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OUR VIEWPOINT

- The clash of two worlds in the Peruvian Amazon

The Peruvian government chose the symbolic date of World Environment Day to launch a bloody attack on the peoples of the Amazon. The reason for this repression? The steadfast opposition of Amazonian communities to the invasion of their territory by socially and environmentally destructive industries such as mining, oil drilling, and monoculture plantations of trees and agrofuel crops.

On 9 April local communities throughout the Peruvian Amazon had begun what they called an "indefinite strike" to protest the failure of the Peruvian Congress to review a series of legislative decrees that endanger the rights of indigenous peoples. These decrees were issued by the executive branch in the framework of the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement signed with the United States.

By unleashing this massacre on World Environment Day, the Alan García government clearly showed the world how little concern it has for environmental protection and how highly it values the large corporations that hope to exploit – and simultaneously destroy – the country's natural resources. Even worse, it publicly declared its contempt for the lives of the indigenous peoples struggling to defend what little has been left to them by the advance of a "development" model that has more than proven to be socially and environmentally destructive.

As a result of this bloody repression and the public attention it attracted worldwide, the Peruvian Amazon became a symbol of the clash between two different conceptions of the present and future of humanity, played out on the international stage.

On one side of this conflict there is the world of economic interest, which signifies social and environmental destruction, imposition by force, violation of rights. Obviously, this world is not represented by the Peruvian president, who is merely a temporary and disposable assistant to the corporations – a fact now evidenced by the fate of the once all-powerful president Fujimori. Nevertheless, the role played by these assistants is very important, since they are the ones who lend the necessary trappings of “legality” to actions that clearly violate the most basic human rights.

On the other side there is the world of those who aspire to a future of solidarity and respect for nature. In this case, they were symbolized by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, but they can also be found in similar struggles around the world, confronting other governments who are also at the service of the economic interests of big corporations. To mention just a few examples, we could point to the current struggle in Southeast Asian countries to defend the Mekong River – which provides sustenance for millions of people – from destruction by giant hydroelectric dams; the struggle of the peoples of Africa against oil drilling and logging; the struggle of the tribal peoples of India to protect their forests from mining; and far too many others.

In this confrontation, the hypocrisy of those striving to impose the destructive model is seemingly unbounded. In the case of Peru, President Alan García, the same man who now wants to open up the Amazon to extractive industries, declared just over a year ago that he wanted “to prevent this basic wealth that God has given us from being degraded by the works of man, by the incompetence of those who work the land or exploit it economically, and that is why we created this Ministry of the Environment.”

This kind of government hypocrisy is blatantly evident all around the world, especially with regard to climate change. During an endless international process that began in 1992, the governments of the world agreed that climate change is the worst threat facing humankind. They also agreed that the two main causes of climate change are greenhouse gas emissions created by the use of fossil fuels and deforestation. Finally, they agreed that something must be done about it. And after signing the corresponding agreements and flying back to their countries, they have done everything in their power to promote oil drilling and/or deforestation.

Without needing to create ministries of the environment or participate in international processes to combat climate change, peoples around the world are taking action to defend the environment and climate from the threats looming over them. In almost all cases, their actions are criminalized or repressed – in both the South and the North – by those who should be encouraging and supporting them: their governments.

In the now symbolic case of Peru, the peoples of the Amazon – with the support of thousands of citizens around the world – have won an important battle in this clash between two worlds. Obviously, no one believes that this is the end of the struggle. But it is a victory that provides hope for many other peoples fighting for similar goals, and ultimately for the whole world, because the final outcome of this confrontation between two worlds will determine the fate of all of humanity.

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

Mekong Citizens to Hand 15,000 Signature “Save the Mekong” Petition to Thai PM

PRESS RELEASE. In a bold outpouring of public concern for Southeast Asia’s Mekong River, more than 15,000 people from within the six-country Mekong region and around the world have signed a “Save the Mekong” petition urging governments to abandon plans for hydropower development along the river’s mainstream. The petition – written in seven languages - will be hand-delivered to Thailand’s

Prime Minister H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva on 18 June in Bangkok, and sent to other government leaders within the region.



Despite strong government backing for dam building on the Mekong River, over 10,000 people from within the Mekong region have signed the petition addressed to the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam urging them to keep the river flowing freely and to pursue less damaging electricity options. The petition is signed by fishers and farmers living along the river's mainstream and tributaries, as well as by monks, students, city-folk and even some of the region's well-known celebrities. Another 5,000 people around the world signed the postcards and an online petition.

Most postcard signatories wrote personal messages to the region's leaders:

"Don't let hydropower dams block our children's future!" *Wang Dezhi, Yunnan, China*

"Don't build the Mekong dams. The existing dams in Thailand already make brothers and sisters fight against each other!" *Mak Vangdokmai, Roi et, Thailand*

"I love my country. I don't want to see some people destroy my home country for greed. So I would like to do my best to protect our Mekong!" *Sneampay, Vientiane, Laos*

"If the dams happen, where will all of us go to live?" *Villager, Stung Treng province, Cambodia.*

"Saving us, saving our resources! Electricity is not everything!" *Nguyen Thanh Hang, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Mekong fisheries provide a critical source of food and income for millions of people along the river. Recent official estimates place the annual value of the river's wild capture fisheries to be worth up to

Recent official estimates place the annual value of the river's wild capture fisheries to be worth up to US\$3 billion. Mainstream dams will block the massive fish migrations that count for up to 70% of the river's commercial fish catch and that ensure regional food security. Experience around the world demonstrates that there is no way to mitigate the fisheries impacts of such large dams.

Civil society groups in the Mekong region and internationally have been sounding the alarm about plans to build eleven hydro dams on the Lower Mekong mainstream for many years, in what is often described as an uphill battle.

SEE FULL PRESS RELEASE AT

http://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/dams/Press_Release_Mekong.pdf

More information on the Save the Mekong initiative and government-backed plans to dam the Mekong is available in English, Burmese, Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese on the coalition's web site www.SavetheMekong.org

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Guatemala: sugarcane's bitter consequences

In our country, one of the crops that has caused the most negative impacts from its start to the present day is sugarcane. The sugarcane plantations are located in the Pacific Plains, a rich area with fertile soils of volcanic origin and abundant water from rainfall and the rivers born in the volcanic chain. These conditions were perfect for the development of this crop and the expansion of sugar mills. Today Guatemala is the fifth largest exporter of sugar in the world and second in production in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Presently, 14 sugar mills are in operation and in 2007 sugarcane plantations covered 216,000 hectares, approximately the same size as the Department of Guatemala (225,300 hectares) an appreciable area considering the size of our country (108,889 km²).

One of the most serious problems of monoculture sugarcane plantations is the total destruction of the ecosystems where they are located. In Guatemala this has led to the disappearance of vast areas of forest.

Added to the above is the exaggerated use of water which affects the human communities and causes direct and indirect negative impacts on terrestrial and coastal marine ecosystems. Burning sugarcane contaminates the environment, affects the health of neighbouring communities and releases CO₂, one of the greenhouse gases. The burning of these plantations, year after year contributes to increasing global warming. During the harvest, the sugar mills change the course of rivers towards their plantations, leaving the communities without water; while at the same time also dumping their

contaminated waste in them.

The canals and ditches, opened up for irrigation in the plantations, carry the water inland and cause flooding during the rainy season, placing many villages at risk. To this is added the contamination caused by the excessive use of agrochemicals, pesticides and chemical ripeners that are transported by the rivers towards coastal marine ecosystems such as mangroves.

One of the problems encountered by the sugar industry is the amount of land available to expand its plantations. According to statements made in 2007 by Armando Boesche, manager of the Guatemalan Sugar Growers Association (Asazgua - Asociación de Azucareros de Guatemala) **“Now there is no land available because we have reached the limit.”** This situation has become a threat to ecosystems and local inhabitants and is sensitive in a country where land disputes have led to wars,

disappearances and death.

A clear example of the lack of land was the transfer in 2006 of the Guadalupe sugar mill to the Polochic River valley in Izabal near the wildlife refuge and Ramsar Site of Bocas del Polochic. This situation directly and indirectly threatens the wetlands and wildlife due to the changing of river courses and the use of agrochemicals that are transported to this body of water by rain and runoff, risking stepping up the growth of *Hydrilla verticillata*, an invasive plant that has been established in this location for several years now.

However, in the South the sugarcane plantations do not seem to have reached “the limit,” as they continue to expand, with the felling of the last trees and riparian forests that protected the river courses. They have had negative impacts on endangered species such as the Yellow-necked Parrot, in serious danger of extinction. The sugarcane frontier has reached the mangrove shores and localities such as Iztapa and Hawaii, two areas that still conserve this endangered ecosystem. The plantations reach their borders, causing isolation and pressure.

No assessment has yet been made in Guatemala of the accumulative negative impacts of these monoculture plantations that affect both the neighbouring communities and local ecosystems. In the meanwhile, the people continue to sweeten drinks and food, oblivious of the bitter impacts of this monoculture on nature and on people.

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Nigeria: The long arm of justice is finally catching up on Shell

On June 9 Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) has released a press statement describing the outcome of the landmark suit instituted by Ken Saro Wiwa Jr and other Ogonis accusing Shell of complicity in the execution of author and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders in 1995, among other human rights abuses, as a significant milestone in the search for justice in the bloody oil fields of the Niger Delta.

After legal twist and turns lasting nearly fourteen years, Shell has been forced to pay an out-of-court settlement put at \$15.5 million to the Ogoni plaintiffs who have struggled to hold the company accountable for complicity in atrocities committed against the Ogoni people in the 1990s, including the execution of Saro-Wiwa.

The plaintiffs had in a suit instituted at a New York court, alleged Shell financed, armed, and colluded with the Nigerian military forces during the Sani Abacha years that used deadly force and conducted massive, brutal raids against the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta.

After the announcement of the settlement on Monday (June 8, 2009), Shell in a hasty statement said its decision was “a compassionate payment to the plaintiffs and the estates they represent in recognition of the tragic turn of events in Ogoni land, even though Shell had no part in the violence that took place.”

But ERA/FoEN Executive Director, Nnimmo Bassey dismissed the company’s claim in a statement issued in Lagos, insisting that “Shell’s sudden decision to settle out of court is a clear indication that the company is guilty of the atrocities alleged and much more.”

“This development signals a ray of hope for the people of the Niger Delta that Shell’s irresponsible acts which have violated their land and livelihoods in the last five decades of oil exploration in the region will not go unaccounted for. It is however sad that justice was achieved not on Nigerian soil where

innocent people of the Niger Delta have been labeled criminals and vandals but in far away US.”

Bassey said the Nigerian government should take a cue from the outcome of the suit and compel Shell to commence immediate cleanup of pollution of rivers, streams and farms with its obscene profits and account for other human rights abuses that piled up before and after the Saro Wiwa incident in 1995.

Another phase of the legal campaign against Shell is billed for Shell’s headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, where the company faces a legal action for repeated oil spills, brought by residents of the Niger Delta, supported by Friends of the Earth Netherlands and Friends of the Earth Nigeria.

“The clear message to Shell is that no matter where how far it is headquartered, the long arms of justice will get there. The subjugation of innocent people and their environment will never go unnoticed and must be accounted for. Shell may have ducked the dock this time around, but it will surely have its day in the dock soon,” Bassey added.

Oilwatch International’s coordinator, Keania Karikpo believes that Shell’s claim of accepting out of court settlement on compassionate grounds “is a big insult capable of flaring tempers in an Ogoni where the people are beginning to enjoy peace in the absence of the corporation. Their stance shows that this corporation is unrepentant”.

ERA Press release, 9 June 2009, www.oilwatch.org

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Peru: The silent genocide of the last uncontacted indigenous groups

The Peruvian government is not only responsible for the open repression of Amazonian peoples which it is currently carrying out, but also for the silent genocide of the last uncontacted indigenous groups still living in isolation within their ancestral territories.

As documented in a recent Survival International report, one such case is happening with indigenous peoples living along the Envira River in the Peruvian Province of Ucayali. Illegal loggers have been invading territory belonging to uncontacted Indians in the south-east of Peru, forcing them to flee across the border into nearby Brazil, where they are likely to come into conflict with other, similarly isolated, Indians already living in Brazil.

The loggers are mainly seeking mahogany and cedar. Peru boasts some of the last commercially-viable mahogany trees anywhere in the world. According to José Carlos Meirelles, head of the Brazilian Indian Affairs Department’s post in the area, mahogany exploration in the headwaters of the Jurua, Purus and Envira (rivers in Peru), have caused the forced migration of indigenous groups in Peru.

Despite the abundant evidence about the presence of these isolated indigenous groups, Peru’s government has failed to publicly accept that uncontacted Indians are fleeing from Peru to Brazil. Peru’s president, Alan Garcia, has even suggested the tribes do not exist.

Another case is that of the Napo-Tigre Indians in the Province of Loreto. Multinational oil companies are working inside the territories of at least two uncontacted tribes living between the Napo and Tigre rivers in northern Peru.

One of them, Perenco (an Anglo-French company), recently revealed its intention to send hundreds of workers into the region. According to the company, one oil well has already been drilled.

The area where Perenco is working is in the middle of a proposed reserve for the Indians. Perenco’s presence in the region is opposed by indigenous organizations in Peru which have filed lawsuits

presence in the region is opposed by indigenous organisations in Peru which have filed lawsuits against the company.

The identities of the uncontacted tribes living in the area are not clear, but one is believed to be a subgroup of the Waorani, and another is known as the 'Pananjuri'. Perenco denies the tribes exist.

Perenco's chairman, Francois Perrodo, recently met Peru's president, Alan Garcia. Days later, a law was passed declaring Perenco's work in the region a "national necessity".

Other companies involved in the Napo-Tigre area are Repsol-YPF, ConocoPhillips, the Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol, and the Brazilian state oil company Petrobras.

It is important to stress that uncontacted tribes face two principal threats to their survival. By far the greatest is their lack of immunity to common Western diseases such as influenza, chicken pox, measles, and a host of respiratory diseases. Even where 'first contact' between an isolated tribe and outsiders is carefully managed, it is common for significant numbers of tribespeople to die in the months following contact.

Where such encounters are not managed, with medical plans in place, the entire tribe, or a large proportion of it, can be wiped out. Such catastrophes have occurred repeatedly in the Amazon, and not just in the distant past: in 1996, for example, at least half the Murunahua Indians died after they were contacted by illegal mahogany loggers. The other key threat is simply violence: in several of the cases outlined in this report the tribes people face gangs of heavily-armed loggers who are likely to shoot them on sight.

By refusing to acknowledge the existence of these groups and by allowing and even promoting the entry of loggers and oil companies into their territories, the Peruvian government is guilty of genocide.

Article based on information from Survival International's Report "One Year On. Uncontacted tribes face extinction", May 29, 2009

http://assets.survival-international.org/documents/14/One_Year_On_Survival_Report.pdf

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

India: Jatropha plantations destroy the livelihoods of poor local communities

The plans for the establishment of jatropha plantations aimed at the production of biodiesel are based on the alleged availability of "barren and degraded" lands in the country. Within government there is a belief that large areas within forests are wastelands, including degraded forests, pasture and grazing lands, and under-stocked forest land that could be used for jatropha plantation.

Indigenous and local communities contest the criteria of barren and degraded lands. For instance, many arid and semi-arid ecosystems have been classified as 'barren and degraded', in spite of the fact that those areas are often inhabited and used by communities, who themselves do not consider them to be barren nor degraded. When these lands are categorized as such, this opens them up for jatropha plantations, or other so-called "land improvements" that the affected community may strongly oppose.

To fulfill their ambitious jatropha plantation targets, state governments like that of Chhattisgarh virtually let loose the forest development corporation (FDC) and the forest department (FD) and give them a free hand to carry on this mission. Both FDC and FD officials started indiscriminate planting of jatropha

saplings on any land, forest or non-forest, or disputed, that they could lay their hands on, often forcibly, leading to major rights violations of the vulnerable forest communities, dalits and tribals, severely curtailing their rights to livelihood.

During the second half of 2007, hundreds of tribal families, living for generations in the forests of Chhattisgarh, were displaced from their cultivable land by the forest department and jatropha was forcibly planted on their lands. "Incidents of such forcible planting of jatropha by the forest department have happened in at least five districts of Kawardha, Bilaspur, Korba, Kanker and Rajnandgaon," said Pravin Patel of Tribal Welfare Society.

Baigas are an indigenous group, spread across the forest regions of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. These tribals live in extreme poverty; grow some staple food such as kodu, some lentils and paddy where they have access to cultivable lands. A large number of them engage in manual work and tend to cattle.

As Budhu Ram of Baridih in Bilaspur district, described, "The local forest officials, usually forest guards and deputy ranger, accompanied by the Sarpanch (village Panchayat chief) come with a big herd of cattle, which runs amok over their crops, trampling them down and destroying them totally. Subsequently, that crop land is forcibly planted with jatropha".

This is precisely what happened in the Baigatola of Baridih village on August 7, 2007, when 400 heads of cattle were herded into the cultivable land of the Baigas, destroying their Kodu crop planted in June. The whole area was then planted with jatropha saplings. The Baigas fought back, uprooted the jatropha saplings and filed a complaint with the local police. But the Baigas, Bhils and dalits in other villages were not so lucky. Protesting villagers in Belgahona, Konochara, Mithu Nawagaon and Kekradihi were beaten up by the forest guards and arrested by the police. In the process more than 150 families lost their cultivable land, the only means of their subsistence.

The story repeats itself in the forests of Kanker and Bastar districts. According to Ratneshwar Nath of Parivartan, an NGO working among the tribals of Kanker and Bastar districts, at least 355 families of 27 villages were affected and displaced by the forcible planting of jatropha on their land. "More than seventeen hundred acres of land cultivated by the tribals for generations, have been taken away from them for planting jatropha", Ratneshwar said.

Field visits and media reports indicate that forcible plantation of jatropha on the land of tribals and dalits, on village common lands and grazing lands are rampant in the other districts of Raipur, Dhamtari, Kabirdham, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Korba, Sarguja and Jashpur.

All for the sake of feeding cars!

Article based on a yet to be published report by Soupama Lahiri for Friends of the Earth International. For more information, please contact the author of the report: lahiri2006@gmail.com

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Uganda: BIDCO Oil palm plantation expansion will further put at risk local communities livelihoods

BIDCO, the largest and fastest growing manufacturer of vegetable oils, fats, margarine, soaps and protein concentrates in East and Central Africa is investing in a multi-million dollar oil palm plantation on Bugala islands in Kalangala. The company counts with investment partners including Archer Daniels Midlands of America, Wilmar Group of Malaysia and Josovina of Singapore. Within Uganda's Vegetable Oil Development Project (VODP) scheme, the International Fund for Agricultural

Development (IFAD) and the World Bank granted a \$10m loan to support the plantations and supporting infrastructure, while the Government will contribute \$12m in the form of land, electricity and roads, and BIDCO will invest \$120m (see WRM Bulletin 100).

The project was intended to grow 10,000 ha of palm on Bugala Island. So far nearly all the planned area has been planted. Of the total project area, 6500 ha were planted under the nucleus estate and 3500 ha by out growers/small holders.

According to the project's proponents it was designed to improve the livelihood of the people of Uganda and Kalangala in particular, more so on the nutrition status of the poor and reduction on the national cost burden of importation of vegetable oils.

To this date, Oil Palm Uganda Limited (BIDCO's subsidiary company) has already cleared more than 6,500ha of forest and grassland and replaced most of it with palms that will be ready for processing this year.

Despite the promises made by the government and the company, the oil palm project has not been able to come up to the promises made. According to a recent report undertaken by the Kalangala District NGO Forum (KADINGO), local people are facing serious negative impacts.

The establishment of the plantations has had high environmental impacts starting from deforestation and water depletion; and local people can no longer obtain a large number of products and services from the forest environment which disappeared as a result of the plantation. However, the most serious impact local communities are facing is the appropriation of their land by the plantation companies. In Kalangala district, local people do not have formal ownership of the land. Plantation companies are awarded concessions or land titles to that land and receive government support to repress whatever opposition they may face from local communities.

There have been eruptions of land wrangles between BIDCO and the community over who owns land. Some residents cannot precisely tell how their tomorrow will be simply because the land they are settled on is being claimed by BIDCO.

Coupled with the above, many communities have been displaced from the areas they were cultivating, and grazing, whereby some of them have been forced to sell off their animals. Although some landless people in Bwendero, Buguzi and Mulabana were said to have been facilitated to acquire land for re-settlement, the displaced communities in Buswa and Mugela were reportedly either not compensated for their losses at all or received a totally inadequate compensation.

The give-away of public land has affected the local communities who have been living on those lands and depended on it for their livelihoods. In addition, the land market boom on the Island has attracted many rich men to buy off private land. More of the indigenous and local communities that have for years lived on such land have either been fenced off or evicted.

Consequently, local communities living on both private and public land have lost their livelihood. Even those who have not been affected yet are worried about their future and cannot make long-term investments on land. In Mugoye village, more than 100 people are currently living on a land enclave surrounded by oil palm plantations. Local people are worried about what will happen if the land "owners" decide to sell off the land to the Project owners or convert it to oil palm tree growing under the out-growers scheme.

Land including natural resources such as forests has been providing a safety net for victims of social changes, displacement, unemployment, lost opportunities in the urban areas etc. Its loss has increased the vulnerability of the communities to such changes/shocks over which they have no control.

Furthermore, there are many conflicts between the communities and the Project arising from denied access to:

- Use of the project road network for livestock movements/transportation;
- Water points located in the project area formerly used by the communities; some were destroyed during the clearing of land for project activities especially the wells in Kibaale;
- Grazing lands within the project area leading to confiscation of “trespassing” animals with either an exorbitant fine of about 50,000 Shs (Ugandan shillings) per animal, or risk of having the animals slaughtered and eaten free of charge, which discourages animal rearing in most areas of the project.

One particularly severe problem resulted from the project taking over sand mining areas and denying the indigenous and local community access to building materials as in the case of Bukuzzindu. The area was a community utility where sand for building and construction was obtained but when the project took over, the indigenous and local people were denied access to this vital material. The area was put under oil palm plantation and accommodation structure for the top staff and workers. The refusal by BIDCO to vacate the area is creating friction between BIDCO and the community, to the extent that the community is reacting by digging sand ditches along the roadside so as to cause accidents to BIDCO’s vehicles.

In the company’s race to have more land for plantations, even the children’s play ground of the community of Kasenyi – Bamungi was converted into oil palm plantation!

Given that BIDCO is planning to establish 30,000 more hectares of oil palm on the mainland, it is important to inform local communities living in the area targeted for plantations about the negative impacts of the 10,000 hectares already planted in the islands. The proposed expansion will not only not improve but will worsen people’s livelihoods –and the impacted communities of the Buggala islands in Kalangala can provide more than ample evidence on this.

Article based on information from: “A study to identify key issues for engagement about the oil palm project in Ssesse islands Kalangala district: A case study of Buggala and Bunyama island in Kalangala district” sent by David Mwayafu - a Programme Officer of Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), P.O.Box 27551 Kampala Tel: 256 414 269461 Email: ugandacoalition@infocom.co.ug Website: www.ugandacoalition.or.ug The full report is available at: Kalangala District NGO Forum Email: Kalangalango@yahoo.com

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Uruguay: The Ence, Arauco and Stora Enso’s eucalyptus and pulp fairytales

Monoculture tree plantations continue to advance over the Uruguayan grasslands and now occupy almost one million hectares of land that was previously assigned to the production of food. On several occasions we have made reference to the negative impacts of these monoculture plantations on the environment and its people and in Bulletin 139 we included recent evidence given by farmers and their families from the Department of Paysandu (see: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/boletin/139/Uruguay.html>).

The increasing appropriation of land by large companies must be added to the negative social and environmental impacts of such monoculture plantations. Today, four foreign companies own almost 600,000 hectares of land -Stora Enso (Sweden-Finland), Arauco (Chile), Weyerhaeuser (USA) and Botnia (Finland)- making them the largest landowners in the country.

Recently, something hitherto unknown happened. showing up the way these companies operate: the

sale by the Spanish company Ence of almost all its assets in Uruguay, as a way of addressing its serious financial problems in Spain. Up until that time, Ence was one of the country's largest landowners, with a total of 160,000 hectares and a government-approved project to install a pulp mill. Its plantations had been subsidised, it had been exempt from taxes, it had been given a duty-free zone to install the mill, but it decided to leave and did so, pocketing all the benefits received through the sale of its land and plantations.

Ence's assets were acquired by an consortium set up by two companies that up to then had been owners of a total of 110,000 hectares: the Swedish-Finnish company Stora Enso and the Chilean company Arauco. This sale –decided on and negotiated among three foreign companies– led to the establishment of the largest landholding in the history of the country: 253,000 hectares in the hands of a foreign consortium.

The objective stated by the Arauco/Stora Enso consortium is the installation of a gigantic pulp mill to be fed with eucalyptus plantations. This is to be the largest pulp megaproject in the world, as it implies the installation of a pulp mill able to produce 1.5 million tons of pulp (today the largest one produces 1 million tons). Given these dimensions, any accident, human error or mechanical breakdown would be catastrophic, while the level of emissions and effluents, however small, would involve an accumulation of impacts, of equally major dimensions.

These companies' track records do not auger anything positive. Both companies are responsible for serious social and environmental impacts in the countries where they have established themselves. As examples geographically close to our country, mention can be made of the cases of Stora Enso in Brazil (Veracel) and Arauco in Chile (CELCO) and Argentina (Alto Paraná).

The installation of Stora Enso in the State of Bahia (Brazil) involved the expansion of monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the area, resulting in a series of serious social and environmental impacts. According to the Pataxó indigenous peoples who live in the area, the company appropriated lands with false deeds, cut down the native vegetation, poisoned and is still poisoning water sources with agrochemicals, causing the death of animals and fish. For their part, the peasants affirm that the company has only promoted land concentration, monoculture plantations and the eviction of human beings from the land.

The negative impacts caused by the company have been documented in detail in a report by the local organization CEPEDDES (2008). The title of this report is graphic: "A story of illegality, indifference and profit! Social and environmental violation promoted by Veracel Celulose, the property of Stora Enso and Aracruz Celulose) (see complete report at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/CEPEDES_2008.pdf)

The activities of the Chilean company Arauco in the Province of Misiones (Argentina) have also involved a series of negative social and environmental impacts both due to its pulp mill – the largest in the province – and its pine tree plantations. The local inhabitants coincide in denouncing strong headaches, allergies and respiratory diseases as common in the town, located a few kilometres away from the mill. They tell that there are days (and particularly, nights) when they can't breathe and the smell is unbearable. They also refer to the low salaries paid by the mill and the repressive system prevailing there.

In Chile there are also innumerable complaints against the company lodged by local communities and mainly by the Mapuche people, who have been repressed and have had their territory taken over by the company. Arauco was also responsible for serious contamination in the Valdivia region, affecting the Rio Cruces sanctuary, a Ramsar site and the habitat of black-necked swans. Rio Cruces was one of South America's most important nesting sites for black-necked swans and an important source of income from tourism for the local population. What had started with complaints by the community

affected by the nauseating smell from Arauco's pulp mill, ended in the mass death of black-necked swans and the ensuing negative tourist-related economic impacts in the area.

In spite of the well documented impacts of their activities in Chile and Brazil, these companies will surely affirm that in Uruguay their pulp mill will not contaminate and that their plantations have not had, do not have and will never have any negative impacts. Whoever wants to believe in fairytales .. may of course do so. But they must know that they are no more than fairytales.

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Arborgen Seeks to Legalize GE Eucalyptus Trees in U.S. -Brazil is Not Far Behind

“Eucalyptus is the perfect neoliberal tree. It grows quickly, turns a quick profit in the global market and destroys the earth.”—Jaime Aviles, La Jornada

ArborGen, the international leader in genetically engineered (GE) tree research and development, is moving rapidly forward with plans to commercially release their GE tree “products” in both the U.S. and Brazil. ArborGen, headquartered in South Carolina in the United States, has received preliminary approval from the U.S. government to release more than a quarter of a million GE cold tolerant, low-lignin, flowering eucalyptus trees in seven states across the southeastern U.S. This is a major step toward the unregulated commercial release of large-scale plantations of GE eucalyptus trees. ArborGen has already started the process of petitioning the government for permission to commercially develop GE eucalyptus plantations as soon as 2010. In Brazil ArborGen has stated they plan to commercially release GE eucalyptus as soon as 2012, but given the state of the technology in the U.S., it could be even earlier.

Plantations of GE eucalyptus would be used for paper pulp, so-called “second generation” cellulosic transport fuels or wood-fired electricity production. These cold tolerant GE eucalyptus tree plantations pose an unprecedented threat to forests both in the U.S. and globally. The cold tolerance trait will allow development of GE eucalyptus plantations over a much wider geography than eucalyptus trees are currently able to grow. In the same way that conventional eucalyptus have been a social and ecological disaster for the forests and forest dependent communities in the regions where eucalyptus plantations currently grow, GE cold tolerant eucalyptus will threaten communities and forests over greatly expanded regions.

In the U.S. southeast, one in five forested acres is made up of monoculture pine plantations, but the area's cold winters have made growing eucalyptus impossible. Eucalyptus may soon replace these pine plantations, with significant impacts. Eucalyptus trees, for example, use 2.5 times the water of pine trees and have roots that grow much deeper than pine trees, threatening ground water sources in a region already experiencing extreme drought in many areas.

Large plantations of non-genetically engineered eucalyptus have depleted the availability of fresh water for communities, forests and other ecosystems. In the Lumaco District of Chile, for example, some indigenous Mapuche communities are completely surrounded by eucalyptus plantations. While they previously had year-round access to fresh water, today they must truck water in because the eucalyptus plantations have depleted the local water supply. In addition, the chemicals used on the eucalyptus plantations have contaminated the ground water, leading to rising rates of sickness in Mapuche communities.

Eucalyptus are also much more flammable than pine plantations. In the spring of 2007, wildfires in forests and pine plantations of Georgia and Florida burned for weeks on end. If these had been eucalyptus plantations, the fires would have been significantly worse. A dramatic example of the

danger of eucalyptus fires was seen in Australia earlier this year. Raging wildfires, exacerbated by a drought, moved at over 100 kilometers per hour, devastating wildlife and killing 173 people.

Eucalyptus trees, which are highly invasive, also produce a compound that inhibits the growth of other plants, enabling the eucalyptus to form monocultures when it escapes from the plantations. According to the Introduced Species Summary Project of Columbia University, "The loss of biodiversity and habitat is a great threat from the ... eucalyptus. It creates virtual monocultures and can rapidly take over surrounding compatible areas, completely changing the ecosystem."

Eucalyptus grandis, one of the species of eucalyptus used in the GE eucalyptus hybrid, is also a known host for the deadly pathogenic fungus *Cryptococcus gattii*. *Cryptococcus gattii* can cause fatal fungal meningitis in people and animals that inhale its spores. This fungus was previously found only in the tropics, but has recently been found in British Columbia in Canada and in the Pacific Northwest U.S.

In addition to these dangerous impacts, legalizing GE eucalyptus trees would open the door to the commercial release of other GE forest trees, including trees with native wild relatives, such as poplar and pine, that would inevitably and irreversibly contaminate native forests with GE traits, devastating forest ecosystems, wildlife and communities that rely on the forest. Once GE trees escape, there is no way to call them back. The only way to stop genetic contamination of native forests is to ban the commercial release of GE trees before it is too late.

The STOP GE Trees Campaign is mobilizing to fight this threat. We are bringing together experts in genetic engineering, forest protection, wildfire, soils, water and eucalyptus to develop the campaign to stop ArborGen's plans. If you know of experts who can help, please contact us!

We need your help! This will be a lengthy battle —ArborGen has millions of dollars in profits at stake and will be activating their PR machine. Please help us stop these deadly GE eucalyptus plantations.

To be alerted to updates on this situation and get involved in the fight to stop GE eucalyptus trees, email us at info@globaljusticeecology.org or visit our website at <http://www.nogetrees.org>

By Anne Petermann, Global Justice Ecology Project, email: globalecology@gmavt.net

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WORDS AND NOT DEEDS AT CLIMATE CHANGE TALKS

The gaping chasm between climate science and climate negotiations

The distance between climate science and climate negotiations was dramatically illustrated at the UN climate meeting in Bonn earlier this month. While scientists tell us we need large reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, governments are setting targets for emission reductions that are so low that runaway climate change is almost guaranteed.

At a side event organised by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research scientists gave a series of presentations under the title: "Emissions in line with staying below 2°C – do current proposals make it?". Katje Frieler of the Potsdam Institute noted that more than 100 countries call for a target of limiting global warming to 2°C or lower. "How much emission reductions are necessary in order to reach this target?" she asked. The graphs she showed were scary. Business as usual emissions would result in a temperature increase of somewhere between 3°C and 8°C by 2100. But the important figure was 1 trillion tons of CO₂. That is the total amount of emissions we can produce between 2000 and 2050 if the probability of exceeding 2°C is to be limited to 25 per cent. The bad news is that we

have already emitted one-third of that in the last nine years.

Joeri Rogelj made things worse. He looked at the targets that countries are currently setting for emissions reductions. He concluded that if countries meet the targets that they have currently set, we are "Virtually certain to exceed 2°C", with median concentrations of CO₂ of over 700 parts per million by 2100.

Bill Hare of the Potsdam Institute and Climate Analytics summed up the implications of the findings, which were published in Nature magazine on 30 April 2009. "Less than a quarter of the available and economically recoverable, fossil fuel reserves can still be burned and emitted from 2009 to 2050," he said.

As George Monbiot has pointed out, "The test of all governments' commitment to stopping climate breakdown is this: whether they are prepared to impose a limit on the use of the reserves [of fossil fuels] already discovered, and a permanent moratorium on prospecting for new reserves. Otherwise it's all hot air."

The urgency in the Potsdam Institute's presentations was not reflected in the official negotiations in Bonn. None of the government delegations present in Bonn were talking about imposing any limit on using fossil fuels. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWGLCA) ended up with a 200-page draft negotiating text, which is almost four times as long as the draft produced before the meeting. The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Kyoto Protocol failed to reach any agreement on emission reduction targets beyond 2012. Hot air, in other words.

In addition to stopping the burning and extraction of fossil fuels, we also need to stop deforestation. But little progress was made during the discussions about reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) in Bonn. In one informal plenary session Michael Zammit Cutajar, the chair the AWGLCA, spoke at length about curly brackets and square brackets. He talked about the "lack of perfection in the curly brackets" and something he called "mind brackets".

At an AWGLCA meeting on REDD during the second week of the talks, the overwhelming impression was that someone had dreamed up REDD the previous evening over a glass or two of Kölsch. For 90 minutes delegates chatted about REDD as if no previous discussions on REDD had ever happened. Other AWGLCA discussions were fiendishly complex, featuring discussions of REDD plus; REDD and NAMAs; REDD and LULUCF; REDD and MRV; REDD and CBD; REDD and UNDRIPs; REDD and carbon trading; REDD and offsets; and REDD and carbon accounting. What all this means is not the point, since there was little or no agreement on any of this.

But while the official negotiations on REDD are drowning in a soup of acronyms, organisations such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are steaming ahead with their own versions of REDD. At a side event in Bonn, TNC's Sarene Marshall described the Berau REDD Pilot Programme which covers an area of 2.2 million hectares in East Kalimantan. Of this area, 780,000 hectares would be logged. This would be "reduced impact logging / certification", Marshall's presentation assured us. The project would then "sell emissions reductions 'credits' to voluntary carbon market buyers."

There are two serious problems here. First, the logging will produce large amounts of emissions. Comparing these emissions with what might have happened under more destructive logging is fraudulent. A new Global Witness report, "Vested Interests – industrial logging and carbon in tropical forests," documents how reduced impact logging "kills 5-10 non-target trees for every target tree cut, and releases between 10 and 80 tonnes of carbon per hectare." Logging also makes forests more vulnerable to further deforestation and to fire. "During the El Niño events in the late 1990s, 60% of logged forests in Indonesian Borneo went up in smoke compared with 6% of primary forest," Global Witness notes.

The second problem is that we need both to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuel and to stop

The second problem is that we need both to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuel and to stop deforestation, especially industrial scale logging of old-growth forests. We cannot offset one against the other. "In practice offsetting is having a disastrous impact on the prospects for averting catastrophic climate change," writes Friends of the Earth in a new report on offsets. "Offsetting must not be expanded at Copenhagen. New proposed offsetting schemes must be dropped from the negotiations, and existing offsetting mechanisms need to be scrapped."

The most extraordinary slide in Sarene Marshall's presentation in Bonn about the Berau project was titled "Berau REDD Phase I Structure". The slide outlines money transfers. An arrow with three dollar signs goes from "Funders" to "Timber Concessions". A trust fund and a project management unit are to be established. Under the words "REDD Activities" are three boxes, labelled: "Timber Concessions", "Oil Palm" and "Protection Forests". Underneath is the word "offsets". One box includes the words "Local Government, National Government, Civil society, etc." and two others are for "Government" and "Communities". None of these seem to have any role in overseeing the money flows, or anything much else. Marshall's slide shows the political and financial infrastructure to be established by TNC, a US-based NGO, which has not, at least as far as I'm aware, been elected to govern this area of Kalimantan. This is not democracy. This is carbocracy.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org/>

Global Witness, "Vested interests - Industrial logging and carbon in tropical forests". <http://bit.ly/F7aI4>
Friends of the Earth, "Offsetting: A dangerous distraction". <http://bit.ly/3cgNy>

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GenderCC urges to really stop deforestation, not promote carbon offsetting

The June 2009 Climate Talks in Bonn served as the scenario where the new push to include forest preservation within climate change negotiations was expressed.

On the one hand, controversial proposals enthusiastically support economic incentives to protect the forests. On the other hand, strong arguments are warning about setting market-based mechanisms that would allow continuing doing "business as usual" instead of really stopping deforestation which is a major cause of carbon emission.

Gender CC, the global network of women and gender activists, has been fully involved in the UNFCCC process. In Bonn, the group issued a statement highlighting that support of the UN climate change negotiations to "the protection and restoration of forests and supportive ecosystems" should encompass several dimensions including human rights.

That means that any measure regarding forest protection must respect and strengthen "all rights of indigenous and forest dwelling communities who have so far conserved them with special support to women's traditional rights and knowledge systems". Traditional custodians must be incorporated "at the centre of decision making and planning from the ground to the highest levels".

Consistent with human rights standards is also the need to preserve and restore forests "for their biodiversity value and for the livelihood of forest and forest-dependent communities" – forests provide a home and livelihood for about 300 million people worldwide.

There is the peril that proposals and projects for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (RED/D) may become market-based mechanisms that would allow carbon offsetting: "Some of the proposed REDD schemes and the related biochar initiative would serve to maintain high-

carbon economies by enabling offsetting of high emissions technologies and economies. The projected 'saving' by REDD would, therefore allow and promote the retention and expansion of high carbon economies perhaps further offsetting these against industrial tree plantations. This is not acceptable", stated GenderCC who also warned about the fact that "Tree plantations are disguised as forests under REDD and other CDM, are accessing legal protections of forests, and are already creating massive human rights violations and ecosystem damage including exacerbating climate change."

The group's statement exposed the peril that "large amounts of money being transferred through REDD schemes" might bring about swift changes in traditional societies' production, consumption and cultural patterns. In a cash-economy "women would be the most excluded, doing away with their ancestral rights as indigenous women, compromising their livelihoods and disrupting their knowledge systems".

As GenderCC strongly urges: "The issue is reduction of emissions". Offsetting and carbon trade schemes would just imply to divert it.

(The full declaration is available at
<http://www.gendercc.net/policy/conferences/road-to-copenhagen.html>)

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