
Nicaragua: will Smartwood certify depredatory logging company?

In February 1998, representatives of indigenous communities -Sumus and Miskitos- local and regional authorities, environmental NGOs, and community and religious leaders joined in Rosita, a village on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, to discuss a common strategy against the illegal activities of the Korean transnational logging company Kimyung, which in 1994 had received a concession from the central government on 62,000 hectares of forest in indigenous territories (see WRM bulletin 11). Kimyung operated through the subsidiary SOLCARSA. Even if such concession was considered to be in violation of the constitution, the company began its depredatory logging activities, provoking resistance among local communities. As thousands of trees were felled and people realized that the jobs created were few and badly paid and that the company did not comply with its initial promises, opposition grew.

A 1998 resolution of the Supreme Court ruled that the concession was unconstitutional and had to be revoked, which happened one year later. Nevertheless SOLCARSA did not surrender, and once its activities became illegal, they didn't leave the country, but made the manoeuvre of changing its name to PRADA. Even if PRADA and SOLCARSA are one and the same thing, this new name gave them the chance to continue the depredation of indigenous resources in the same areas. They even sued a group of Nicaraguan ecologist NGOs, which has accused it of being an illegal company. That sue against the ecologists was halted by two judicial resolutions at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999.

Surprising as it may seem, last December PRADA started a spot campaign on TV stating that Smartwood had already certified the company. Nicaraguan environmental NGOs contacted the National Bureau involved in Forestry Certification issues, and received as an answer that such certification was not yet true.

In order to prevent that PRADA receives the certification -which would be a complete farce, thus undermining the reliability of the whole of the certification process- the environmental NGOs of Nicaragua have addressed Smartwood demanding it:

- to research more about the terrible and illegal background of PRADA with regard to the country's rainforest;
- to clarify to the Nicaraguan public opinion which is the present relationship between Smartwood and PRADA;
- to demand PRADA to immediately take out of circulation the above referred spot.

Source: Centro Alexander Von Humboldt, 20/1/2000;