument that they needed terminator technology to enable them to address the contamination problems of commercializing GE trees.

As a result of this link between the issues, the Ban Terminator Campaign and the STOP GE Trees Campaign worked collaboratively to spell out the inherent dangers of both of these technologies and why they both needed to be banned outright.

The COP-8 decided to uphold the Terminator moratorium during the first week of meetings, though countries such as Canada and New Zealand tried unsuccessfully to derail this agreement on several later occasions. The decision on the issue of genetically engineered trees came to a close late on the last night of the COP. This historic decision, acknowledging for the first time the potential dangers—both social and ecological—of genetically engineered trees and urging countries to take a very cautious approach to the technology, will help slow down the headlong rush to commercialize GE trees.

The decision states in part: "The Conference of the Parties, *recognizing* the uncertainties related to the potential environmental and socio-economic impacts, including long-term and trans-boundary impacts, of genetically modified trees on global forest biological diversity, as well as on the livelihoods of indigenous and local communities, and given the absence of reliable data and of capacity in some countries to undertake risk assessments and to evaluate those potential impacts... *recommends* parties to take a precautionary approach when addressing the issue of genetically modified trees." The decision also called for the initiation of a global compilation of data on the social and environmental implications of GE tree release, in a process that includes the participation of relevant organizations, including indigenous and local communities.

The fact that the CBD was able to take such a strong stance against GE trees on the first occasion that the issue was introduced, and despite behind the scenes pressure from the United States and industry, indicates the high level of concern over the unique and important threats posed by genetically engineered trees. Ricardo Carrere, of World Rainforest Movement summarizes the concerns over GE trees. "GE trees are one of the most dangerous threats to forests, which host most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity. The release of GE trees will inevitably and irreversibly contaminate forest ecosystems and destroy biodiversity."

During the opening round of talks of the COP-8 Forest Biological Diversity Working Group, where the GE trees issue was scheduled, ten countries called for a halt to the release of GE trees into the environment, starting with Iran, and followed by Ghana, Malawi, Ecuador, the Philippines, Senegal, Norway, Madagascar, Egypt and Rwanda. They were joined in this call by the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, Greenpeace, the Women's Caucus and the Federation of German Scientists. In subsequent discussions, Liberia played an important role in strengthening the COP-8 decision on GE trees.

This is an important step forward for the global campaign to stop GE trees. Corporations such as Arborgen are rapidly moving ahead with steps to commercialize GE trees in countries such as Brazil, Chile, India and South Africa. The COP-8 decision will provide a political leverage point for organizations opposing GE tree plantation development in countries that are members of the UN CBD. The decision will also help advance the STOP GE Trees Campaign in the United States. For even though the U.S. is not a party to the CBD, the threat of eliminating potential locations for future plantations (and future profits) will send a chill through the industry, helping stifle on-going and expensive GE trees research. For example, Arborgen considers Brazil its "most important geography." If movements in Brazil are successful at stopping the expansion of monoculture tree plantations, including future GE tree plantations, Arborgen may find it difficult to continue to secure funding for ongoing research for a product with little future.

Geneticist Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher of the Federation of German Scientists sums it up this way, "this CBD outcome, recommending a precautionary approach to GE trees, represents a first step in recognizing the dangers of GE trees. It will assist NGOs and scientists alike in sending an urgent alert to all nations that there is insufficient scientific data on the implications of GE trees, which pose a threat to forests and indigenous and local peoples globally—and therefore it is crucial to halt all releases at least until such data and assessments become available."

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