
[Declaration from the Campaign to STOP GE Tree](#)

After IUFRO: Campaign Denounces Violence of Timber Industry

“Get the forestry corporations out of UdeC” & “Ciao IUFRO” Photo: Keith Brunner

The international Campaign to Stop Genetically Engineered (GE) Trees [1] rejects a public declaration by the University of Concepción’s (UdeC) Biotechnology Center [2] made on 8 June accusing a 7 June anti-GE trees protest of being “violent” due to graffiti. Activists say the real violence is perpetrated by the pulp and paper industry in Chile and around the world.

The protest in question occurred at the UdeC Biotechnology Center during the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) Tree Biotechnology Conference held in Concepción during the week of 4-9 June. UdeC organized and hosted the IUFRO conference. The protest caused the UdeC Biotechnology Center to cancel a IUFRO field trip to their facilities.

The Campaign to Stop Genetically Engineered (GE) Trees both attended the conference and took part in counter-IUFRO protests and events throughout the week that were organized by local groups, communities and Mapuche organizations.

The IUFRO conference was hosted in the Bío Bío Region which just experienced the worst wildfires in Chile’s history. The timber industry has been sharply criticized for the role of their tree plantations in greatly increasing the likelihood and severity of the fires which burned entire communities to the ground and killed eleven people. Vast eucalyptus and pine plantations, which drain water and are highly flammable, are planted all the way up to people’s backyards. The wildfire disaster was inevitable. That UdeC organized the IUFRO forestry conference in this same region as these disastrous fires was a slap in the face to those people who lost everything.

“The University of Concepción misrepresents their science as being only for the public good, but the IUFRO conference clearly proves this is a lie,” stated Anne Petermann, International Coordinator of the Campaign to STOP GE Trees. “Presentation after presentation at the IUFRO conference ignored the social and ecological consequences of expanding timber plantations and detailed how scientists are working on ways to intensify and expand them for commercial profitability.”

The first session of the IUFRO conference was called “Chilean Forestry and adoption of new technologies,” and was hosted by the Chilean Forestry Association (CORMA) and Arauco, one of the largest pulp companies in Chile. It was full of misinformation about the devastation of the timber industry in Chile. For example, stating that they have only converted 3% of native forest to industrial tree plantations. The World Resources Institute, however, points out that 25% of Chile’s native forests has been converted on land with slopes of 45° or less.

Another presentation described use of biotechnology to expand the geographic range of freeze-tolerant eucalyptus trees in Chile. The researcher, Sofia Valenzuela, was quoted in *El Sur* saying that

she does transgenic tree research, but only in the laboratory. In her session at IUFRO, however, one of her researchers showed a slide depicting the new regions where these freeze tolerant eucalyptus plantations could grow, both north and south in Chile.

Already in Chile the Mapuche People and rural communities are suffering from the impacts of non-GE eucalyptus plantations on human health, land rights, fresh water resources and biodiversity. The further expansion of eucalyptus plantations into new parts of Chile will greatly exacerbate these problems.

Lira Reyes, of the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI) and of Solo el Pueblo Ayuda al Pueblo said, “The forest business is a business of death, which is devastating the land. We see extensive militarization and the Mapuche people criminalized for defending their lands. That is why we will continue to mobilize and raise awareness about these social and environmental conflicts.”

In 2015 alone, 185 environmental activists were killed around the world, many of them for defending their land from logging and conversion to industrial tree plantations. [3]

The UdeC Biotechnology Center states that they do not do research that promotes the production or commercialization of GE trees. However, in other countries where IUFRO has held this conference, there is a clear link between the choice of location for the conference and the future promotion of genetically engineered tree plantations there.

The 2011 IUFRO Tree Biotechnology conference took place in Brazil. It included “...almost 100 different laboratories from tens of Universities, research institutions and private companies.” Four years later the Brazilian government approved an application by FuturaGene to commercialize GE eucalyptus trees there.

The 2013 IUFRO Tree Biotechnology conference took place in the US and was sponsored by ArborGen. Right now the US is considering approving an application by ArborGen to legalize commercial production of GE eucalyptus plantations there.

Tree biotechnology companies and commercial interests are working hand in hand with universities in these countries to advance GE tree technology.

The protests against the IUFRO Tree Biotechnology conference targeted the violence of the timber industry and the collusion of the UdeC Biotechnology Center in helping advance their aims. One can by no means compare the violence perpetrated by the timber industry – including land theft, wildfires, monopolization and despoiling of fresh water sources, contamination from toxic chemical exposure, militarization of communities and the destruction of native biodiversity with graffiti denouncing that violence.

NOTES:

[1] The [Campaign to STOP GE Trees](#) is a global coalition of organizations and networks dedicated to protecting forests, biodiversity and forest dependent communities through the global rejection of all genetically engineered trees. It includes geneticists, foresters, ecologists, biologists, plant scientists, Indigenous Peoples and other experts on the impacts of monoculture timber plantations. These experts have been working on the problem of GE trees and monoculture timber plantations for decades.

Organizations in the Campaign include Biofuelwatch (U.S. and UK), Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Field Liberation Movement (Belgium), Friends of the Earth Melbourne (Australia), GE Free New Zealand, Global Justice Ecology Project (U.S.), Indigenous Environmental Network (North America), OLCA: Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (Chile), and World Rainforest Movement (Brazil and Uruguay). Geneticist Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher of EcoNexus and the Federation of German Scientists is the scientific advisor to the Campaign.

[2] “[Declaración pública ante actos vandálicos contra el CBUdeC](#)” in Spanish only on University of Concepcion Biotechnology Center facebook page.

[3] MSN News story “[Making the Ulimite Sacrifice for the Planet](#)”