



## Issue 173 - December 2011

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### THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: HUMAN RIGHTS

December 10 commemorates the adoption and proclamation in 1948 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, in many countries, many people still continue suffering human rights violations and are fighting to defend their land, water, forests, livelihoods, culture, from the advance of corporate encroachment and land grabbing.

The story of the struggle for human rights is still being written.

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### OUR VIEWPOINT

- **At the end of the International Year of Forests, is there anything to celebrate?**

The United Nations (UN) declared this year, 2011, the International Year of Forests. Now that 2011 is coming to an end, it would be interesting to take a look back for a brief overview.

The theme of the International Year was “Celebrating Forests for People”. Back in January, we asked, will the world's forest peoples actually have any reason to “celebrate”? Will progress be made this year in fighting the direct causes of deforestation, such as logging and the expansion of agribusiness? What about the so-called indirect or underlying causes, that is, the reasons behind the destruction of forests, such as an economy fuelled by the drive for profit and financial speculation, and excessive consumption that benefits only a small minority of the world's people?

## **REDD+**

Once again, the international agenda on forests was dominated by the debate over the REDD+ mechanism. Banks, consultants, governments and even many NGOs were heavily caught up in attempts to move forward with the implementation of REDD+. Billions of dollars have been spent on these efforts, as denounced by a platform of NGOs, including indigenous peoples' organizations (1). These are funds that could have been used to encourage and build on successful initiatives for forest conservation and respect for human rights around the world, with no connection to the REDD mechanism.

What is rather striking is the “blindness” of those who most forcefully insist on promoting REDD+, such as the World Bank and various consulting firms. It seems they are unable to see the hard evidence of human rights violations taking place where REDD+ pilot projects are being implemented, as demonstrated by the case study undertaken by WRM on a project being jointly implemented by Conservation International and the Walt Disney Company in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2), among other studies. They are equally blind to the growing number of studies that have determined that REDD+ will not work due to serious obstacles, and particularly as a market mechanism (3). The many problems that have come to light led a coalition of indigenous peoples and other local communities to launch a call at COP 17 in Durban for a moratorium on REDD projects (see the article in this issue of the bulletin).

While Brazil strives to portray itself as the protector of the world's largest rainforest, a group of parliamentarians, with links to agribusiness, tried to reform the country's Forest Code this year, opening the way for the legal deforestation of millions of hectares, primarily for the benefit of those same agribusiness interests. Meanwhile, the proposed means of compensating for this destruction would be REDD+ projects and payment for environmental services, for which specific legislation is being speedily drafted. The promotion of a “green economy”, based on the commodification and control of natural resources and land, threatens the legally guaranteed rights of indigenous and traditional communities in Brazil.

The increased pollution resulting from this model also aggravates the pollution caused by large transnational corporations in the North, which implies increased negative impacts on indigenous populations and other communities who live near these industries and their extractive areas in the North, exacerbating racism and other

environmental and social injustices. In the South it also means, in the medium and long term, negative impacts on rainforests, making REDD+ a counterproductive proposal, even for those who believe that a “standing forest” and certain amount of control over it will guarantee their future.

There is a lack of structural proposals to tackle the direct and indirect causes of deforestation. Those that do exist continue to be viewed by governments and their partners as overly “radical”. But without these “radical” proposals, the climate will suffer an increase in the average global temperature of close to four degrees within a very short time (4). This will mean a genuinely radical change in the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world, especially women, who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

### **The definition of forests**

Another factor that contributes to deforestation is, without a doubt, FAO's definition of forest, which allows monoculture tree plantations to be classified as forests. WRM undertook an intensive mini-campaign on this issue this year, developing tools and submitting a letter to FAO in September in which it urged the organization to urgently initiate a review of this definition, with the effective participation of forest peoples.

The opposition to the current definition of forests may have had an echo at COP 17 in the recommendation made by the SBSTA (5), the advisory body of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, in the framework of discussion around REDD. The SBSTA recommends that each individual country be allowed to adopt its own definition of forest, as opposed to a single definition imposed by the UNFCCC. Although, on the one hand, this opens up the opportunity to fight in each country for definitions that exclude monoculture tree plantations and better reflect the local reality of forests, it also opens up the possibility of the adoption of definitions that even further promote the expansion of monoculture plantations.

It is this second possibility that is most likely, given the enormous lobbying power of companies in the sector and the financial institutions that persuade national governments to promote tree plantations. Some government representatives have grown accustomed to having their electoral campaigns financed by plantation companies, who in exchange are provided with lands and various state incentives and other benefits. Without a clear definition and reference established at the international level, the door is open to definitions that best serve corporate interests.

The lack of interest in addressing the underlying causes of deforestation is even more obvious when we look at the advances made in plans to promote false solutions for the climate crisis. A prime example is the use of agrofuels, especially wood biomass, to generate electricity in Europe. The aim is to maintain the current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, turning once again to certification systems like the FSC for eucalyptus and pine plantations and the RSPO for oil palm plantations geared to the production of palm oil. Neither of these systems prevents the occurrence of serious human rights violations, as demonstrated by the article from Indonesia in this month's issue of the bulletin. Governments prefer to cater to the interests of corporations and banks, rather than worrying about the well-being and future of people and the environment, and even the climate. They attempt

to confront the economic crisis with the same models as always, without bothering to establish limits on the exploitation of natural resources or to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of the big polluters.

## **Resistance**

We would have little to celebrate this year if it were not for the concerted challenges to “greenwashing” through certification systems, like the FSC label, in the countries of the North (6), and above all, if it were not for the resistance of the peoples of the forests and other biomes who have been struggling in various countries of the South against deforestation, and have fought back in areas where governments are providing incentives for the establishment of monoculture tree plantations and other forms of land grabbing.

The urgent need to protect the rights of these communities is becoming increasingly obvious. The alternative is the perpetuation of the violation of their rights and the criminalization of people who are only fighting to defend those rights, something that is happening in many different countries, from the pine plantation areas in Chile to the eucalyptus and oil palm plantations in Indonesia. Respecting the rights of the peoples who live in and depend on forests and other biomes is the best way to conserve forests, reduce the impacts of climate change, and promote food security and sovereignty.

To advance in this direction, we believe that it is fundamental to support and link together the most diverse resistance processes, from the struggle for forest conservation to the struggle against the international financial system, creating ties of solidarity among the peoples of the South and also with the peoples of the North, in order to increase the pressure on corporations and governments.

It is essential that the voices of different peoples, opposed to the privatization and appropriation of land and natural resources and in defence of their basic human rights, have a louder and more coordinated echo at the next big international events, such as Rio+20 (see the Rio+20 call for mobilization in this issue of the bulletin). And finally, we also firmly back the global call to fight land grabbing launched last month in Mali, Africa by La Via Campesina (see the related article also in this issue).

1- [http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/Open\\_Letter\\_no\\_REDD.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/Open_Letter_no_REDD.pdf)

2- [http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/DRC\\_REDD\\_en.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/DRC_REDD_en.pdf)

3- <http://www.fern.org/carbonmarketswillnotdeliver>

4- <http://outrapolitica.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/a-un-ano-de-cancun-y-dias-de-durban-mas-de-40-c/>

5- <http://www.redd-monitor.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/l25a01.pdf>

6- An example was the denounce to the FSC in Belgium derived from the case of Veracel Celulose in Brazil (see <http://www.duurzaamoppapier.be>)

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## **- The World March of Women: strengthening the struggle**

For WRM the women's struggle is a struggle for freedom and social justice. It is essentially a demand for changes in the social structures that have placed women in an unequal and subordinate position. Thus, the fight for gender justice becomes a social struggle against the dominant capitalist and patriarchal system that treats women and nature in a similar way exerting violence against women's bodies and lives to control them, and against communal goods such as water, land, sovereignty and even culture in its insatiable quest for profit and appropriation.

The World March of Women (WMW) is one of the actors within the social movements struggling for gender justice. It is a movement of women from various backgrounds and affiliations who are organized in grassroots groups and organizations that fight for the elimination of the causes of poverty among and violence against women, causes that they identify as inherent to the present capitalist and patriarchal system.

The actions of the groups that constitute the WMW revolve around both a feminist agenda and the demands of other social movements. Thus, the WMW is part of the struggles against militarisation, free trade or the false solutions to climate change and the systemic crisis.

On 21 -25 November 2011, under the slogan "Women on the March: Strengthening Collective Action, Changing the World", 80 women coming from 34 countries including delegates, workers and guest allied movements met for the 8th WMW International Meeting, which was held in Quezon City, Philippines in order to analyze the current situation and discuss strategies.

The text for debate prepared by the WMW International Committee for the 8th International Meeting (1) conveys the idea that the struggle for women's integrity is a struggle for social justice and human rights. It reflects that "the financial crisis, unemployment and debt levels in Northern countries opened up space for a questioning of the current model and neoliberal discourse, and for an increase in social mobilizations. Nevertheless, neoliberal policies are kept in place. The same neoliberal 'solutions' to the crisis prevail, from cutting public spending and attacking the rights of women workers, to maintaining levels of corporate greed, including financial business and military expenditure. Pressure is growing on 'real assets', such as land and real estate, resulting in landgrabbing of peasant, indigenous, and traditional lands, and the stalling of urban reform."

Regarding the role of women, the document analyses how "the work done by women, in its multiple possible forms, is at the centre of the economic and market organisation of our societies in the capitalist, racist and patriarchal system. Women are to this day primarily responsible for care-work at home, in their communities or in the service sector, thus reproducing the model which has been historically designated to them by the capitalist and patriarchal society. Women are present in greater numbers than men in the kinds of work that sustain entire communities, such as agricultural and peasant production, artisan fishing or small-scale manufacture. They are also more active in economic production and sectors that depend on intensive labour-force within today's globalised market, such as the dressmaking and shoe industries and agro-exportation."

Sexual division of labour attributes productive work (production of merchandise) to men, and reproductive work (caring for people) to women, establishing a hierarchy in which the former is more important than the latter. The document highlights how the present neoliberal capitalist model "subjects care-work, human relationships and the organisation of work and consumption to the rules of the market, which aim to increase profit through efficiency and effectiveness within the current neoliberal phase of capitalism. This is particularly evident in the privatisation of common goods, such as public health services, education and water distribution. Given the pre-planned weakening and non-existence of public and community care services (for children, the ill or elderly, etc), women find themselves working long hours without remuneration, individually fulfilling tasks that are historically invisible and without salaries." Even in the debate around the crisis women remain invisible: "male unemployment is highlighted, while the fact that women have only kept their jobs because their insertion in the labour market has always been based on less rights and lower wages is ignored."

Violence is another tool for women's control and the document refers to sexual harassment used by men to control women's work in sweatshops as well as sexual violence to punish women that demand their rights and to spread terror. Such violence has increased with the present growing militarization in all continents as a way of strengthening control over territories (including water, agricultural land, mineral resources and biodiversity) which has included rape and persecution against women who are involved in social movements.

Regarding to the environmental crisis, the WMW International Committee's document highlights how the market is presented as a solution such as the 'right' to pollute, transformed in carbon market credits that then are negotiated on the stock market. The REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism has also been considered by the document which concludes that REDD projects increase the power of governments, private companies and some big NGOs as it necessarily takes over forest control, dismissing and excluding the original peoples who have lived there for generations.

The WMW calls women to strengthen political action in order to reclaim not only women's territories - their body and their land - but also water, biodiversity and the culture of those people living in these territories for generations.

The meeting ended with a colorful international mass rally demanding to end violence against women which, in the Philippines, includes the removal of US military bases.

(1) Article based on the text produced by the International Committee of the WMW for debate at the 8th International Meeting,  
<http://www.worldmarchofwomen.org/structure/8rencontre/context/en/>

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**- Call for the creation of an international alliance against land grabbing**

Land grabbing is a global phenomenon that has grown even more widespread as a result of the food, climate and financial crises created by the capitalist elites through their own neoliberal policies. Now, those who are responsible for these crises have set their sights on the world's land and natural resources in a new phase of capitalist expansion aimed at total control of the planet's natural wealth.

Land grabbing is aligned with the large-scale industrial development model that has already caused countless negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems. This is essentially a struggle between the industrial model versus the peasant and indigenous model. It is a struggle to defend the basic right to land, to territory, to the ability to produce food; a struggle to defend the right to food sovereignty.

This is what led La Via Campesina to organize a historic conference in Nyéleni, Mali, where some 300 participants gathered to share experiences of land grabbing in different parts of the world. From here they also launched a call for the creation of a Global Alliance Against Land Grabbing. We invite you to read the conference declaration and join in the call for an end to land grabbing:

### **Conference Declaration:**

#### **Stop Land-Grabbing Now!**

We, women and men peasants, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and their allies, who gathered together in Nyeleni from 17-19 November 2011, have come from across the world for the first time to share with each other our experiences and struggles against land-grabbing. One year ago we supported the Kolongo Appeal from peasant organizations in Mali, who have taken the lead in organising local resistance to the take-over of peasants' lands in Africa. Now we came to Nyeleni in response to the Dakar Appeal, which calls for a global alliance against land-grabbing. For we are determined to defend food sovereignty, the commons and the rights of small scale food providers to natural resources.

In Mali, the Government has committed to give away 800 thousand hectares of land to business investors. These are lands of communities that have belonged to them for generations, even centuries, while the Malian State has only existed since the 1960's. This situation is mirrored in many other countries where customary rights are not recognised. Taking away the lands of communities is a violation of both their customary and historical rights.

Secure access to and control over land and natural resources are inextricably linked to the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several regional and international human rights treaties, such as the rights to self-determination, an adequate standard of living, housing, food, health, culture, property and participation. We note with grave concern that states are not meeting their obligations in this regard and putting the interests of business interests above the rights of peoples.

Land-grabbing is a global phenomenon led by local, national and transnational elites

and investors, and governments with the aim of controlling the world's most precious resources. The global financial, food and climate crises have triggered a rush among investors and wealthy governments to acquire and capture land and natural resources, since these are the only "safe havens" left that guarantee secure financial returns. Pension and other investment funds have become powerful actors in land-grabbing, while wars continue to be waged to seize control over natural wealth. The World Bank and regional development banks are facilitating land and water grabs by promoting corporate-friendly policies and laws, facilitating capital and guarantees for corporate investors, and fostering an extractive, destructive economic development model. The World Bank, IFAD, FAO and UNCTAD have proposed seven principles that legitimise farmland grabbing by corporate and state investors. Led by some of the world's largest transnational corporations, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) aims to transform peasant agriculture into industrial agriculture and integrate smallholder farmers to global value chains, greatly increasing their vulnerability to land-loss.

Land-grabbing goes beyond traditional North-South imperialist structures; transnational corporations can be based in the United States, Europe, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea, among others. It is also a crisis in both rural and urban areas. Land is being grabbed in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe for industrial agriculture, forest plantations, mining, infrastructure projects, dams, tourism, conservation parks, industry, urban expansion and military purposes. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are being expelled from their territories by armed forces, increasing their vulnerability and in some cases even leading to slavery. Market based, false solutions to climate change are creating more ways to alienate local communities from their lands and natural resources.

Despite the fact that women produce most of the world's food, and are responsible for family and community well being, existing patriarchal structures continue to dispossess women from the lands that they cultivate and their rights to resources. Since most peasant women do not have secure, legally recognised land rights, they are particularly vulnerable to evictions.

The fight against land-grabbing is a fight against capitalism, neoliberalism and a destructive economic model. Through testimonies from our sisters and brothers in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda, we learned how land-grabbing threatens small scale, family based farming, nature, the environment and food sovereignty. Land grabbing displaces and dislocates communities, destroys local economies and the social-cultural fabric, and jeopardizes the identities of communities, be they farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, workers, dalits or indigenous peoples. Those who stand up for their rights are beaten, jailed and killed. There is no way to mitigate the impacts of this economic model and the power structures that promote it. Our lands are not for sale or lease.

But we are not defeated. Through organisation, mobilisation and community cohesiveness, we have been able to stop land-grabbing in many places.



Furthermore, our societies are recognising that small-scale, family based agriculture and food production is the most socially, economically and environmentally sustainable model of using resources and ensuring the right to food for all.

Recalling the Dakar Appeal, we reiterate our commitment to resist land-grabbing by all means possible, to support all those who fight land-grabs, and to put pressure on national governments and international institutions to fulfill their obligations to ensure and uphold the rights of peoples. Specifically, we commit to:

*Organise rural and urban communities against land-grabs in every form.*

*Strengthen the capacities of our communities and movements to reclaim and defend our rights, lands and resources.*

*Win and secure the rights of women in our communities to land and natural resources.*

*Create public awareness about how land grabbing is creating crises for all society.*

*Build alliances across different sectors, constituencies, regions, and mobilise our societies to stop land-grabbing*

*Strengthen our movements to achieve and promote food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reform*

In order to meet the above commitments, we will develop the following actions:

On capacity building for organising local resistance

- Report back to our communities the deliberations and commitments of this Conference.
- Build our own databases about land-grabbing by documenting cases, and gathering the needed information and evidence about processes, actors, impacts, etc.
- Ensure that our communities have the information they need about laws, rights, companies, contracts, etc., so that they can resist more effectively the business investors and governments who try to take their lands and natural resources.
- Set up early warning systems to alert communities to risks and threats.
- Strengthen our communities through political and technical training, and restore our pride in being food producers and providers particularly among the youth.
- Secure land and resource rights for women by conscientising our communities and movements about the importance of respecting and protecting women's land rights particularly in customary systems.
- Develop and use local media to organise members of our and other communities, and share with them information about land-grabbing.
- Make our leaders abide by the rules set by our communities and compel them to

be accountable to us, and our communities and organisations.

On using legal aid for our defense

- Develop our own systems of legal aid and liaise with legal and human rights experts.
- Condemn all forms of violence and criminalisation of our struggles and our mobilizations in defense of our rights.
- Work for the immediate release of all those jailed as a result of their struggles for their lands and territories, and urgently develop campaigns of solidarity with all those facing conflicts.

On advocacy and mobilization

- Institutionalise April 17 as the day of global mobilisation against land-grabbing; also identify additional appropriate dates that can be used for such mobilisations to defend land and the commons.
- Develop our political arguments to expose and discredit the economic model that spurs land-grabbing, and the various actors and initiatives that promote and legitimise it.
- Establish a Peoples' Observatory on land-grabbing to facilitate and centralise data gathering, communications, planning actions, advocacy, research and analysis, etc.
- Promote women's land rights through targeted re-distribution of land for women, and other actions; make laws and policies responsive to the particular needs of women.
- Take our messages and demands to parliaments, governments and international institutions. Continue engaging with the Committee on World Food Security and demanding that processes such as the FAO Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forest truly contribute to protect and promote the rights to land and natural resources of small scale food providers.
- Identify and target local, national and international spaces for actions, mobilizations and building broad-based societal resistance to land-grabbing.
- Plan actions that target corporations, (including financial corporations), the World Bank and other multilateral development banks that benefit from, drive and promote land and natural resource grabs. Maintain opposition to schemes of corporate self-regulation such as RAI.
- Expand and strengthen our actions to achieve food sovereignty and agrarian reform, to promote the recognition of customary systems while ensuring the rights of women and to ensure the rights to land and natural resources of the youth.
- Support peoples' enclosures of their resources through land occupations, occupations of the offices of corporate investors, protests and other actions to

reclaim their commons.

- Demand that our governments fulfill their human rights obligations, immediately stop land and natural resource transfers to business investors, cancel contracts already made, reconstitute the grabbed lands and protect rural and urban communities from ongoing and future land-grabs.

On alliance building

- Build strong organisational networks and alliances at various levels--local, regional and international--building on the Dakar Appeal and with small-scale food producers/providers at the centre of these alliances.
- Build alliances with members of pension schemes in order to prevent pension fund managers from investing in projects that result in land grabbing.
- Build strategic alliances with press and media, so that they report accurately our messages and realities; counter the prejudices spread by the mainstream media about the land struggles and land reform in Zimbabwe.

We call all organizations committed to these principles and actions to join our Global Alliance against Land-Grabbing, which we solemnly launch today here in Nyeleni.

### **Globalize the struggle! Globalize hope!**

Nyeleni, November 19, 2011”

To join the call go to: <http://www.dakarappeal.org>

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#### **- From Durban: Call for a Moratorium on REDD+**

Real action to face climate change has once again been blocked by the world's polluters. The 17th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN COP17) in Durban ended with the launching of a new round of negotiations (the Durban Platform) aimed at a new regime. The decision represents a crime against humanity as long as postponing action to 2020 allows global temperatures to increase 4 degrees Celsius, based on the promises for emission reductions, made by industrial countries in Cancun for the period 2012-2020.

In spite of a lack of action to come to a binding emission reduction agreement, many efforts once again were made in Durban to push for REDD+ as a way to move forward.

Indigenous Peoples participating in the UNFCCC negotiations, organized under the Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities against REDD and for Life Forms have called for a moratorium on REDD+. They highlighted that “the

sources of financing for REDD+ carbon offsets come from the private sector and carbon markets, which extractive industries are involved in. Carbon markets and REDD+ convert our territories and forests into carbon dumps, while those most responsible for the climate crisis do not commit to legally binding reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and continue to make profits. The World Bank itself has reported that the “financial flows required for climate stabilization and adaptation, will in the long run be mainly private in composition.”

REDD – coupled with Clean Development Mechanism – might allow industrialized countries “to offset 24-69% of their emissions ... thus avoiding the necessary domestic cuts that are required to peak emissions around 2015”, as the Director of NASA, James Hansen has acknowledged.

The majority of the forests of the world are found in the land and territories of indigenous peoples and the group denounces that REDD+ -as well as the CDM- promotes the privatization and commodification of forests, trees and air through carbon markets and offsets, “a hypocrisy that will not stop global warming” and which could result in the biggest land grab of all time.

The call for a moratorium is based upon the precautionary principle which says that, “when an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not established scientifically.” A growing number of recent reports provides evidence that “Indigenous Peoples are being subjected to violations of their rights as a result of the implementation of REDD+-type policies and programs, including the right to life of objectors to REDD+, forced displacements and involuntary resettlement, the loss of lands, territories and resources, means of subsistence, food sovereignty and security, and the imposition of so-called “alternative livelihoods” that lead to separation of our people from their communities, cultures y traditional knowledge. Similarly, our rights to free, prior and informed consent, self-determination and autonomy consecrated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIPs) are also violated. It is worth noting that the United Nations itself recognizes that REDD+ could result in the “lock-up of forests”.”

REDD+ not only harms Indigenous Peoples and local communities, but also damages the environment promoting industrial tree plantations - which may include planting genetically modified trees – that under perverse incentives are replacing native forests thus increasing deforestation.

While biotic carbon – the carbon stored in forests – can never be the climatic equivalent to fossilized carbon kept underground, carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels adds to the overall burden of carbon perpetually circulating between the atmosphere, vegetation, soils and oceans. This inequivalence, among many other complexities, makes REDD carbon accounting impossible, warns the declaration.

“REDD+ is undermining the climate regime and violating the principle of common but differentiated responsibility established under the UNFCCC. Pollution credits generated by REDD+ obstruct the only workable solution to climate change: keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground,” concludes the statement.

The call of the Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities against REDD and for Life Forms can be read at <http://climate-connections.org/?p=12488&preview=true>

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## **- Mega-projects and the criminalization of struggles to defend people's rights in India and Honduras**

Since December is the month in which International Human Rights Day is commemorated, we feel it is urgent to highlight the cases of two communities in countries that seem very distant from one another and yet have a great deal in common. In Honduras and India, these communities have been struggling for years against the new form of colonialism represented by powerful economic groups connected with oil palm plantations and the iron and steel industry, respectively.

Based on a large-scale, extractivist, export-oriented industrial model, these companies are responsible for human rights violations in the communities where they have set up operations. Earning profits is more important than anything else, and this justifies the use of any means to silence the voices of resistance in order to achieve large-scale production for export to countries on the global market that consume large quantities of palm oil, iron and steel.

Whether they are national or international, steel companies or agricultural enterprises, they arrive with promises of development, well-being and employment for the community, but it does not take long for the reality of these capitalist enterprises to come to light, which has nothing to do with the promises made or the interests of the local communities.

Local communities react by organizing, seeking information, denouncing irregularities, demanding respect for their right to their land and territory – their means of survival and sustenance – and fighting back not only against the appropriation and destruction of ecosystems, but also the violation of human rights.

Faced with this opposition to their operations, the companies are swift to respond. With government backing, they criminalize local community movements through threats, news stories discrediting local community leaders or the denunciations made by these movements, prison sentences for unspecified causes, unfair trials, police and/or military repression, and sometimes even murder.

*India: Leader of the anti-POSCO movement kidnapped by Orissa state authorities*

South Korea's Pohang Steel Company (POSCO) has plans to build a steel plant with a production capacity of four million tons in the state of Orissa in eastern India, for which it needs some 1,500 hectares of land (see WRM Bulletins 147, 155, 157 and 163).

Of this total, 1,200 hectares are forest land, and the company is currently negotiating with the Orissa state government for authorization to deforest the area to make way for the plant. According to the government, "only" 60 hectares are private land. What

it fails to mention is that this “only” represents two communities that are home to 600 families, who would be displaced.

For a number of years, a local movement of fisherfolk and peasant farmers in the communities of Dinkia and Gobindpur has been fighting back against the attempts of the government of Orissa, and the multinational POSCO, to turn these lands over to the iron ore mining and steel plant project, which would include the construction of a highway to provide access to the plant.

Although the government claims that the land acquisition process has been peaceful, protestors and activists maintain that the government has coerced them into giving in by deploying a huge number of police officers in the area. Abhay Sahoo, one of the leaders of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS, which means Group to Resist POSCO), wonders why the government is so upset over obstacles to this project. The local communities are defending their vibrant economy based on betel, fish and rice production, which would allow them to ensure the well-being of future generations "without any such project, which promises only to destroy everything around us," Sahoo told the IPS news agency (see <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56216>).

As a consequence of this opposition, Sahoo was arrested in late November near the proposed site of the steel plant and is currently being held in preventive custody, after a request for bail was denied. This is happening after the inhabitants of Dinkia and Gobindpur heroically resisted – in the blistering heat of summer and for more than two months – the attacks of the police, drawing the entire country's attention to the threat to their prosperous local economy and ecosystems. It is also taking place in the context of denunciations made to the Ministry of the Environment regarding the authorization for the company to clear forests for the project, which they consider immoral and contrary to their wishes – referring to a recent bill that requires the consent of 80% of the population.

The situation recently became even more dramatic, when more than 500 armed men – a sort of private militia – backed by the police and the government came in to break up a non-violent demonstration organized by the PPSS, in which 2,000 people, including men, women and children, formed a human barricade by lying on the ground to prevent the company from entering the area. The militia attacked the protesters with bombs and guns, injuring at least eight people, including one woman who was seriously wounded.

The communities of Dinkia and Gobindpur need our solidarity. The repression of the PPSS movement, the arrest of movement leader Abhay Sahoo, and the attack on the peaceful demonstration by these two communities deserve the condemnation of the international community, as does the POSCO mega-project: in addition to being socially unjust and economically destructive, it is responsible for the violation of human rights in Orissa. (A sample letter to the government and Human Rights Commission of India is available here: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/India/letter12-2011.html>).

*Honduras: Urgent call for solidarity with the Bajo Aguán Campesino Movement*

The Campesino Movement of Bajo Aguán, in northern Honduras, recently published an open letter which declares: "The Massacre in Bajo Aguán Must Be Stopped Urgently!" In addition to sounding an alarm over the extreme situation in the region, the letter is also a call for support from the international community, including peoples, governments and institutions (see <http://movimientocampesinodelaguan.blogspot.com/2011/11/llamamiento-urgente-de-solidaridad-con.html>).

The people of Bajo Aguán live in constant danger, with "a military and police presence which has recently increased significantly – a presence which has been repeatedly blamed for its role in the repression," the letter states.

"The seriousness of the problem was highlighted on October 24, at the 143rd Period of Sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which noted the increase in murders – 42 members of campesino organizations were murdered between September 2009 and October 2011 – persecutions, threats and intimidation of 3,500 campesino families demanding their right to land and food, and who find themselves completely defenceless when confronted with the criminal repression and plunder by the Honduran oligarchy, primarily associated with oil palm production in this region and closely linked with the political regime installed after the 2009 coup. In addition to these murders, there are legal proceedings against more than 160 campesinos – as of July 2011 – forced evictions, and the destruction of the homes and livelihoods of entire villages.

"According to the reports and public statements available, over 600,000 of the country's families are landless, and the Honduran state has no agrarian strategy to deal with this serious social problem. The land conflict in Honduras became more polarized as a result of the 1992 Agricultural Modernization Law, which allowed the existing limits on land tenure to be exceeded, leading to enormous plantations in Bajo Aguán concentrated in the hands of large landowners such as Miguel Facussé, Reynaldo Canales and René Morales Carazo," the letter reports.

In an interview with Rel-UITA, a local campesino leader stressed, "Campesino families are demanding land because they have nothing to eat. We need to grow our own food and also to contribute to the local and national economy. Monoculture plantations are one of the reasons that has led us to this land conflict, and we cannot continue to perpetuate this model." (See "Palma africana y derechos humanos. El agua y el aceite" at [http://www.rel-uita.org/agricultura/palma\\_africana/index.htm](http://www.rel-uita.org/agricultura/palma_africana/index.htm))

The open letter notes that "while death and terror continue to sweep through the fields of Bajo Aguán, and the regime criminalizes the campesino struggle and intensifies the militarization of the area, its leader, Porfirio Lobo, assures the world that the peace and reconciliation process in the country is making progress, thereby securing the reintegration of the State of Honduras into the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international bodies as an active member with full voting rights. At the same time, free rein is given to ambitious plans for investment, indebtedness and occupation of the country's territory, in order to increase the plundering and depredation. Far from achieving this peace and reconciliation, the Honduran people are suffering the impacts of a system which has collapsed."

“Beginning in June of this year, with the involvement of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the United States and others, and justified by a new Central American Regional Security Initiative which is supposedly aimed at more effectively combating the drug trade and other forms of organized crime, strong support and increased supplies are being provided precisely to those sectors most implicated in these crimes. This new transnationalization of a very peculiar concept of security, always under US control, already has many precedents in the country and the region, including the ‘security chapter’ incorporated into NAFTA, whose results in Mexico can be clearly seen. We also cannot ignore its links with policies for investment, indebtedness and territorial control, under which, in the Bajo Aguán and Garífuna coastal areas, among other parts of Honduras, there are efforts to impose projects for ‘greenwashed’ land grabbing – ‘renewable energy’, ‘ecological reforestation’ and ‘sustainable tourism’ – despite the opposition of local populations whose means of livelihood are increasingly threatened.”

Among other requests, the open letter calls on the Organization of American States to urgently designate a verification commission for the situation in Bajo Aguán, with the support of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). It also urges “international financial institutions, investors and international ‘donors’ to suspend all operations that affect the region, until their necessity and legitimacy are confirmed from the perspective of the rights of the affected communities.”

With regard to the Honduran authorities, the letter demands that they respect their commitments to the international community, by upholding human rights, ending the criminalization of campesino movements, stopping forced evictions, preventing the advance of agribusiness at the expense of food and territorial sovereignty, and demilitarizing the region.

We call on the international community to offer their solidarity to the Honduran people and to remain alert to the highly dangerous situation in Honduras and particularly the Bajo Aguán region.

These two cases are representative of many others in Latin America, Africa and Asia, where those responsible for imposing a large-scale, extractivist industrial model and promoting excessive consumption in line with the rules of global capitalism respond with criminalization, repression, militarization and death to those who refuse to surrender their land, territories, culture and traditional forms of production to a ferocious commodification of nature.

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### **- Human rights crisis in palm oil estates in Indonesia**

A new report published in November 2011, exposes how local police in the Province of Jambi on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, working with oil palm plantation staff, systematically evicted people from three settlements, firing guns to scare them off and then using heavy machinery to destroy their dwellings and bulldoze concrete floors into the nearby creeks. The operations were carried out over a week in mid-August and have already sparked an international controversy.



Andiko, Executive Director of the Indonesian community rights NGO, HuMa said:

*Forced evictions at gun point and the destruction of the homes of men, women and children without warning or a court order constitute serious abuses of human rights and are contrary to police norms. The company must now make reparations but individual perpetrators should also be investigated and punished in accordance with the law.*

The operations occurred in August 2011 in the 20,000 hectare oil palm concession of PT Asiatic Persada, a 51%-owned subsidiary of the Wilmar Group. Singapore-based Wilmar is represented on the Executive Board of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and as well as holding over 600,000 ha. of plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia, has expansion plans in other continents, is the world's largest palm oil trader and has processing facilities in Sumatra and Europe. Abetnego Tarigan, Executive Director of the Indonesian NGO, SawitWatch, which is also a board member of the RSPO, stated:

*Frankly we are very disappointed. We expect leading members of the RSPO to scrupulously adhere to the agreed standard which includes respecting people's customary rights and resolving disputes. RSPO member companies should pro-actively reach out to communities and not resort to the heavy-handed tactics of past eras.*

As detailed in the report, underlying the present problems is a long-standing land conflict with the local communities whose lands were taken over by the oil palm plantation without recognising their rights, without compensation and without their consent. Wilmar, which took over the plantation in 2006, has refused to recognise the communities' land claims or offer them smallholdings within its concession instead offering them shares in a 50/50 1000 ha joint venture further west. Some community members, who did join this scheme, have since repudiated it claiming it has brought them few benefits and further conflicts.

The Forest Peoples Programme, which coordinated the field investigation, notes that the NGOs have now filed a third complaint about Wilmar with the International Finance Corporation's Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO). The previous complaints led to the suspension of all World Bank funding to the palm oil sector worldwide. Currently the CAO still has an ongoing process to mediate the disputes between Wilmar subsidiaries and the communities. However, in Jambi, these efforts broke down in June this year.

The CAO has now agreed to look again into the complaint, and the company, some community representatives, local government and some local NGOs have also agreed to the CAO mediating the dispute. Meanwhile, however, the dispute remains unresolved and other activists, impatient with the slow progress, recently took their complaints to Germany where, with the help of German NGOs, they demonstrated outside palm oil processing facilities in Hamburg. The German NGOs have called on Unilever, one of the world's largest users of palm oil, to cease trading with Wilmar.

SawitWatch, the Indonesian NGO which monitors the palm oil sector has, through its own network, catalogued 663 cases of land conflicts between communities and oil

palm plantations in Indonesia. The National Land Agency of the Government of Indonesia has admitted that there are some 3,500 such cases on its own books.

Underlying these desperate disputes is the problem that, contrary to Indonesia's international human rights obligations, national laws only weakly recognise the customary rights of rural communities. Less than 40% of all land holdings in Indonesia have been titled. Despite being the third most populous country in the world the Government treats over 80% of the national territory as State land and liberally hands areas out to companies for logging, mining and plantations without community consent. Academic studies show that the deals offered to local people by the oil palm companies are worse today than during the dictatorship of President Suharto. The United Nations human rights treaty bodies have repeatedly brought these issues to the attention of the Indonesian government urging the reform of laws to recognise indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights. The Indonesian Government however has not even replied to the UN, apparently ignoring its responsibilities to protect the rights of its citizens.

A wider regional review of palm oil expansion in South East Asia, also published by Forest Peoples Programme and SawitWatch in November, shows that where community rights are ill-protected and law enforcement weak oil palm continues to expand through large 'land grabs', leading to conflict, repression and further human rights abuses. The same pattern can be seen in Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and even in Papua New Guinea. Where farmers' lands are more secure, however, as in lowland Thailand, the crop is being chosen by smallholders who can independently market their produce on terms of their choosing, leading to better outcomes for local people. The study also shows that such expansion in South East Asia is not only being driven by global demand for palm oil, which is expanding exponentially, but also by national policies to develop the crop to serve local markets, save foreign exchange and promote energy security.

In December, a regional meeting of the national human rights commissions of South East Asia was convened by the Indonesian Human Rights Commission, KOMNASHAM, to examine these problems. The conference issued the 'Bali Declaration on Human Rights and Agribusiness' which calls on South East Asian States to secure the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples, including their right to food, and establish stronger frameworks to oblige companies to respect human rights.

Links:

For copies of the new report on the human rights abuses in Jambi, Indonesia, see: <http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/11/final-report-pt-ap-nov-2011-low-res-1.pdf>

For a detailed overview of the human rights problems in the palm oil sector in both Malaysia and Indonesia see: [http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2010/08/palmoilindigenouspeoplesoutheastasiafinalmceng\\_0.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2010/08/palmoilindigenouspeoplesoutheastasiafinalmceng_0.pdf)

For the new report on palm oil expansion in SE Asia:

<http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/11/oil-palm-expansion-southeast-asia-2011-low-res.pdf>

For the Bali Declaration see:

<http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/12/final-bali-declaration-adopted-1-dec-2011.pdf>

For information on the protest action in Germany see:

<http://www.regenwald.org/news/palmoel/3933/tagliche-news-zu-dem-indonesier-besuch-die-indonesier-in-deutschland>

This article was compiled by Marcus Colchester of the Forest Peoples Programme

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### **- Climate, human rights and forests in Thailand**

In Thailand, indigenous communities have been and continue to be threatened to be expelled from their traditional territories as a result of the implementation of the country's REDD+ policy. This human rights violation is due to the fact that communities have been accused of contributing to the climate crisis because they would deforest, they would destroy natural resources and they would cause forest fires, all activities that result in carbon emissions. At the same time, they use not to be consulted when this type of analysis and, based on this, policies are being formulated.

To challenge this vision and policy, a study has been carried out with the indigenous Karen community of HuayHin Lad in Wieng Pa Pao district in the Chiang Rai province, a community threatened itself to be expelled because of being located in a national park. Their traditional ways of using and relating with the forest was studied, including the potential and capacity of community forests to absorb greenhouse gases, in comparison to the emissions of greenhouse gases by the community's activities.

The conclusion of this study was that the way of life and doing agriculture of highland peoples in Thailand not only does not contribute adversely to climate change, but "the traditional livelihood practices of these peoples are helping to balance the ecological system, effectively mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and maintain a sustainable food security".

It showed that the shifting agriculture practice of the community causes few carbon emissions, because it is a self-sufficient system, it does not use any chemical input so it has minimal expenses, and it is able to guarantee food security of the community throughout the year because of different harvesting periods. The community prefers the locally produced food instead of buying industrially processed food. This all contributes to a very low ecological footprint and the result that annual carbon emissions in the community are only 0.08% of the carbon stored in the community area.

Another important factor that influences the way the community deals with their forest

is the fact that the utilization of the natural resources and food consumption of the community are all guided by their traditional ways of dealing with their environment, based on beliefs, wisdom and regulations collectively established. For example, cutting a tree is a collectively decided process, guided by several rules.

The findings of the study reinforce the need to respect the rights of highlands peoples to sustainable natural resource management, in accordance with the Thai constitution. And also, the study shows how necessary it is that indigenous peoples are consulted and can fully participate in the formulation of policies relating to climate change.

This interesting study also shows how much people, including governments, can learn from this and other communities in tropical forest areas worldwide about the responsible use of natural resources, about how to live well and in harmony with these resources without causing negative impacts for the climate and environment in general. The results of this case study are also a clear message to policy makers in Thailand and in many tropical forest countries not to take people out of the forests because they are not responsible for forest destruction. On the contrary, they are key actors in the struggle for forest conservation.

Based on: 'Climate Change, Trees and Livelihood: A case study on the carbon footprint of a Karen Community in Northern Thailand,' written by Northern Development Foundation and the HuayHin Lad community.

[http://ccmin.aippnet.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=350&Itemid=159](http://ccmin.aippnet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=350&Itemid=159)

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## PEOPLE IN ACTION

### **- Dutch pension fund denounced for investing in monoculture tree plantations in Mozambique**

On December 3, 2011, a front page article in the Dutch newspaper Volkskrant, denounced that the Dutch pension fund, ABP, one of the biggest in the world, is investing money through the Global Solidarity Forest Fund (GSFF), an initiative of Swedish and Norwegian Churches, in a monoculture tree plantation project of pine and eucalyptus in Mozambique that is affecting negatively peasant communities (see WRM publication of 2010: [www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Mozambique/livro.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Mozambique/livro.pdf)).

In the recent article in the newspaper, the Provincial Union of Peasants in Niassa affirms: "We do not understand why church institutions and other investment funds are putting money in projects which are exploiting the poorest of the poor".

ABP admits that there are problems but claims that management now has changed and things are improving. Unnecessary to say that we will continue to monitor, together with the National Union of Peasants (UNAC) in Mozambique, member of the Via Campesina, how the situation will develop in the context of increasing landgrabbing in Africa by foreign companies and investment funds.

In Mozambique about 80% of the population lives from agriculture and peasants suffer from little support to improve their food security and sovereignty. Expansion of tree plantations over agricultural lands makes life more difficult for rural communities and therefore has caused strong opposition from these communities.

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### **- Disaster foretold for the extreme south, south and southwest of the state of Bahia**

Governor Jacques Wagner and Environment Secretary Eugênio Spengler are preparing to give the people of the extreme south, south and southwest regions of the state of Bahia a SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT on December 21. The news has been leaked that regardless of the shortcomings of the corresponding EIA/RIMA (Environmental Impact Study/Environmental Impact Report), authorization will be granted for the expansion planned by Veracel Celulose. Although the EIA/RIMA contains numerous errors, this will pose no impediment. Although the local population has voiced a resounding NO to the company's expansion plans at public hearings, all that is needed is the signature of Mr. Eugênio Spengler

Countless errors, ranging from spelling and grammatical to methodological and conceptual, characterize the so-called Veracel II RIMA. The use of simple language required for the drafting of these reports seems to have been used to justify omissions, serious inaccuracies, and vague and generic terminology. More than 100 pages are devoted to the analysis of tables and figures referring to data on municipalities in the project's area of influence. The technical specialists deliberately omit an analysis of the project itself and its relations with the surrounding area and instead present lists of agricultural, demographic and educational data for the 17 municipalities that comprise the direct area of influence of the project. It is only at the end of the report, in the last 25 pages, that they provide a brief and sketchy description of the project's impacts and a few mitigation measures.

The clearly propagandistic style of the report is striking. For example, phrases like "Veracel uses environmentally friendly technology" or "the sustainability of the enterprise" are scattered throughout the report, to the point where this environmental impact report sounds more like the company's annual sustainability report or an elaborate piece of marketing.

As a result, the fate of the area's small farmers, landless rural workers, traditional communities, etc. has now been sealed. Ongoing conflicts and those that will undoubtedly erupt are completely ignored. We are destined to continue on the path determined by a "development" model based on the exploitation of natural resources and people, compromising food security and denying the human rights of groups and communities. For the government of the state of Bahia, all that matters is guaranteeing profits for a small group of shareholders, including BNDES, Aracruz Celulose (now Fibria) and Stora Enso!

8 December 2011

### **- Call for the mobilization and coordination of struggles towards Río+20 and beyond**

From June 18 to 23, 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil will host the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), commemorating 20 years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, better known as the Earth Summit or Rio '92.

This historic meeting marked the beginning of the movement to compel the industrialized countries to accept their responsibility – also historic – for climate change. This in turn led to the popular struggles for the recognition of the industrialized North's environmental and climate debt to the countries of the South, inverting the logic of the prevailing view of “debt”, which was limited to the financial debts owed by the governments of the South to the countries of the North and the financial institutions that they control.

However, these developments were accompanied by an accelerated process of the commodification of life and nature, through false solutions both to climate change – in the form of carbon markets – and to biodiversity loss – in the form of so-called innovative financial mechanisms.

“Given this reality, we need to turn Río+20 into a strong process of global mobilization that confronts the reality of a system of death that will stop at nothing to perpetuate itself, and strengthens our resistance and struggles for survival through the building of non-capitalist alternatives, such as food sovereignty,” declare the organizations, networks and social movements involved in the building of the “Peoples' Summit for social and environmental justice, against the commodification of life and nature in defense of the commons”, to be held at the same time and in the same city as Río+20.

The organizers of the summit call on “peoples and movements struggling against all forms of exploitation, depredation and domination, to join with us in building the Permanent Peoples' Assembly, in order to affirm our rights and those of nature against the commodification of life and the greenwashing of capitalism, under the rhetoric of the ‘green economy’.”

To add your support to the initiative, contact the organizers through [movilizacion.rio20@gmail.com](mailto:movilizacion.rio20@gmail.com). The full text of the call for mobilization is available here: [http://wrm.org.uy/RIO+20/Mobilize\\_together.html](http://wrm.org.uy/RIO+20/Mobilize_together.html)

