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#### OUR VIEWPOINT

- [Invasive alien species: More than a technical issue](#)

The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSSTA) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will hold its thirteenth meeting in Rome from 18 to 22 February 2008.

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In the meeting's agenda there are two items of extreme importance for WRM's concerns: forest biodiversity and invasive alien species. Though they will be treated separately (the former by the full meeting and the latter by a working group), we believe that they are inextricably linked.

Invasive alien species are a major cause of biodiversity loss in forests and other ecosystems, but the issue of invasive alien tree plantation species is rarely mentioned or addressed, in spite of the fact that some species of eucalyptus, pines and acacias have already become invasive in many countries (e.g. in South Africa, Chile, USA, Uruguay and others).

Although there are many definitions about the meaning of the concept "alien invasive species", perhaps the most accepted one defines them as non-indigenous species that adversely affect the habitats they invade economically, environmentally or ecologically.

For any "adversely affected habitat" it doesn't matter much how the invasion occurred: if the wind, water, birds or animals brought in the seeds of plant species that later spread spontaneously in that habitat or if those species were introduced by plantation companies and resulted in adverse economic, environmental or ecological effects.

In line with the above, all large-scale, monoculture, alien tree plantations are considered to be invasive by local communities whose habitats –and therefore also livelihoods- are negatively affected by such plantations. Because of the impacts on biodiversity resulting from the large scale planting of alien species as monocultures, they should also be addressed as dangerous invasive alien species by the Convention on Biodiversity.

In that respect, the SBSSTA experts should raise and answer the basic question: does such type of alien tree plantation adversely affect the habitats they invade or not? In case they do, it is clear that from a biodiversity conservation perspective they should be banned in the same way as trade in seeds and plants of other invasive species (e.g. *Lantana camara*, *Solanum mauritianum*) has been prohibited in many countries.

Similar questions should be raised and answered regarding genetically engineered trees. Is there a risk that they could adversely affect habitats economically, environmentally or ecologically? Could they spread spontaneously? Could their pollen pollute other species? If the answer to these questions is positive, then the COP8 decision urging to apply the Precautionary Principle should be upgraded to a total ban on the release of GE trees.

Though plantation species can spread spontaneously through wind, water, birds or animals –and the same can happen with GE trees- plantations themselves do not simply occur. Neither does research on GE trees. Both are the result of corporate decisions aimed at increasing their profits.

In that light, if we look at the biodiversity issue from a political and economic perspective, it is clear that transnational corporations are the most dangerous invasive alien species of all. As their natural invasive counterparts do, they invade lands and forests and destroy habitats that provided the means of living to countless other species and to local people.

In this bulletin (and many more can be found in the previous 125 issues), there are sufficient examples to prove the above: mining corporations in India, Congo, Bangladesh; pulp and paper corporations in Chile and the USA; oil and logging corporations in Ecuador; palm oil corporations in Indonesia; polluting corporations in Zimbabwe. All of them are invading and destroying biodiversity-rich habitats and local peoples' livelihoods.

However, we don't expect SBSSTA to address that fundamental issue. What we do expect is something more in line with its mandate as advisory body to the CBD:

- that it adopts a definition of forests that excludes large scale plantations as such
- that it urges the CBD to recommend governments to halt the expansion of large scale monocultures of alien tree species
- that it recommends the CBD to ban the plantation of tree species that have already proven to be invasive
- that it recommends the CBD to ban GE trees

Those would be very positive outcomes from this SBSSTA meeting for both people and biodiversity.

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## COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

### - Bangladesh: Resistance against coal open-pit mine in Phulbari

In August 2006, Phulbari, a town located in the Dinajpur district, witnessed the killing of five persons at the hands of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) during a massive rally against the controversial open pit coal-digging project supervised by UK-based Asia Energy. More hundreds were injured among a crowd of some 50,000 people opposing a coal open-pit mine which would cover an area with more than a hundred villages of seven unions in four Upazilas —Phulbari, Birampur, Nawabganj and Parbatipur— and part of Phulbari Sadar Upazila, under Dinajpur district.

The mine would not only affect at least 17,000 hectares across four sub-districts displacing at least 50,000 people but also create a thousand-foot deep hollow in order to reach the layer of the coal (that after 30 years of digging will contain toxic substances), dewater the mine during the entire lifetime of the project so that the hollow of the mine does not get immersed in water, cause noise pollution by regular dynamite explosion and permanent trucks and trains traffic, air pollution by coal dust, water pollution from washing of the coal, and threaten the Sundarbans.

Phillip Gain explains (1) that the coal will be carried to the deep seaport through the Sundarbans (the largest mangrove forest on earth) for which a new seaport and railroads need to be built. The noise and water pollution already created by the Mongla Port that harms the animals, plants and other life forms in the mangrove forest will be increased by the added transportation over the 30 years of the mine's lifetime.

The 2006 massive protests that went on several days brought the small town to a halt blocking a major highway that passes through it. Eventually, the government made an agreement with the people pledging to withdraw Asia Energy, and prohibit open pit mining in Bangladesh.

A draft coal policy is being considered now by the government which though prohibits exports, is being challenged by the people, who accuse the interim government of betraying the spirit of their movement as long as it does however allow open-pit mining as a pilot project, which according to insiders could well be the Phulbari coal mine.

A documentary film on the Phulbari resistance titled "The Blood Soaked Banner of Phulbari" can be seen online at <http://banglapraxis.wordpress.com/2008/01/09/documentary-film-the-blood-soaked-banner-of-phulbari/>

Article based on: "Residents of Phulbari apprehensive of coal policy", The New Age, January 2008, <http://banglapraxis.wordpress.com/2008/01/09/residents-of-phulbari-apprehensive-of-coal-policy/>; (1)"Killings in Phulbari Ignite Unstoppable Protest: Local Communities Stand Strong against Open Cut Mining", Philip Gain, SEHD, <http://www.sehd.org/phulbari/enreport2.html>

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## - Congo, Democratic Republic: The looting war

Front-page articles in mainstream newspapers and magazines have pictured Congo's crisis along the "preconceived notion of the 'savage,' 'depraved' African", said Maurice Carney and Carrie Crawford, from Friends of the Congo (FOTC), in their article "Casualties in the Scramble for Congo's Resources" (at [http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo\\_casualties.php](http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo_casualties.php)). In doing so, "the leading media institutions of the west are complicit in one of the most well documented resource heist of the 20th century and which persists at the dawn of the 21st century."

The authors rightly recall that "The conflict resulting in brutal rapes and ghastly killings are inextricably linked to the looting of the Congo" and that "A lot of the blame for the persistent climate of conflict is often laid on the Hutu militia who fled Rwanda in 1994 pursuant to the genocide in that country. In fact this is just a part of the story, which does not give a complete picture. It is instructive to note that, for all intents and purposes, Rwanda controlled the east of the Congo from 1996 – 2002, a period in which they claimed to be in hot pursuit of the Hutu genocidaires known as the Interhamwe. However during that period, Rwanda's most noted military clash was with Uganda inside the Congo. The source of the clash was over who would control vast diamond concessions in Kinsangi, hundreds of miles away from where the dreaded Hutu genocidaires were situated. Hence, although the Hutu presence in the Congo is an issue, it falls far short of explaining the source of the violence and crimes in the Congo."

The article points out that "As humanitarian groups seek resources to care for the sexually violated and brutalized women and children of the Congo, they should start with those companies that are lined up to purloin billions from Congo's wealth while 80 percent of Congolese live on less than 30 cents per day. Coexisting with the orgy of rapes and killing is what one corporate magnate calls a party. Gerhard Kemp of the Rand Merchant Bank, of Johannesburg, SA is quoted saying 'The Congo is so rich in mineral wealth, you can't just ignore it. You don't want to be the last guy at this party.'"

The article also quotes a 2007 International Crisis Group report saying that "the U.S., Canada, South Africa and Belgium took the lead in seeking to control strategic reserves of copper, cobalt and other minerals and restrict China's access" and that "the U.S. ambassador's public celebration of Phelps-Dodge's [now Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold] acquisition of the Tenke-Fungurume concessions in Katanga in August 2005 and the grandiose June 2006 ceremony in Kolwezi marking the reopening of the Kamoto mine, attended by Belgian, EU, Canadian, French, Angolan and even UN representatives", revealed the main economic interest of Western diplomatic corps allegedly in the Congo to assist a democratic process.

It is worth reproducing a comment from a Congolese reader in Los Angeles regarding the news of a visit paid by Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc.'s CEO to President Joseph Kabila: "Just reinforces what people have said all along about Joseph Kabila; he's only interested in mining companies. The mining companies may bring jobs, may give a little money to the community, but when the sun goes down the only thing the mining companies care about is their shareholders. Joseph Kabila will make sure those shareholders are kept happy while the Congolese that need the same consideration and protection languish in extermination in eastern Congo." (see at [http://www.eacourier.com/articles/2007/10/29/local\\_news/doc47228e6172be8078788651.txt](http://www.eacourier.com/articles/2007/10/29/local_news/doc47228e6172be8078788651.txt))

According to Global Witness, the deal resulted "in Congo owning only 17.5% of its own resources and being in such position that it may even not get any profits from the deal. Nonetheless, the United States government agency, Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) has provided risk insurance for a \$1 billion investment project by Freeport-McMoRan."

The FOTC article deplores that "[a]s a result of the high stakes in Congo's resources, the Congolese people are fighting against enormous odds. The die is literally being set now for a continued impoverishment of Congolese for several generations. The odious contracts will be in place for 30 to 40 years and will be backed by international law.

The World Bank established the Mining and Forestry guidelines in the Congo as early as 2002. These guidelines were fixed on a neo-liberal model, which calls for the selling off of the country's wealth to private interests".

FOTC's article warns: "We may look at what is taking place in the Congo and cringe or cover our eyes but the unsightly picture that is often left out or obfuscated, especially by the mainstream media, is the significant role of the corporations that provide us with our cell phones, game consoles, lap tops and other modern technological devices which benefit from Congo's woes."

The authors conclude, "[s]hould the global community play a constructive role in the Congo, the Congolese people will take care of the rest and produce leaders who represent their interests by bringing reconciliation, justice and prosperity to this vital country in the heart of Africa."

Article based on "Casualties in the Scramble for Congo's Resources", by Maurice Carney and Carrie Crawford, FOTC, December 17, 2007, e-mail: [info@friendsofthecongo.org](mailto:info@friendsofthecongo.org), [http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo\\_casualties.php](http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo_casualties.php)

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### **- India: Illegal aluminium refinery in Tribal lands in Orissa**

India's new Tribal Forest Rights Act came into force in the beginning of 2008. It gives indigenous forest communities rights to continue their forest life. Adivasi communities should not be evicted if they do not agree to be displaced for the establishment of a "critical wildlife habitat" in their area. But still the administration of the forest areas and the corporations often try to displace Adivasi communities, even for mining activities in sanctuary areas.

In the Niyamgiri hills, verified to be appropriate for a sanctuary with an elephant corridor in Kalahandi district of Orissa for example, Vedanta Aluminium corporation (a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources, a British metals and mining company) has planned and prepared bauxite mining and has even built already an illegal aluminium refinery in a nearby area. As a result of local and international pressure, Vedanta's application for mining in this area was rejected by the Supreme Court in November 2007. The Court however proposed a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to take control of the mine. This would be floated by the Orissa state government, with Sterlite (which is also a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources) invited to come on board.

What follows is a report produced in December 2007 by Finnish activist and free-lance journalist Veera Rönkkö about the company's illegal refinery area:

"Before one can even see Vedanta's refinery in Lanjigarh it's presence can be felt, as eyes start to burn and there is an unpleasant feeling in the throat.

The refinery was built on 5th Schedule land (land classified as tribal area due to the high percentage of tribal population). Such land "cannot be transferred to private companies without the consent of the affected tribal peoples." The tribal communities have not given the required written consent to validate the transfer of land to Vedanta, which means that this is a totally illegal operation.

Though forest land was required for the project and since forest clearance requires permission from the Government of India, Vedanta sought the environmental clearance stating that no forest land was required. The Supreme Court Central Empowered Committee regarded this "as a grave breach of laws and regulations" with "the environmental clearance... issued on the wrong basis" and "recommended that the... clearance for the refinery project be revoked and the mining... banned."

In the Gram Sabha (village assembly) meeting where permission was allegedly agreed on, only the district collector (main district government official) was present. The villagers -whose lives would be directly impacted by the refinery- were never consulted and were not even informed about the meeting.

Near the refinery the company has two ponds: the ash-pond and the redmud-pond. The ash-pond is a ghostly site with meters of light grey ash on its shores and from an open pipe more poisonous 'leftovers' are being poured constantly into the water.

The redmud-pond is hidden from the eye by surrounding walls and there is a guard standing by the gate. It is established on the banks of river Vamsdhara with a part of the river actually covered by the red mud pond. A flashflood in the river can cause a breach in the pond which could result in a massive spill in the river of noxious and poisonous red mud, which is a mix of highly toxic alkaline chemicals and heavy metals including radioactive element. The river is now so polluted that it has taken both human and animal lives.

All over the area there are also long pipelines, which leak in many places, thus poisoning the ground.

While Vedanta has been eager to tell how they invest money to improve the lives of the locals, there is no evidence to be seen in Lanjigarh about this. Few billboards and road signs painted by the company can hardly make much difference in the local's life quality. Even the jobs created by the refinery have been given to outsiders. So the locals face the environmental disaster brought by Vedanta empty handed, as no work or compensation is given to them by the company.

Almost next to the refinery is Chhatrabur-village, which nowadays has its houses and fields covered with white aluminium dust. From here two people have died after bathing in the river, which caused big boils on their skin and ultimately took their lives. Even though the district collector was brought to see their condition, no action was taken. At the moment 4 people suffer from major skin diseases. Many others have strange patches appearing on their skin, which they show by lifting their shirts up. Eye problems are commonly suffered by everyone. The refinery has also had a serious impact on their agriculture, with rice crop yields dropping from 200kg to only 50kg.

Another village nearby is Belamba, home to 35 families. Originally Vedanta's refinery was going to be built on their land, but these people refused to move, even though they experienced all sorts of harassment, including beatings and death threats. After one and a half years of opposition Vedanta decided to built its refinery on another location where it was easier to force villagers to move. The people from Belamba also tell that their rice crops have diminished almost by half since the refinery was built and that wherever the ash falls the crop 'burns'. Their cows have to be now taken further away to eat and drink, as 17 cows from other villages died after drinking water from the river. Apparently since the death of the cows Vedanta stopped dumping their wastes during the day, but instead do it during the dark hours of night.

By Vedanta's land there is a thick wall which however at one point is suddenly cut for a short distance. This gap opens up to a garden and a house owned by a man, who refused to move from his land. As we stop to see him, we find his frightened mother, who says she doesn't remember his son's name or doesn't know where he is. In order not to frighten her more, we leave telling her that we only wanted to congratulate her son for his brave action.

Behind the refinery rise the Niyamagiri hills, currently threatened by Vedanta's plan to start bauxite mining on an area consisting of 750 hectares of reserved forest. These pristine, forest covered hills have a rich variety of wildlife and many of the animals inhabiting here are listed on IUCN's red list of endangered species. Many rare plants also grow on the Nyamagari hills, including over 70 species of important medicinal plants. From the hills originate two important rivers, Vamsadhara and Nawagali, and there are 36 streams.

In the planned mining area there are 120 villages, inhabited by Jharnca (stream)-Khonds and Donkria (hill)-Khonds,

who are on a verge of extinction, only living here on these mountains. For these tribals the Nyamagari hills are very sacred and therefore they don't cut trees, but instead prey to the mountains which they regard as the origin of Life. Living within their traditional lifestyles they are self sufficient -apart from salt which is brought from outside. From the forest they collect non timber forest products and grow some crops like pineapples, mangos, hill bananas, turmeric, jackfruits, minor millets and different vegetables for daily use.

The last place we visit in Lanjigarh is the re-settlement for the villagers who already have lost their land. The houses are tiny and set in a row. The lady in the last house has made an attachment to get a bit more space. She says she is fine, but thinks about her village. As she talks she keeps on changing her words and views in a confused manner. It's obvious that these people are not supposed to speak out their minds openly. Before there even used to be a guard by the gates as no outsiders were allowed in the village. Now our visit creates a lot of interest and in a matter of minutes a police comes to see what's happening. As we drive away in the darkness, the air starts to get incredibly thick. As I ask about this, the local green belt volunteers explain that Vedanta lets lot of gases out at night time."

By Veera Rönkkö, e-mail: [veerapu13@suomi24.fi](mailto:veerapu13@suomi24.fi) and Ville-Veikko Hirvelä, e-mail: [villeveikkoh@gmail.com](mailto:villeveikkoh@gmail.com)

An appeal sent by Friends of the Earth Finland to the Supreme Court of India on 24 January 2008 is available at [http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/India/Appeal\\_Niyamgiri.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/India/Appeal_Niyamgiri.pdf). For more information on Niyamgiri and bauxite mining, see: <http://www.freewebs.com/epgorissa>

To oppose the planned bauxite mining in Niyamgiri, you can send an appeal or protest letter to the Supreme Court of India, which is likely to decide about the mining soon. You can find models for an appeal against Niyamgiri mining, for example the appeal by Friends of the Earth Finland: <http://www.freewebs.com/epgorissa>

Or you can find a model of a protest letter by Forest Peoples Program :  
[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/asia\\_pacific/india\\_mining\\_aktivasi\\_land\\_fpp\\_let\\_jan08\\_eng.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/asia_pacific/india_mining_aktivasi_land_fpp_let_jan08_eng.pdf)

You can send your appeal or protest letter to: Justice K. G. Balkrishnan, Chief Justice of India, Supreme Court, Tilak Marg, New Delhi -1, Fax: +91 11 233 83792, Email: [supremecourt@nic.in](mailto:supremecourt@nic.in)

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### **- Liberia: So, who owns the forest? New SDI-FERN publication**

In 2003, Liberia emerged from 14 years of national and regional conflict that left around 270,000 people dead and 1.5 million displaced. Presidential elections in November 2005 were won by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first ever female president. It is well documented that the conflict was in part fuelled by uncontrolled exploitation of and competition for Liberia's resources, especially timber. This factor along with associated corruption and revenue misappropriation led to sanctions being imposed on Liberian timber exports by the UN in 2003. Following a review that showed that the timber industry did not provide any real benefits for local communities and that the total area given out in logging concessions was twice the size of the total forest estate, President Sirleaf's administration cancelled all concessions, put in place a moratorium on all logging activities, and passed a new forestry law.

Despite its many shortcomings, this law states that a new law must be enacted before the end of 2007, governing community forest rights. This has created a new impetus to develop a legal framework that can form a fairer basis for sharing the many benefits that Liberia's forests and other natural resources have to offer.

In a new study, led by Liz Alden Wily and published by the Sustainable Development Institute in Liberia (SDI) and FERN, clear steps towards the development of such a law are outlined. The report, based on field research by SDI, documents the current system of customary law in place and proposes how the existing system could and should be



incorporated in a statutory law that ensures local people become the rightful owners of the land they live on.

This landmark study brings together existing legal texts and new on the ground research to document that honouring land rights is compatible with economic growth. The study clearly shows the path to improved and decentralised forest management can be based on local structures and warns that issuing concessions over community lands could trigger new conflicts.

The report is available at [http://www.fern.org/media/documents/document\\_4078\\_4079.pdf](http://www.fern.org/media/documents/document_4078_4079.pdf) and on [www.loggingoff.info](http://www.loggingoff.info) under Liberia. For more information: [saskia@fern.org](mailto:saskia@fern.org), [director@sdiliberia.org](mailto:director@sdiliberia.org)

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### **- Liberian NGO's expectations for an EU/Liberia FLEGT partnership agreement**

Liberian NGOs hope that negotiations expected to start this spring between the European Union (EU) and Liberia for an EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) partnership agreement will support their calls for legal reform and respect local peoples' rights to land. At the root of any EU/Liberia partnership agreement must be a definition of legality that ensures good governance and provides long-term control to Liberian communities as the natural custodians of Liberia's forests. It is also important that Liberia's legal and institutional framework is in line with Liberian constitutional principles and socio-cultural realities as well as international law and best practice. The report, "Forest Governance in Liberia, an NGO perspective" published by FERN, details clear recommendations for such an agreement.

If the voluntary partnership agreement turns out to be inadequate and fails to bring with it the necessary legal and institutional reform, it will lead to another negative chapter in Liberia's history. This is a country in great need of visible progress to galvanise faith in the new government of President Sirleaf and the democratic process. The temptation to cash in its national heritage in an attempt to encourage economic growth to fill the public purse and improve infrastructure will be strong, but lessons of the past and of other countries show that selling of old-growth forests fails to even produce the short-term hoped for outcomes. Instead, Liberia must begin to institute the necessary measures to ensure long-term development. In its recovery from fourteen years of civil conflict and decades of bad governance, corruption and overly liberalised trade without meaningful development, another step backwards is something that Liberia can ill-afford.

The report will be available shortly on [www.fern.org](http://www.fern.org) and [www.loggingoff.info](http://www.loggingoff.info). For more information: [saskia@fern.org](mailto:saskia@fern.org) and [director@sdiliberia.org](mailto:director@sdiliberia.org)

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### **- Peru and Ecuador: The last Free Peoples besieged by oil and logging companies**

At the end of 2007, the Peruvian government opened the way to the exploitation of new oil plots in the Province of Loreto, on the frontier with Ecuador: plots 67 and 121 to the US Barrett Resources Corporation and plot 39 to the Spanish company Repsol YPF.

These plots, according to evidence submitted by the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Forest (AIDSEFP) in 2003 and 2005, are the territory of the Tagaeri and Taromenane "Free People" who live in voluntary isolation. The evidence gathered includes information on various ocular encounters by soldiers and inhabitants of the region, as well as trails, sounds and physical evidence including crossed lances and ceramics.

The Barrett oil company plans to open up 8,000 Km. of seismic lines over a relatively small space, which implies an



incredibly intense level, so far unprecedented in the whole Peruvian Amazon. It also plans to establish 5 logistic bases, 61 encampments, 61 heliports and to bring in over 1,000 workers, all this in the heart of the proposed Napo Tigre Territorial Reserve. All this movement, noise, deforestation and destruction will doubtlessly threaten the existence of the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, as it implies the possibility of the indigenous people being frightened off by the oil workers from their traditional hunting areas. This forced displacement of the indigenous people in isolation would constitute a violation of their territorial rights, according to articles 16 and 18 of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization.

It is very obvious that the seismic programme was not designed to take these people into account. The oil exploration phase implies covering the forest with paths to detonate seismic charges over small stretches. "These explorations convert the forest into squared paper, at each of the vertexes they bore a hole and fill it with dynamite. The explosion serves to draw a sort of subsurface scan"... "for the inhabitants of the forest this becomes a sort of cobweb, impossible to avoid."

Furthermore, Barrett plans to hire interpreters to communicate with the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and for this purpose intends "using" members of the Ecuadorian Waorani people in this plan as interpreters. The proposal is to take them to Peru, "train" them and through them, establish contact with the Taromenane. This action would evidently violate article 3 of ILO Convention 169.

The Environmental Impact Assessment shows that no precautions have been taken to avoid encounters with the indigenous people. On the contrary, there is only a plan of action following a "non-forced" encounter. These encounters expose these peoples to a very serious situation due to their extreme vulnerability, as they lack any biological defence against common diseases that could be introduced by the oil workers, such as measles or flu. Epidemics of such diseases could quickly decimate entire populations, as has happened on previous occasions.

The 1955 story in Ecuador is being repeated, when a group of US evangelists from the Summer Linguistic Centre sent presents from a basket suspended from an aeroplane in flight to the Waorani indigenous groups. With this method they made friends with them and finally relegated them to a space of approximately 10 percent of their original territory, so that Texaco could come in and exploit their land with impunity, while the population was decimated by the diseases that had been introduced. Now Barrett's plan is to make presents of necklaces, blankets, matches, combs, etc., while Repsol plans communication using megaphones, in the event of attacks, using sentences such as "Is something bothering you?", "We have not come for your women, we have our own women in our own villages."

The Spanish oil company has a dire track record in Peru: violation of worker's rights and mass dismissals, contamination at the La Pampila refinery. Under the name of Pluspetrol, it spilt 5,500 barrels of oil from a launch into the River Marañón, in the North Peruvian forest, affecting the Pacaya Samiria Reserve and the Cocamas-Cocamillas people. During the development of the Camisea project complaints were made about aggression towards the Machiguenga community, also affecting indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, in addition to the Nahua and Kugapakori Reserve, sacred sites such as the Pongo de Mainique canyon and the Community reserve "Pavilk Nikitine" in Vilcabamba (Oilwatch 2002).

Furthermore, there are considerable numbers of Tagaeri and Taromenane people in voluntary isolation on the other side of the frontier. The Ecuadorian State has established an intangible zone covering 650,000 hectares between the rivers Curaray and Nashiño for their survival. Despite the creation of this area, where any type of activity is banned, the members of this clan continue to suffer from pressure generated by the extraction of natural resources from within their territories. The reports of sightings, tracks and utensils and other objects of anthropological value along the length of the Nashiño River and the middle and upper Curaray (on the Peruvian side, lead us to suppose that members of this group are fleeing from the harassment they are suffering due to hunting and illegal logging within their territory on the Ecuadorian side.

The Inter-American Human Rights Commission has ordered preventive measures that Ecuador must implement for the protection of the *Free Peoples*. So far these have resulted in action plans that are still on paper, while the threats are very real in the forest. However this scenario has been further complicated by the presence of these two oil companies at the frontier and more so with the declarations of the Peruvian government stating that there is no reliable proof of the presence of isolated peoples in this region of the country. Allowing the granting of plots 67 and 121 to the Barrett Company and plot 39 to Repsol is placing at risk the already fragile Intangible Zone established in Ecuador to protect the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples.

Finally it should be noted that no mechanism has managed to avoid outsiders from contacting peoples such as these and leading to their extinction because of the propagation of diseases or violent contacts that have been well-documented. Therefore the only efficient measure to ensure the survival of these cultures is to avoid contact, to respect their territory and the use these peoples make of their resources and their right to their self-determination to remain in voluntary isolation.

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## COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

### **- Chile: Patricia Troncoso, a symbol of the Mapuche struggle against a Government at the service of forestry companies**

The young indigenous Mapuche leader, Patricia Troncoso has been on a hunger strike since 10 October 2007. She was given a prison sentence of 10 years and a day, accused of terrorist arson at the Poluco Pidenco property. This fire took place in December 2001 and the alleged perpetrators were tried, in the presence of "faceless witnesses" (that is to say, anonymous witnesses), under the Anti-terrorist Law created during the military dictatorship.

That is to say, it was a trial without even a minimum guarantee of due process of law as established in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratified by Chile.

The case of Patricia is not unique. There are over 20 Mapuche political prisoners in the prisons of Angol, Victoria, Lebu, Concepción, Temuco and Traiguén. Most of them have been tried under the anti-terrorist legislation which entered into force during the dictatorship of Pinochet.

To this is added the atrocious murder that occurred very recently (3 January 2008) of Matias Catrileo a 22 year-old Mapuche who was shot in the back by Chilean police.

None of this is accidental. The Chilean State has placed itself at the service of forestry companies and while the police repress, torture and kill, the legal powers criminalize the Mapuche struggle. In this respect, the historian, Víctor Toledo Llancaqueo says that "The Mapuche case is illustrative of the criminalization of social protest, as a political, media and legal process, branding acts of protest as crimes, seeking to remove social conflicts out of the political arena and take them to the criminal field. The objective of those promoting criminalization is to launch the State's punitive powers in order to neutralize, discipline or destroy social protest."

Toledo Llancaqueo adds that "The mass media and right-wing sectors have been key actors in the process of criminalizing Mapuche protest. Faced by the emergence of indigenous mobilization, they actively promoted making it unlawful, penalizing it and having it classed as a matter of security. For their part, the forestry companies have felt that the conflict with Mapuche communities actively damages their corporate image. Accused of ecological damages and repression of indigenous people by private guards, they have become exposed to the loss of some markets. In

order to address this state of affairs, the major forestry groups are putting pressure on the government and on public opinion to get the conflicts solved by criminal courts. Thus, they have magnified the economic effects of Mapuche protests and the figure of arson."

The situation of repression and criminalization of the Mapuche people, who are struggling to recover their ancestral territories today occupied by forestry companies, becomes more serious every day, while the State and the mass media endeavour to make it invisible. However, the solidarity of a growing number of Chileans is also increasing, and they have started mobilizing in defence of the rights of this people. In a recent declaration, they affirm that "both the crime against Matias – whose perpetrator we hope will be condemned as an example by Justice – and the unjust treatment given to Mapuche prisoners, are the result of a policy of systematic repression by the Chilean State against the Mapuche communities and at the service of the forestry, electricity and large landowning companies, that does not fall in line with our country's position before international organizations and fora" and demand that "the Government ends this situation of institutionalized injustice, taking up an active policy of respect and in defence of the human and ancestral rights of the Mapuche people." (See full declaration in Spanish at [http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Chile/Declaracion\\_2008.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Chile/Declaracion_2008.html))

More than 3 months after she started her hunger strike, Patricia Troncoso tells –from prison- the Chilean people, and the world "...that the illegitimate violence of money and power, that imprisonment, persecution and criminalization of our cause, that police brutality, are not the way to solve the historical and political problem with our people. Because while you, the politicians, come and go, future generations of Mapuche people continue to germinate and grow. And the Mapuche will continue to resist your arrogance and domination. We will continue to struggle, we will continue to resist and we know that for each one that falls, ten shall rise up." (Her message -in Spanish- may be seen in video at [http://www.wrm.org.uy/Videos\\_Esp/Patricia\\_Troncoso.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/Videos_Esp/Patricia_Troncoso.html))

Patricia has today become the symbol of the struggle of a people that time and time again have shown that her words are true, because for each one that fell, ten arose. And until justice is done, they will continue to arise!

By Ricardo Carrere, WRM, [rcarrere@wrm.org.uy](mailto:rcarrere@wrm.org.uy)

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### **- Indonesia: Leading oil palm producer. Leading carbon emitter?**

Indonesia, a leading producer of palm oil, reached an output of 16 million tonnes in 2006, having tripled the area of land under oil palm plantation between 1995 and 2005.

Though the Indonesian government had established a moratorium on forest conversion for estate crops --though unclear about how long the moratorium should be maintained and whether it referred to a moratorium on actual conversion of forest cover or a moratorium on changing the status of forest lands to allow planting (see WRM Bulletin N° 124)-- the country's policy on palm oil development seems to continue the increasing trend. There are plans to add some 10 to 11 million hectares to the six million hectares of land occupied with oil palm plantations, in response to the rising global demand for palm oil.

Palm oil is used in numerous food products and consumer goods and is one of the main raw materials for the new biodiesel rush. In early 2007, the European Union endorsed a minimum target for biofuel to constitute 10% of its transport fuels by 2020.

The target of increasing palm oil production to 40 million tonnes in Indonesia by 2020 goes along with the need to add some 300,000 hectares of new estates each year. A report by the Indonesian Forest Ministry and European Union cited by an article of Hilary Chiew (1) says that inevitably, most new estates would come up in wetlands, as the more

desirable dry lands are already occupied.

Recently, the Indian edible oil refiner Jhunjhunwala Vanaspati Ltd has announced its plans to buy 20,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in Indonesia for an amount of up to US\$ 38 million. According to Reuters (2), the company director S.N. Jhunjhunwala said that they were "looking at either virgin or developed plantations [sic] in Indonesia". For the Indian firm, the operation has two purposes. First, to reduce costs. The costs of producing edible oils are mounting so for Indian firms the opportunity to buy plantations abroad is a way of bringing down the cost incurred through import of crude palm oil (CPO).

Besides cutting costs, Indian firms in Indonesia can thus avoid the laws that at home limit them to acquire the large areas they need. That's why they are heading to countries in South-East Asia or South America, with less protective regulations.

However, such happy business plays a heavy toll on the people and the environment. Almost one-quarter of Indonesia's palm oil plantations is established in the province of Riau, where peatlands abound. The carbon rich peatlands are drained and burned to make way for palm oil plantations thus sending huge quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. According to Wetland International, this gives Indonesia a notorious third place as carbon emitter and contributor to global warming after the United States and China.

The Indonesian Technology Assessment and Application Agency (BPPT) has claimed that the calculation did not include the carbon absorption power of Indonesia's forest that reduced the total amount.

Whether ranked third or 14th carbon emitter, the destruction of rainforests to grow palm oil in Indonesia represents, as UNDP's latest Human Development Report 2007/2008 puts it "the erosion of a resource that plays a vital role in the lives of the poor, in the provision of ecosystem services and in sustaining biodiversity." The UNDP report also acknowledges that the "rapid expansion of the [palm oil] market has gone hand-in-hand with an erosion of the rights of small farmers and indigenous people." So, good business for whom?

Article based on information from: (1) "Eco-conscious palm oil", Hilary Chiew, The Star Online, <http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2008/1/1/lifefocus/19561783&sec=lifefocus>; (2) "India firm eyes oil palm plantations in Indonesia", Reuters, <http://in.news.yahoo.com/071121/137/6nj6g.html>; "Indian firms scout for farms overseas", M.R. Subramani, The Hindu Business Line, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2007/12/03/stories/2007120350860500.htm>; Human Development Report 2007/2008, UNDP, [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr\\_20072008\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf)

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## **- Paper Industry & Pine Plantations in the Southern United States**

The United States is legendary for our ability to consume. Though we have the third largest population in the world far behind China and India, we consume more than any other nation in the world. This is no different when it comes to paper; we leave the rest of the world behind with the average American consuming 300 kg of paper per year. For context, the United Nations estimates that 30-40 kilos is the minimum needed to meet basic literacy and communication needs.

What most people do not know is that while we import some paper from around the world, especially Brazil, Canada and Indonesia, the Southern United States is by far the largest paper producing region in the world, producing over 15% of the world's paper. Along with this massive scale of paper production comes all of the associated destructive forestry practices, from large-scale clearcuts in cases approaching thousands of hectares in size to logging of endangered forests to the conversion of our native and natural forests to sterile pine plantations.

There are over 32 million acres (nearly 13 million hectares) of pine plantations in the United States. In recent years a majority of these plantations have come at the expense of native forests. In addition to turning our incredibly diverse forests into a crop, we add insult to injury with a massive use of chemical fertilizers and herbicides to manage these plantations. As of 1999, the US used more chemicals to manage their plantations than the entire world combined, which poisons our rivers, drinking supply, livestock and people.

As readers of the WRM Bulletin know, the Dogwood Alliance, a coalition of over 70 organizations, is working to stop the destructive practices of the paper industry. Our current focus is on the Southern Swampland region on the Atlantic coastal plain stretching from Virginia to Georgia, where the impacts of the timber industry have been particularly severe.

The Atlantic coastal plain in the US is one of the most diverse regions in North America, from the longleaf pine savannahs to the bottomland swamp forests to unique ecosystems like the Carolina Bays, this region is home to many plants and animals found nowhere else on the planet.

One unique example of forest communities are our long leaf pine savannahs, that take 100-150 years to reach full size making it a poor timber and paper species. These fire resistant forests include over 30 endangered species that are reliant on them for survival.

A unique plant species that calls this region home is the Venus Flytrap, a carnivorous plant that catches and eats flies and arachnids. It is only found in a small swampy region in southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina.

This incredibly diverse region is gravely threatened by the pulp and paper industry, especially companies like International Paper who have three paper packaging mills here. Our forests of the Southern Swampland region are being chopped down, chipped up and pulped to make paper packaging for products like fast food. It is a major tragedy.

Ditching and draining is the leading cause of freshwater forested wetland loss in the Southern US. This region has been hit particularly hard. Wetlands are critical for flood control, to prevent storm surge, to filter drinking water, and as habitat to countless species of wildlife. Instead, large canals have been dug over decades to drain water from the swamps in order to dry the soil and allow the plantation of fast growing loblolly pines that are harvested approximately every 12 years.

In recent months our region has been facing a severe drought, which has opened up even more of this swampland to logging in places that have never been touched before. We are facing an ecological crisis here with less than 10% of these forests protected, leaving the future of the wildlife, swamps and people who rely on them in doubt.

Over the next few years, Dogwood Alliance and our allies will work to protect this critically important place and stop the further invasion of pine plantations here. We will campaign to stop some of the biggest companies in the world, from McDonalds to Taco Bell to Unilever and more to stop buying paper packaging from this special place and to start using less packaging and where necessary switch to recycled paper. Our hope is that by taking on these big companies, not only will we protect the forests of our region, but also force the companies to look at the way they do business in order to protect important forests and forest dependent communities around the world.

By Scot Quaranda, Dogwood Alliance, [scot@dogwoodalliance.org](mailto:scot@dogwoodalliance.org)

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## **- Zimbabwe: Tree plantations to accrue greenhouse gases emissions credits**

In last month WRM bulletin N° 125, and linked to the 12th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007, we warned about some decisions of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Executive Board that might attract more tree plantation projects to the CDM – such as the removal of restrictions that prevent providing a perverse incentive to cut down forests to replace them with CDM sponsored monocultures, and the increase of the size of tree planting projects that can apply to the CDM under simplified procedures and with fewer requirements to assess social and environmental impacts.

The announced trend seems to be reaching Zimbabwe.

Last news appearing in The Herald, 11 January 2008, announce that “The Zimbabwe Government has started receiving enquiries from investors in industrialised countries that want to accrue greenhouse gases emissions credits under the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an official said this week.”

According to the newspaper, the source said that “Investors had expressed interest in implementing afforestation and reforestation projects in such areas as Murehwa, Mutoko and Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe in Mashonaland Central Province”.

The Zimbabwe Parliament voted on December 6 last year unanimously to approve ratification of the protocol, and before and after ratification enquiries started coming.

The Zimbabwean government seems fully engaged in the carbon trade and enthusiastic about the short term foreign currency it would earn from giving away huge tracts of land to plantations of exotic and indigenous trees that would sell as carbon credits. The Herald reports that a tonne of saved carbon dioxide currently sells at between five and seven euros.

Such chrematistic estimations have proved fairly wrong for the peoples whose livelihoods depend on the land and the water. Unless we stop the flood of monoculture tree plantations over agricultural lands, forests, wetlands, it will sadly also prove wrong for the entire planet in a not so far future.

(1) 'Country to Reap Investment From Protocol', The Herald (Harare), 11 January 2008, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200801110193.html>

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## **GE TREES**

### **- Aotearoa/New Zealand: Scion's GE trees cut down!**

Since 2003, New Zealand's Scion has been carrying out a field trial planting of genetically engineered (GE) Radiata pine and Norway spruce trees at its research facilities in Rotorua. The GE trees contain reporter genes, herbicide resistance genes and genes which according to Scion are "thought to affect floral development". The trial is planned to last 22 years, although none of the trees will be left in the ground for more than 10 years.

In January 2008, someone got into Scion's GE tree experiment site by digging under the fence. They damaged 19 trees but no one seems to know whether any parts of the GE trees were removed. The protester (or protesters) left a spade with a "GE Free New Zealand" sticker on it.

The Soil and Health Association, a New Zealand NGO founded in 1941, has been campaigning for the GE tree trial to

be stopped and the trees to be removed. Shortly before the trees were damaged, the Soil and Health Association put out a press release saying that Scion should take down its GE trees, pointing out that rabbits have burrowed under the fence surrounding the trial, creating the risk that GE plant material has been removed from the trial area.

Scion acknowledges that there are rabbits inside the GE tree trial site, but argues that the rabbits cannot leave the site because the fence is buried to a depth of 1.5 metres. Scion does not explain how the rabbits might have got inside the fence in the first place. Steffan Browning of the Soil and Health Association visited Scion's GE tree field test site in November 2007. He found evidence of rabbits inside and outside the trial site. He took photographs of "an obvious hole in and under the fence, which had clearly been there for some time."

In order to comply with Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) requirements, Scion is supposed to carry out a weekly inspection of the fence. Scion's 2007 report to ERMA makes no mention of rabbits.

In a press release, Claire Bleakley of GE Free New Zealand says, "Each year GE Free (NZ) raises concerns over issues pertaining to compliance and we are always fobbed off. We must hope that no GE material was taken from the facility. Responsibility for this negligence and the carelessness leading to the breach should lie in part, with the inspection and monitoring agencies."

Browning notes that "ERMA has never declined an application for a GE field trial." He points out that there is a conflict of interest, in that "some ERMA decision makers [are] employed by other GE experimenting CRIs [Crown Research Institutions]".

New Zealand's Greens are not surprised that the GE trial should attract this sort of protest. "It's a bit like streakers at the one day cricket," states a post on the Greens' blog. Browning points out that the Soil and Health Association does not condone illegal acts, but, he told Radio New Zealand, "I struggle to disagree with the motives of whoever has done whatever it is. It does depend on what they've actually done and how responsible they've been with any material."

Scientists are outraged, reports the New Zealand Press Association. "The deliberate destruction of genetically modified trees at Scion is eco-terrorism and destroys knowledge and opportunity for all New Zealanders," says Dr William Rolleston, chairman of the Life Sciences Network, a pro-GE lobby group. Scion is a member of the Life Sciences Network.

In a 2002 article in the New Zealand Forest Industries magazine, Christian Walter, a senior scientist at Scion, explains the organisation's justification for its GE tree experiment: "We must gain a thorough understanding of the potential risks associated with GE in forestry and how they can be mitigated, before any commercialization can possibly take place. This inevitably involves field testing."

Elsbeth MacRae, Scion's Group Manager for Biomaterials Research says that "The express purpose of this trial is to assess the impacts, if any, of transgenic trees on the environment. Results to date show that soil microbial populations and insect biodiversity in a GE tree pine field test is unaffected." But the trial consists of only a few dozen trees. Clearly the environmental impact of industrial tree plantations of GE pine trees would be a completely different and even more dangerous experiment. As Felicity Perry of the People's Moratorium Enforcement Agency points out, field trials of GE trees are like "starting a bushfire to find out how badly it burns".

Scion has signed a research agreement with GE tree research company ArborGen, owned by International Paper, MeadWestvaco and Rubicon. Scion is conducting laboratory research aimed at producing GE trees which are easier to pulp. "As part of our commercial activities, Scion is providing research and development services to assist ArborGen with their tree improvement programme," MacRae says. "We can confirm that our service to ArborGen supports their research into GE trees."



Scion's GE trees are not welcome in New Zealand. "The destruction of the GE trees in Rotorua highlights the resistance to genetic engineering in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Because ERMA is not stopping GE material from being released into the environment, the people of Aotearoa have to intervene," says Felicity Perry of the People's Moratorium Enforcement Agency. "Overwhelmingly the population of Aotearoa wants this country to be GE Free."

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

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### - Brazil and Chile: Concern over research on transgenic trees

In Latin America biotechnology applied to research on varieties of transgenic trees to give them certain characteristics facilitating their large-scale monoculture plantation is being led by two countries: Brazil and Chile.

In Brazil, the National Biosecurity Technical Commission (CTNBio), the body responsible for monitoring recombining DNA technology – implying gene manipulation – approved standards for planned liberation into the environment of experiments with transgenic eucalyptus trees in the country in June 2007.

Presently CTNBio has 24 requests for approval of transgenic eucalyptus trees. Some of the genetic modifications refer to a volumetric increase in the plants, others to reduction and modification of lignin (a request submitted by International Paper do Brasil Ltda.), the alteration of the cellulose content (request by Suzano Bahia Sul Papel e Celulose), improvement of the quality of the timber (request by Alellyx Applied Genomics) and glyphosate tolerance (request by the Federal University of Vinosa).

ArborGen Tecnologia Florestal Ltda. also appears as one of the companies requesting liberation of transgenic eucalyptus using a technology that makes it possible to produce trees with less lignin – the substance making the wood strong – thus reducing the costs of pulp extraction.

This would lower the costs of the pulp industry for two reasons: because more pulp would be obtained per ton of timber and because it would increase output efficiency when obtaining pulp as there would be less lignin to separate from the pulp.

More recently agrofuel fever – of which ethanol is one – has given rise to this increase in research on transgenic eucalyptus trees. Lignin and cellulose are the main components of wood and a transgenic tree with less lignin content favours the production of cellulose, the raw material for the production of ethanol. According to a report by Rel-UITA (International Union of Food Workers – Latin America), companies in this sector are eager to plant transgenic trees in the Latin American market.

Maria Rita Reis, a lawyer with the NGO Tierra de Derechos, believes that (see <http://www.rel-uita.org/agricultura/transgenicos/brasil-eucliptus-transg.htm>) CTNBio is being influenced by market pressure and "has not been capable of having a serious discussion on Biosecurity issues that come within the Commission's scope, for example, of discussing the possibility of coexistence between transgenic and non-transgenic plantations. So far, very little has been said about the rights of farmers and consumers who do not want to plant or consume transgenic crops."

Genetic manipulation leading to transgenic varieties involves various risks, among which the possibility of other crops becoming contaminated – which would be lethal for those plantations aimed at the furniture industry, or for fruit trees. There are also risks for beekeeping.

In Chile, already in 2004, the GenFor Company promised to develop pines resistant to the pine shoot moth (*Ryacionia buoliana*), which is seriously affecting pine plantations.

In August 2007 a mega Forestry Consortium was set up -- Consorcio Genómico Forestal S.A.— which operates in the University of Concepción's Biotechnology Centre in the Bio Bio Region.

This type of consortium, which mostly operate as research companies, reflect the close relationship presently existing between universities and companies, facilitated by the State, which transfers funds to the universities to enable them to design the business together with the companies belonging to the consortium and which in turn, are essential to obtain State funding.

In the case of the Genómico Forestal S.A. Consortium, the research workers from the forestry companies involved - Forestal Arauco and Forestal Mininco— represent approximately 60 per cent of the country's plantation assets and over 75 per cent of the exports.

Current research aims at obtaining more pulp from Eucalyptus globulus (that is to say, more pulp from less area), and at obtaining trees of this species that are more resistant to cold (presently at an altitude of 400 or 500 metres they die because of frost). According to the Consortium's webpage, they are interested in finding trees that are resistant to the pitcher canker fungus that arrived in Chile from abroad some five years ago affecting Monterrey pine. It has devastated plantations in the US and other countries, but in Chile it has not developed outside nurseries. However it is feared that if it is not stopped it will become adapted within five to seven years.

The training of forestry genomic experts at university level, another of the Consortium's objectives, seeks to place the region as leader in forestry genetics in Chile.

Faced by this situation, numerous organizations gathered in the Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations (RECOMA), delivered an open letter to the Governments of Chile and Brazil expressing their concern, which "in the first place originates from the fact that the genetic manipulation taking place aims at consolidating and expanding a monoculture tree plantation model that has already shown itself to result in serious social and environmental impacts."

"Moreover, the use of transgenic trees would further increase the impacts on water, already verified, given that one of the characteristics sought to be introduced is faster growth, which would imply greater use of water by the plantations."

RECOMA requests the Governments to adopt "precautionary approaches on addressing the issue of genetically modified trees" and to order "the suspension of on-going research until doubts on possible impacts set out in the arguments for the adoption of COP8's Decision VIII/19 are clarified." (See complete text of the letters in <http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/RECOMA.html#Letters>).

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### - PAN joins the struggle against transgenic trees

The Sixth Meeting of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) took place in Penang, Malaysia from 28 November to 3 December 2007. The 25th Anniversary of the foundation of this Network was celebrated in the same city that saw it come into being: Penang.

PAN is a network involving over 600 non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals, who work in over 90 countries to replace the use of dangerous pesticides by ecologically and socially just alternatives.

Although when it started out, PAN was centred on the struggle against the use of agrotoxics, technological changes

brought on a new problem – transgenic crops – an issue that was incorporated into PAN's working agenda some time ago.

At this last meeting, PAN also included in its declaration of principles the issue of genetically modified trees, thus formally joining opposition to transgenic trees. In its declaration it set out the need for:

“Creating awareness of the dangers of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and campaigning to stop the development and use of GMOs in food, agriculture, pharmaceutical crops and animals, **forestry** and prevent terminator seeds. We demand the implementation of the precautionary principle to prevent the spread of the use of GMOs.”

PAN understands that with the introduction of this new technology the struggle to make progress in ecological management and in the elimination of the production, marketing and use of dangerous pesticides is further hindered, as it is accompanied by the massive use of agrottoxics and by large monoculture plantations that are far from being a sustainable model of production for ensuring the food sovereignty of the people.

The incorporation of transgenic trees into PAN's work is a fundamental element in the struggle against the model imposed by the large transnational companies. In addition to generating new and unknown risks, transgenic trees exacerbate the negative impacts of large monoculture tree plantations which occupy lands previously given over to the production of foodstuffs, placing them at the service of large transnational corporations.

One of the negative impacts that would be worsened is linked to the enormous consumption of water of such plantations, because one of the characteristics to be introduced is even faster tree growth, implying greater use of water.

However, negative impacts are not only limited to water, but also involve the flora – as research is being done on the incorporation of genes making the trees resistant to weed-killers – and the fauna – with genes providing the trees with insecticide characteristics.

Finally, genetic manipulation aims at consolidating and expanding a model of monoculture tree plantations that has already shown itself to have serious negative social and environmental impacts all over the world.

Throughout its 25 years of existence, PAN has achieved many things, but its work is becoming increasingly complex, as it has to face new challenges imposed by an unsustainable agricultural and forestry model. The incorporation of PAN to the campaign against transgenic trees is yet another element to protect food sovereignty, people's rights and biodiversity; in sum, to protect life itself

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## CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

### - The Convention on Biodiversity, GM trees and paper consumption

In March 2006, in Curitiba, Brazil, the parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) discussed the issue of genetically modified (GM) trees. Some delegates demanded a moratorium on GM trees. Others requested that the CBD produce a report looking at the "potential environmental, cultural, and socio-economic impacts of genetically modified trees".

The CBD produced its report in early December 2007. The report will be discussed during the 13th meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), in February 2008 in Rome.

The report summarises the arguments for and against GM trees, mainly based on articles published in peer reviewed, scientific journals. "Considerable uncertainty on the use of genetically modified trees exists," the report states. Moreover, "the scientific data needed to assess the potential impacts of these trees is not currently available." This is because the only way to obtain the data needed to determine the impacts of GM trees is by planting them in vast monocultures and monitoring them for several decades. Such an experiment would prove that GM trees have major impacts on ecosystems and local communities. Some GM trees would become weeds and others would spread their genes through outcrossing. Once this happens it will be too late to demand their return to the laboratory. Clearly such an experiment would be dangerous and irresponsible.

The Curitiba meeting agreed a decision which "Recommends Parties to take a precautionary approach when addressing the issue of genetically modified trees." The CBD report notes that many scientists echo this decision, "emphasizing that the precautionary approach should be applied when considering the use of genetically modified trees." But this doesn't go far enough. A ban on GM trees is needed.

While the CBD report points out some of the problems with GM trees, it has little say about the fact that GM trees will exacerbate the problems of industrial tree plantations. The impacts on biodiversity, the impacts on the livelihoods of communities living near the plantations, the impacts on Indigenous Peoples and the gender issues associated with the impacts of industrial tree plantations are dealt with superficially or ignored.

Perhaps the biggest fault of the report is that the CBD regurgitates the paper industry's propaganda that more efficient plantations will lead to reduced old-growth logging, "thereby allowing biodiversity conservation in these areas". This might sound logical, but the reality is that no pulp and paper company has stopped the expansion of its plantations because it can grow the same amount of fibre on a smaller area of land. Brazil's pulp giant Aracruz has conducted decades of research into faster growing tree plantations. Aracruz's eucalyptus trees are among the fastest growing trees in the world. Yet the company's plantation area has steadily increased because it continues to increase its pulp production.

The CBD report argues that GM trees with reduced lignin or faster growth would mean that "fewer trees would need to be harvested to meet consumption needs". It's worth looking in a little more detail what these "consumption needs" might be. World production of paper and paperboard has increased dramatically since 1961, when annual production stood at 77 million tons. Production had doubled by 1978. By 1999, it had doubled again, reaching 316 million tons. In 2005, 354 million tons of paper were produced globally. Use of recycled paper has increased at an average of about 12 per cent a year, to reach about 46 per cent of global paper production in 2005. Excluding the use of recycled paper, paper production has steadily increased, at an average of about three million tons a year. Meanwhile, per capita consumption of paper globally has also increased. In 1961, average global per capita paper consumption stood at 25 kilogrammes. In 2005, the figure was 54 kilogrammes.

However, these figures conceal a massive inequity. Consumption in Finland (which has the world's highest per capita paper consumption) increased from about 100 kilogrammes per person in 1961 to 429 kilogrammes in 2000 (since when it has fallen - down to 325 kilogrammes in 2005). In China, consumption per capita was around 4 kilogrammes in the 1960s. Since 1970, it has doubled about every ten years. In 2005, paper consumption in China was about 44 kilogrammes per capita. These figures conceal another inequity, since much of the paper produced in China is used as packaging for goods that are exported to the rest of the world, especially Europe, Japan and North America.

Providing enough paper for China's 1.3 billion people to have the same per capita consumption as Finland would require the additional production of 422 million tons of paper a year, which is more than the current total global production. Of course, low per capita consumption of paper is not confined to China, and we should also add in the

rest of world. The world population is currently 6.6 billion. If the rest of the world were to consume the same amount of paper as Finland we would need to produce 2.3 billion tons of paper a year, or more than six times current world production. Obviously, this is ridiculous. But if it's ridiculous for everyone else to consume so much paper, it must be ridiculous for Finland to do so.

The journalist Eric Sevareid once noted that "The chief cause of problems is solutions." Promoting GM trees as solution to "consumption needs" will create a host of new problems without beginning to address the issue of overconsumption in the North.

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

The full CBD report (The Potential Environmental, Cultural and Socio-Economic Impacts of Genetically Modified Trees) is available at <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/sbstta/sbstta-13/information/sbstta-13-inf-06-en.pdf>

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### - The CBD and the Need to Conserve Real Forests, Not Fake Forests

The main threat to the world's forests is not that they will all be cut in the coming decades. There is an even larger threat; that the last tracks of rich, beautiful, vibrant biologically diverse primary forests that still exist on this planet will all be replaced by ugly, biodiversity-poor and empty rows of monoculture tree plantations. This is one of the main conclusions that could be drawn from the information in the latest State of the World's Forest report that was published by the FAO in 2007; that the trend to replace biologically diverse forests with tree monocultures is continuing, and it is even accelerating. Every day, thousands of hectares of biologically diverse forests, are being replaced by monocultures of Oilpalm, Eucalypt, Pine, and even genetically modified trees. Some of this replacement is direct, but the most threatening replacement is indirect: large tracks of primary forests continue to be lost in continents like South America and Africa, while especially China has embarked on an environmentally disastrous exercise of planting thousands of hectares of tree monocultures. The fact that China is the only country that is planting genetically modified trees on a large scale makes this replacement even more devastating from an ecological point of view (see WRM Bulletin N° 88).

Other global initiatives, like so-called "reforestation" and "afforestation" projects financed through the carbon market and the 1 billion tree campaign of the UN Environment Program are equally ill-advised. By including large-scale monocultures of exotic, often invasive, species in these efforts these initiatives are not only impacting negatively on biodiversity and people. They also present a tremendous missed chance in terms of not ensuring that "reforestation" efforts are what the term pretends: the REintroduction and REstoration of real forests as a home to people and spectacular biodiversity.

Real forests provide a home to millions of people, and a source of livelihood for billions of people, while monoculture tree plantations are an extremely labour-extensive form of land use causing rural unemployment, depopulation and poverty, especially amongst women. Real forests are home to an estimated 60% of terrestrial biodiversity, while tree plantations devastate biologically diverse ecosystems, pollute waterstreams with agrotocics and often contribute to carbon emissions by destroying soils.

If there is one institution that should be truly concerned about the world-wide violation of the term "forests" that has taken place since FAO and the Parties to the Climate Convention adopted a definition of forests that includes any combination of trees, it is the Convention on Biodiversity. With the FAO definition, "reforestation" can have tremendous negative impacts on biodiversity, while "deforestation" can actually benefit biodiversity: cutting large areas of exotic pine plantations in countries like the Netherlands would greatly benefit the restoration of native biodiversity.

Happily, as part of the review of its expanded work program on forest biodiversity, the Convention on Biodiversity now has a chance to put forests and biodiversity in harmony again. The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Forest Biodiversity has proposed that the Conference of the Parties adopts a harmonized, global definition of forests. The upcoming 13th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the CBD, which will take place in Rome in February, is supposed to elaborate this recommendation. A globally harmonized definition is more urgent than ever now that the Parties to the Climate Convention will be actively debating the role of forests in mitigating climate change as part of the Bali Roadmap. It should be ensured any policies and incentives to conserve forests benefit real forests, not socially and environmentally devastating tree monocultures.

So the need to adopt a global, legal definition of forests that matches the sense of the general public in terms of forests being a biologically diverse, precious and beautiful ecosystem is not just a matter of semantics. It is a matter of educating our children, the public, and policy-makers about what forests really are, and what we will lose if we replace them by any kind of trees.

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### **- Rome meeting to assess implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas**

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Parties, intergovernmental agencies, conservation NGOs, indigenous peoples and local communities, and civil society organisations will meet in Rome on 11-15 February 2008 to assess implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) for the period 2004-2007. The programme of work, which was adopted by COP7 in 2004 in Malaysia, contains various activities requesting Parties to increase the coverage of protected area while respecting the rights of indigenous and local communities and ensuring their full and affective participation. It also calls for Parties to review the governance aspects of protected areas and to broaden them to include collaborative management of protected areas (CMPA), the recognition and support for community conserved areas (CCAs), and the right to Free Prior Informed Consent for indigenous peoples in cases of potential resettlement.

COP7 also established the CBD Ad-Hoc Working Group on Protected Areas (WGPA), tasked with providing guidance to Parties concerning the implementation of the PoWPA and to assess its implementation. The Rome meeting is the second meeting of the WGPA and is charged with reviewing the implementation of the PoWPA and exploring options for mobilizing adequate and timely financial resources for its implementation. These matters are of great importance to indigenous peoples and local resource users as they deeply affect their relationship with protected areas in international policy making and in practice on lands and territories inhabited and/or utilized by indigenous peoples and local communities. A number of indigenous peoples and local community organizations and support NGOs will attend the meeting with the objective to ensure that indigenous peoples' views and input are taken into consideration in the review of implementation of the Programme of Work, in recommendations on how to improve its implementation and in addressing options for mobilizing financial resources for its implementation. Reports and case studies on national situations and the implementation of the PoWPA are being prepared by indigenous peoples and local coastal communities.

Although the data on implementation of the Programme of Work will be discussed and analysed in details in the Rome meeting, preliminary data from indigenous organizations indicate that there has been insufficient attention paid to the recognition of indigenous and local communities' rights, their participation, and to governance issues in general. This seems to also be confirmed by data collected by the CBD secretariat in preparation for the meeting. One of the official documents prepared for the meeting, states that, while there has been notable progress in achieving the targets related to expansion of the coverage of protected areas (2,300 new terrestrial protected areas and 50 new marine protected areas, covering approximately 50 million hectares have been established since 2004), limited progress has

been made, *inter-alia*, with respect to the targets of the Programme of Work most relevant to indigenous peoples and local communities, such as goals 2.1 (Equity and benefit sharing), 2.2 (Involvement of indigenous and local communities), 3.4 (Sustainable finance), 3.5 (Public awareness and participation), 4.1 (Minimum standards) and 4.2 (Protected-area management effectiveness).

From this data, it can be hinted that, the so-called 'conservation paradigm shift' from conventional conservation (which infringes on human rights and does not sufficiently address the social aspects of nature conservation) to participatory conservation (which respects the rights and emphasizes the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities), which was hailed as the way forward for biodiversity conservation following the World Parks Congress of 2003 and the CBD COP7 of 2004, is still far from being realized.

However, participants in the Rome meeting are also expected to identify obstacles obstructing the implementation of the Programme of Work and to recommend actions to overcome such obstacles. It is hoped that the goodwill to develop actions to overcome the obstacles preventing the implementation a rights-based approach to conservation will prevail so that more socially just conservation policies and practices can finally be implemented.

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