

WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT MOVIMIENTO MUNDIAL POR LOS BOSQUES TROPICALES

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THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is not just about species, habitats and genes: it is about life and interactions between the different species, including us humans. In this issue of the WRM Bulletin we aim at putting a human face to biodiversity, providing information about how some human actors (mostly in corporations) impact on species, habitats and genes, and on how this is destroying the lives and livelihoods of many more fellow humans who depend on biodiversity for survival. We have divided the bulletin in two sections -forests and plantations- in order to stress the differences between both, which -incredibly enough- are still being confused by "expert" actors and processes such as the FAO, the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Convention on Climate Change and even the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Convention on Biological Diversity: Will it translate hopes into action?

Biodiversity loss is rapid and ongoing. Over the last 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems faster and more extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history. Tropical forests, many wetlands and other natural habitats are shrinking in size. Species are going extinct at rates 1,000 times the background rates typical of Earth's past. The direct causes of biodiversity loss --habitat change, overexploitation, the introduction of invasive alien species, nutrient loading and climate change-- show no sign of abating. ... It is time to translate our hopes and energies into action, for the sake of all life on Earth.

The above is not ours. It is a quote from the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity -- Ahmed Djoghla-- in his foreword to the Convention's "Global Biodiversity Outlook", launched on March 20 to coincide with the opening session of the Conference of the Parties of this Convention in Curitiba, Brazil.

We totally agree with those words and the present bulletin provides further evidence on the problem.

Nonetheless, we feel the need to emphasize on two issues that --from our perspective-- have not received sufficient attention in the abovementioned report: monoculture tree plantations and transgenic trees.

Regarding the former, the Global Biodiversity Outlook does mention that tree plantations have a "low biodiversity value", but still considers them to be forests when stating that "tree planting, landscape restoration and natural expansion of forests have significantly off set the loss of primary forest area." This position is even more obvious when looking at Figure 2.1 ("Annual net change in forest area by region") which explains that "Forest area includes primary forests, modified natural forests, semi-natural forests, productive forest plantations and protective forest plantations" and that "Net change in forest area takes into account afforestation efforts and natural expansion of forests." Translated into common language, this means that the CBD still believes --against all evidence-- that plantations are forests.

The above is contradictory with Mr Djoghla's diagnosis of the situation, when he rightly includes habitat change among the "direct causes of biodiversity loss." Large scale tree plantations imply major changes in and destruction of natural habitats that result in impacts on biodiversity. As a starting point, the CBD should therefore clearly differentiate forests from plantations. Within plantations, it should make clear that large scale industrial tree monocultures should not be promoted or supported by the parties of this Convention, precisely because they are a direct cause of biodiversity loss.

Regarding transgenic trees, there is no mention at all on this crucial issue in the Global Biodiversity Outlook, in spite of the fact that this is one of the most dangerous threats to forests, which host most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity. The release of genetically engineered trees will inevitably and irreversibly contaminate forest ecosystems and destroy biodiversity.

As a result, non-governmental organizations, social movements, scientists, indigenous groups, farmers, foresters and others are calling for a global ban on the commercial release of transgenic trees into the environment. We believe that the CBD is the UN body responsible for putting this ban in place.

Large scale monoculture tree plantations are destroying biodiversity and local peoples' livelihoods; the release of transgenic trees would exacerbate those impacts while adding further ones. Following Mr Ahmed Djoghla's words, we truly believe that "it is time to translate our hopes and energies into action, for the sake of all life on Earth", and that neither tree monocultures nor transgenic trees have any role to play in this. We therefore hope that the CBD will take action.

FORESTS, PEOPLE AND BIODIVERSITY

- CBD's inaction

The situation is much the same in many southern countries: people and supporting organizations are trying to protect the forests against government-corporate alliances. Well known causes of biodiversity loss such as industrial logging, fossil fuel exploration and exploitation, mining, hydroelectric dams, industrial monocrops, road opening and shrimp farming continue being promoted for the almost exclusive benefit of large corporations.

Furthermore, most of the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation not only have not been addressed but have been further promoted through international financial institutions' impositions on southern governments. Even the World Bank has acknowledged this, but has continued business as usual.

And now forests are facing the most dangerous threat: the possible release of genetically engineered trees.

At this point of time, when the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is holding its Eighth Conference of the Parties, people have the right to ask it: what have you done about this situation over the last 14 years? Have you actually tried to stop those well known processes of biodiversity destruction –which is the mandate of this Convention- or have you turned a blind eye on them? Have you supported local peoples' struggles to protect the forests or have you supported the governments you represent in their repression and/or eviction?

The articles below are some few examples of the many issues we would have liked the CBD to be actively addressing ... and hasn't. They include information about forest destruction and their socio-environmental implications --including biodiversity loss. More importantly, they show local peoples' willingness and capacity to use and protect their forests. Those countless women and men are trying to achieve --in reality-- what the CBD should have been implementing over all these years. They deserve --at least-- strong support from this Convention for ensuring that their struggles are successful, because forest biodiversity conservation now depends almost exclusively on them.

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- Cambodia: Sustainable use of the forest by villagers

Contrary to the corporate "mining" approach to forests which invariably implies their destruction, stand out the diverse uses transmitted from generation to generation of indigenous and local communities which have developed a wide and deep knowledge (beyond science) of the forest that have allowed them to benefit from it in a sustainable manner.

The villagers of the Ansar Chambok commune, nearby Tonle Sap Lake, are a case in point. At present they estimate that approximately half of their income comes from the collection of forest products, in particular resin tapping. What follows are some quotes from a recent WRM report (see details below), which illustrate forest management by a community, now threatened by two powerful tree plantation companies: Wuzhishan and Green Rich.

"Dry and liquid resin is collected from Trach and Cheuteal trees respectively, both dipterocarp species. Trees must be mature, usually at least 60 centimetres in diameter, in order to be tapped without harming the tree. In Ksach L'eath village most of the resin tappers are women who inherited their trees from their mothers or grandmothers, as a form of dowry.

Dry resin is crushed into a fine powder and mixed with liquid resin. The resulting paste is either fashioned into a roll and wrapped in dried leaves to make torches or mixed with sand and applied directly on the wooden surfaces it is to protect, notably fishing boats. Resin torches are sold for between 300 to 350 riel [0,074 - 0,08 US dollars] and resin paste is sold for between 100 and 150 riel [0,025 -0,037 US dollars] for a kilogramme depending on the quantities and quality involved.

The following extracts from interviews with resin collectors indicate how important resin trees are to local livelihoods:

Resin collector 1: "I own 35 trees, both cheuteal and trach. I have another 100 trees in reserve, which I will tap once they mature. I visit my trees every three to seven days. Every month I am able to make 350 resin torches. I inherited my big trees from my mother, who inherited them from her mother. Recently some of my trees have been cut down and others marked with red paint by the company [Wuzhishan LS tree plantation giant]..."

Resin collector 2: "I have 70 trees. I am 78 years old and I learned to tap trees from my parents. My children are now resin tappers. My trees that are close to the village I tap every three days; the ones far away I visit every week. After each trip I can make 40 torches which I exchange for rice and prahok [a fermented fish paste, a Cambodian staple]. My 2 hectares of land don't provide enough rice to feed the eight people in my family."

Resin collector 3: "I have 48 trees which are all mature and tapped. I inherited them from my grandmother, who taught me how to tap them. Right after the Khmer Rouge I came back to the area and reclaimed my trees. This is all I know how to do and they are all I have. Every week I can make 50 resin torches."

Resin collector 4: "I am worried that I will lose everything. I have 3 hectares of land, but the village chief told me that they are all in the concession. I had 50 resin trees, but now only 20 are left. Thirty of my trees were cut in the last week. I don't know who did it, but they were cut with axes and chainsaws and only the stumps and crowns remain – the timber has disappeared."

"Besides resin, local people identified a plethora of products collected from the forest. Several dozens of vine species are collected; their uses are varied and range from material for weaving fishing baskets, to ingredients for traditional medicines, to fibre for ropes. For instance, the vine known as Voar Trey (fish vine) is used by fishers on the Tonle Sap Lake for manufacturing fishing traps. One hundred pieces are sold for 4,000 riel (US\$1) and one person can collect on average 200 to 300 pieces in one day. However, fishers are gradually abandoning the use of vines for the manufacture of fishing traps as the supply is becoming unreliable. Traps are now made of synthetic materials: plastic and nylon. Unlike vines, these will not bio-degrade if lost or abandoned by fishers in the lake. Furthermore, the switch to synthetic materials allows for a resulting finer mesh in the traps, thus capturing juvenile fish and impacting on population structures and breeding patterns".

"Over 20 tree species grow in the Ansar Chambok forests. Most objects found in rural Cambodian farms and homes are made by the inhabitants themselves, usually from materials collected in and around farms. Only recently have consumer products and modern appliances started finding their way into Cambodian homes. Timber is used for firewood, housing, furniture, musical instruments and farming implements, such as oxcarts, wooden trucks, ploughs and threshers. Objects of worship such as statues are also made from timber, and in some cases the trees themselves are objects of worship. Despite the intensive selective logging that took place in the commune throughout the 1980s, local people are eager to point out that the forest is regenerating and that none of the tree species has disappeared locally. There is, however a clear understanding and concern that numerous species will become locally extinct as a result of Wuzhishan's proposed clear-cutting and conversion to monoculture plantations".

"Bamboo and rattan is collected for household use. Bamboo is used for manufacturing small household implements and furniture, often as an alternate to wood. Rattan is used for baskets, twine and furniture. Villagers receive orders from furniture and mat manufacturers from neighboring provinces. A piece of rattan sells for 300 riel".

"Local people identified over 26 varieties of forest fruit, which is collected intensively when in season and consumed by the villagers, any surplus is sold to market vendors or from roadside stalls along the national highway. Many urban Cambodians view, often nostalgically, these fruit as delicacies and are prepared to travel lengthy distances to buy them. Other food found in the forest and consumed or sold by villagers are bamboo

shoots, wild potatoes and mushrooms. Local people were able to name 15 varieties of edible mushrooms that occur in the area and which they collect when in season. According to UNDP Human Development Indicators 36 per cent of Cambodia's people are undernourished, as are 45 per cent of the children under the age of five. The forests provide not only additional food many a Cambodian needs, but often the nutritional variety that humans require in order to remain healthy. Losing the forest and the array of foods it provides would render the inhabitants of Ansar Chambok even more vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies".

"Each village or cluster of villages in Ansar Chambok has a Kru Khmer, a practitioner of traditional Khmer medicine. The Kru Khmer will attend to child births, treat illnesses and injuries, and ward off evil spirits or spells that people sometimes believe have been cast upon them. The ministrations of the Kru Khmer are often a mix of magic rituals, incantations and administration of concoctions whose recipes are determined during dreams. The Kru Khmer's secrets are jealously guarded and only passed on from generation to generation to the knowing. Most of the ingredients for the medicine are found in the forest".

Wuzhishan is encroaching the forest land of these people, which is to say their livelihoods, their culture, their memory. Still, local resistance has managed to stop –at least temporarily– the damage. On such strength we take example, and pose our hopes.

The full report "The death of the Forest: A Report on Wuzhishan's and Green Rich's Plantation activities in Cambodia", December 2005, WRM series on tree plantations N° 4", is available at:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Cambodia/BookCambodia.html>

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- Cameroon: Legal forest biodiversity destruction

Industrial logging is one of the main direct causes of forest biodiversity loss. Many organizations and governments have focused on illegal logging and less so on destructive legal logging (see WRM Bulletin N° 98). In this respect, a recent report ("Legal Forest Destruction. The Wide Gap Between Legality and Sustainability") provides a broader perspective by looking at the Dutch timber trade, its focus on legality and the impact of legal logging on forests.

"Legality is often presented as a necessary first step toward sustainability", states the report, an idea which it rejects, presenting the negative social and ecological effects of legal logging that results in "legal forest destruction", defined as "harvesting of timber and/or other forest products in accordance with national legislation, but which is economically, socially and/or environmentally detrimental". "Legality and sustainability must be combined", concludes the report.

Cameroon is one of the ten cases of legal forest destruction presented by the research. In the Cameroonian forest of the Southwest Province, rich in Azobe (*Lophira alata*), the national timber company CAFECO has a logging permit for an area of 2.500 hectares over a maximum period of three years --a Vente de Coupe (VC) that can be renewed twice, each for a period of one year-- and without need for a proper management plan. This makes the VC-system a mining-like type of operation in which the logging company feels --and has-- no long-term responsibility for the area, implying inherent unsustainable logging.

The Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED) conducted field investigations in March 2005 and found logging operations in VC 11-06-18 to be ecologically and socially very disruptive and clearly unsustainable. Trees are cut down and abandoned on site, some of them are felled on steep slopes, making it risky and difficult to be removed. Generally, about 18-20 per cent of the felled trees are wasted. This practice, without being necessarily illegal, contributes to the depletion of the forest and consequently to the disturbance of ecosystem functions.

Furthermore, huge unplanned forest roads and temporary timber yards (*parc à bois*) are build in the forest, causing further destruction and fragmentation of the forest. Logging roads built on slopes and the use of heavy

bulldozers also increase soil erosion and pollution of water sources, making the water unsuitable for consumption by local peoples.

The villages surrounding the area --Dipemda, Koba, Ibemi and Mosanja-- are highly dependant on the forest and its resources in sustaining their livelihoods. A number of socially and culturally useful tree species such as Djabe or Moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*), Djanssang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*) and Bush Mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*) have been destroyed by CAFECO. These trees are used by villagers for food and medicine. Furthermore, their farms have been destroyed by roads. Fifteen farmers from Koba village reported the destruction of their farm and notably cocoa stems (the main cash crop for local communities) during road construction.

Research on the area has exposed that logging operations in VC 11-06-18 contribute to the impoverishment of local communities, to the destruction of their livelihood and to the ecological degradation of the rainforests. The fact that such logging is legal only makes matters worse.

The full report "Legal Forest Destruction. The Wide Gap Between Legality and Sustainability" is available at: <http://www.greenpeace.nl/raw/content/reports/legal-forest-destruction.pdf>

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- Ecuador: Shrimp farming impacts on a mangrove reserve

The Cayapas-Mataje Ecological Mangrove Reserve in the Province of Esmeraldas covers an area of 51,300 hectares and within it is the Majagual mangrove covering 28,367 hectares. The mangrove is the habitat of crustacean species including oysters, blue crabs and shrimps and of tree species such as the red, black, white and jeli mangroves.

During the 1950's the Majagual mangrove had been depredated by loggers who extracted tannin from mangrove bark to use it in the leather industry. Later logging was banned and finally, on 26 October 1995, it became a protected reserve, recognized as having the tallest mangroves in the world (averaging 50 metres tall).

However, within the Reserve the existence of two big shrimp farms, El Rosario and Puro Congo has been allowed. The development of industrial shrimp farming is often promoted by governments that are indebted and under pressure from international financial institutions, as a way of increasing exports and enabling hard currency to enter the country. But the facts always show that this accounting does not work in the same way for local economies (See WRM Bulletin No 51).

Installed in 1993, the shrimp company Puro Congo S.A., owned by Colombian citizen Carlos Acosta, built concrete walls on the beach and illegally opened up artificial channels 30 metres wide and two metres high to provide water to the ponds. The shrimp farm's effluents are illegally released into the El Aguacate, Guachalá and Majagual marshes and into the Cayapas River, causing the disappearance of over 20 native and migratory species from the zone, and a drop of at least 70 percent in the marine-coastal resources of the sector.

The community organization Association of Artisan Fisher-people and Trading of Bio-Aquatic Products Manglares del Norte (Asociación de Pescadores Artesanales y de Comercialización de Productos Bio-Acuáticos Manglares del Norte - APACOBIMN) has repeatedly complained about the destruction of the mangrove, contamination and salinization of ground and surface water in the Laguna de la Ciudad wetland and of the wells belonging to neighbouring communities due to the shrimp farm's activities, and its impacts on the fauna, as millions of fish have been poisoned and green iguanas, native and migratory birds and terrestrial and aquatic mammals have been depleted. However, in spite of the constant complaints, the Puro Congo Company now intends to extend over 300 hectares in the Laguna de la Ciudad wetland, in the Majagual and obtain a ten-year concession for the area.

The national environmental authorities verified the complaints and recommended that the Ministry should order the closure of the channels and that those responsible for the damage should cover the cost of restoring the

wetlands and the corresponding compensation. However the Ministry has not adopted any measure in this respect.

For its part, the National Coordinating Office for the Defence of the Mangrove Ecosystem (Coordinadora Nacional para la Defensa del Ecosistema Manglar - C-CONDEM) denounced that in reprisal for the complaints made, various farms in the neighbouring communities had suffered damages. Together with APACOBIMN, C-CONDEM is demanding that the extension of the concession requested by the shrimp company should not be authorized.

The two tallest mangrove trees in the world –two colossuses from the Majagual mangrove, of the *Rhizophora* variety (red mangrove) measuring 65 and 63.8 metres– have fallen, one nine months ago and the other four months ago. Although the version that they had died of “old age” was considered, C-CONDEM denounced that the progressive erosion of marshes and beaches –as they impound enormous masses of water to serve the shrimp ponds, acting as drains for the 630 hectare shrimp farm– is the true cause of the death of these two unique samples.

Article based on information from: “Manglares más altos del mundo no mueren de viejos, los mata la camaronera Puro Congo”, C-CONDEM, Boletín de prensa, 13-02-2006, e-mail: manglares@ccondem.org.ec; “Luto por los mangles más altos del mundo”, Manuel Toro, January 22, 2006, both articles were distributed by Red Manglar Internacional, Electronic Bulletin No. 28.

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- Peru: Camisea gas project is impacting on community and ecosystem health

At a cost of 1,600 million dollars, the Camisea mega project for natural gas extraction from an area located on the banks of the Camisea River -one of the world's richest areas in biodiversity- has the Inter-American Development Bank as its main public financier. However, it has not brought any benefit to the local communities. As denounced in WRM Bulletin No. 95, the Camisea project will be carried out at the expense of forest destruction, river contamination and noise pollution, soil erosion and the consequent degradation of flora and fauna in the project's area of influence.

The project has had four spills in its 15 months of operation. The negotiations to decide the amount of compensation due to the environmental impact of the spills were still an issue for public complaint considering that they had not respected indigenous rights. An example of this is the following document that states that “Through the present Act of Donation, the Community Relations Coordination office for the TGP Forest Region, on behalf of the Camisea project, delivers the following goods: six bags of rice, four bags of sugar, 30 kgs of salt, 50 litres of oil, 100 kgs of dried pasta, eight boxes of tinned tuna, four boxes of milk, 40 kgs. of dried vegetables, 100 kgs. of onions and 20 kgs of garlic. This donation is part of a gesture of solidarity and good neighbourliness on the part of the company towards the families of the native community as a provision for the damages caused by the spill in KP 50 which took place on 24 November 2005. This delivery is made for five days.” This is the document of the supplies delivered to the zones affected by the spill for a community with a population close on half a thousand people.

With this event still fresh in public opinion, on 4 March a further spill took place at kilometre 123, in the sector called Manatarushiato, at some five kilometres to the north of the populated centre of Kepashiato, district of Echarati, in the Province of La Convención, Cusco.

The international company Transportadora de Gas del Perú (TGP) –responsible for the gas pipeline– confirmed the spill –the fifth for the Camisea project– of approximately 750 cubic metres of liquid gas which were consumed by the fire caused by the fault at the breaking point.

The 20 metre high flames burnt Felipe Ticona's house to the ground and caused second and third degree burns to Nancy Rosalvina Ticona and Carlos and Freddy Huaman Ticona, aged 11 and 7 respectively. The fire also destroyed several hectares of crop lands and forests surrounding the zones and caused the death of animals.

The mayor, Martín Huamán, asked the population to avoid consuming water or fish from the Cumperuciató River as its waters had been contaminated by toxic material.

The Camisea project is also carried out at the expense of the life and health of the indigenous peoples whose territory overlaps one third of the Camisea gas concession, as denounced by the Inter-Ethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Forest (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana – AIDSESP).

A report by the Defence Office for the People of Peru –“The Camisea Project and its effect on people’s rights”– denounces that the fundamental rights of the native communities settled around the Camisea gas deposits have been affected by the foreign companies operating in the Amazon forest. It also contains devastating accusations on the action of the Peruvian State regarding defence of the life of the population of the Nahua-Kugapakori Territorial Reserve in the south of the country, where the Transportadora de Gas del Perú (TGP) company that won the Camisea gas concession intruded. TGP’s partner firms are the Argentine PlusPetrol and Techint, the Texan Hunt Oil, the Algerian State company Sonatrach and the South Korean SK Corporation.

The project affects the native communities in voluntary isolation and in a situation of initial contact such as the Nahua, Matsiguenga (or Machiguengas), Nanti and Yora or Kugapakori. These communities “are particularly vulnerable to respiratory and gastrointestinal infections,” furthermore “their cultural identity is being submitted to changes that are undermining their self-esteem” warns the above-mentioned report.

The Defence Office states that between 2001 and 2003, 17 people belonging to native communities in initial contact who had received visits from company workers, died of flu. Additionally, 16 cases of syphilis have been recorded in the native communities of Camisea and Shivacoreni. According to the Defence Office report the native communities consider that the opening of brothels close to the Techint company (in charge of building the gas pipeline) camps is responsible for this.

For its part, AIDSESP denounces the “lack of consultation or prior and informed consent regarding policies, legislative and administrative measures, programmes or projects involving our indigenous peoples. Faced by these oversights, indifference and negligence we, the indigenous peoples have lost confidence in the validity of the democratic system, and in many cases there are already direct reactions to the affection of our collective rights, in the imposition of ‘negotiable’ grids as concessions on ancestral indigenous territory.” “...the State has imposed exploitation of our natural resources inside our ancestral territories. We have been the owners of these territories since before colonization and before the formation of the present national State, and therefore we declare that our territories are as they have always been: inalienable, indefeasible, they cannot be attached or expropriated.”

The so-called “modernization” announced by mega projects such as the Camisea gas pipeline, sooner or later end up by showing their true nature of destruction, disease and death.

Article base on information from: “Proyecto Camisea, muestra de improvisación: atenta contra los derechos de pueblos indígenas”, Statement by the Asociación Interétnica De Desarrollo De La Selva Peruana, distributed by electronic list PERU & WORLD: Amig@s de l@s Ashaninka; “Piden suspender Camisea luego de quinto derrame ocurrido ayer”, Servindi, 5 de marzo de 2006, e-mail: servindi@servindi.org; **Error! Referencia de hipervínculo no válida.**; “Derechos indígenas violados por gasoducto de Camisea”, Ángel Páez, IPS, distributed by the list [prensaamb-alc]

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- West Papua: Biodiversity and freedom

Earlier this year, a rare thing happened: West Papua hit the headlines. The news was the discovery of a new species of honeyeater bird, a “lost” bird of paradise, a nearly extinct tree kangaroo, 20 new species of frogs, four new butterflies and five new species of palms. The species were found during an expedition to the Foja Mountains organised by Conservation International and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. “It’s as close to the

Garden of Eden as you're going to find on Earth," said Bruce Beehler, co-leader of the group. His words were dutifully reported in newspapers around the world.

The fact that West Papua is an occupied land rarely makes the news. It should do. The 250 tribes who have lived there for around 40,000 years do not have the right to choose their own government. They have little control over their land and resources. The country is flooded with Indonesian soldiers on the look out for the slightest sign of resistance. Anyone suggesting that the Papuans should be free is tortured or killed. Filep Karma and Yusak Pakage are serving 15 and 10 year prison sentences for raising the West Papua flag. The country is closed to journalists and human rights monitors.

West Papua remained under Dutch control when Indonesia became a new nation state in 1949. It remained so until 1961, when West Papua held a congress and declared the country independent.

Indonesia invaded a few months later. John F Kennedy approved the Indonesian government's occupation, describing the Papuans as "living in the stone age". The UN intervened. In 1969, seven years after Indonesia invaded their country, West Papuans got to vote. That is, about 1,000 of them, handpicked by the Indonesian military to represent the population of one million, got to vote. Before the vote, the soldiers threatened them and their families with death if they voted the wrong way. The result was a unanimous vote for Indonesian rule. To its shame, the UN ratified the result.

Since then Indonesia has attempted to wipe out Papuan culture. Estimates of the numbers killed since the occupation range from 100,000 to 800,000. In an attempt to dominate Papuan culture, the Indonesian government has moved about one million people to transmigration camps cut into the forest.

Indonesia sold West Papua's oil, gold, copper, timber and gas to foreign or Indonesian companies.

West Papua's forests cover an area of about 34.6 million hectares. Of this, Indonesia declared almost 28 million hectares as production forest. Logging companies moved in with military support and associated human rights abuses. In recent years the logging has accelerated as the forests of Sumatra, Sulawesi and Kalimantan are becoming logged out.

In December 2005, the Asian Development Bank approved US\$350 million towards a proposed US\$5.5 billion gas extraction and liquefied gas processing plant, which is being developed by multinational oil giant BP in Bintuni Bay. BP's project threatens mangroves, fisheries and local livelihoods. It is opposed by many Papuans on the grounds that Indonesia has no right to make decisions over the resources on their territory.

The Grasberg mine in West Papua is the largest gold and copper mine in the world. It is operated by a subsidiary of US-based Freeport-McMoRan. Freeport is the largest taxpayer to the Indonesian government. But few Papuans see any benefits. Thousands of people have been displaced or killed to make way for the mine. People living near the mine suffer from human rights abuses carried out by the Indonesian security forces hired by the company to protect its operations. Freeport has removed a sacred mountain, leaving a vast crater and a poisoned river system.

On 16 March 2006, five members of the security forces were killed after a peaceful demonstration in the capital Jayapura against Freeport turned violent. A civilian was also killed. Reports on the TAPOL Indonesian Human Rights Campaign website indicate that the violence started when police shot at demonstrators, possibly with rubber bullets, and used tear gas and armoured vehicles to clear the demonstrators. At least 57 people were arrested. In the days following the demonstration, police shot at student dormitories and beat people they had detained. About 1,200 students fled into the mountains around Jayapura to escape reprisals from the police.

In a message of support to the UK-based Free West Papua campaign, Noam Chomsky writes, "The crimes committed against the people of West Papua are some of the most shameful of the past years. The Western powers have much to answer for, and at the very least should use their ample means to bring about the

withdrawal of the occupying Indonesian army and termination of the shameful exploitation of resources and destruction of the environment and the lives and societies of the people of West Papua, who have suffered far too much."

Perhaps Bruce Beehler, co-leader of the Conservation International and Indonesian Institute of Sciences expedition, should take a closer look at West Papua. He might then discover that the country looks a little more like hell on earth than the Garden of Eden.

By Chris Lang, e-mail: chrislang@t-online.de, www.chrislang.blogspot.com

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- Forest restoration with and for their inhabitants

In many cases, forest destruction has created situations of such gravity that company managers and officials - finding themselves cornered by complaints, social pressure or pressure from business sectors whose interests are threatened by the discredit of their activities- are developing their own discourse regarding environmental solutions.

From absolute denial of damages, companies later tried to place responsibility on the victims. They are now attempting to change the true situation through discourse, with statistics showing business success regarding environmental and social matters. However, as the severity of the impacts cannot be concealed, the talk is now of compensation and environmental remediation.

The companies have a discourse and proposals to confuse people and many, either because they are naïve or because it suits them, become entrapped.

Destructive processes are thus called "environmental risk" (as if the impact might not take place). Overcoming these "risks" is called "remediation" (making a parallel with the solution by remedies). The claims arising from damage to property or irreparable damage are called "compensation."

With these three concepts, an attempt is being made to set aside existing damages, people's dignity and rights to justice and equity.

Their discourse tries to hide the fact that when nature is affected, the consequences can be accumulative, can produce a trickle down effect on the ecosystems, that can go unperceived initially but that are catastrophic in the medium and long term.

The argument that people's claims are due to other conditions (such as poverty, the lack of education and health) no longer works and it returns to them just like a boomerang because now it is clear that those conditions are due precisely to environment-destroying processes.

From the communities' standpoint, reparation is part of the claim. If there is damage to be denounced and it is denounced, it is because damage has to be stopped and if the damage has already been caused then it has to be repaired. However, if reparation is not monitored, the communities can loose twice over.

One of the greatest gaps existing, not only in science, but also in politics or in community management, is to understand the meaning of reparation, its scope, who must repair the damage, how the affected zones have to be restored. That is to say, there is no doubt that this is an essentially political problem and not merely a technical one.

In this framework, the Oilwatch network has prepared a protocol on civil responsibility and restoration, which has been submitted to the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity that is meeting this month in Brazil, with the aim of it being adopted by that international process. Although the protocol has been

conceived for oil exploitation zones, it can be applied to all processes destroying biodiversity. The protocol sets out responsibilities, both for those committing destruction (usually companies), and for those exercising control (the States), without either of them excluding the other. The document is available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/Oilwatch.html>

The protocol proposes that once damage has been done, restoration must be a process enabling the reconstruction of the social weave, and not one fragmenting, dividing or disorienting communities, or worse even, exposing them to further pressure. At the same time, getting over the damage must be seen with ecological criteria.

It is foreseen that the communities should play a leading role, not only because of their knowledge and rights, but also because restoration must enable them and their organizations to be strengthened.

In the same way as it became clear that the complaints should be in the hands of the affected people and that there would be no one better than them to talk about the problems and the social, cultural and economic impacts, it is clear that restoration must be centred on those same communities. Otherwise a fundamental part of the damage (even assuming good intentions and good techniques in repair), would not be overcome: the recognition of people's rights to decide on their lives and their future.

By Esperanza Martinez, Oilwatch, e-mail: tegantai@oilwatch.org.ec, <http://www.oilwatch.org.ec>

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INDUSTRIAL TREE PLANTATIONS

- Biological Deserts

Eucalyptus, pine, acacia, gmelina, teak, oil palm plantations have become a major social and environmental problem. From a biodiversity perspective they eliminate most local plants and provide almost no food to wildlife. Some plantation species become invasive, thus encroaching on natural ecosystems. In spite of this, they continue to be promoted, particularly in the South, for the production of cheap raw material mainly for the pulp/paper and palm oil industries.

People opposing them face a number of reprisals, ranging from eviction, threats and criminalization to outright repression or even death. On the opposite side, plantation companies receive full support from governments, while plantations themselves are awarded scientific credibility by being defined by allegedly expert institutions such as the FAO as "planted forests" or "forest plantations".

To make matters worse, even the Forest Stewardship Council –a certification scheme promoted by NGOs for the protection of forests- has already certified hundreds of plantations that should have never been certified, thus strengthening those same companies that people are struggling against.

But nothing is ever enough for corporations: not even fast growing eucalyptus. They want trees to grow yet faster, to be resistant to herbicides, to act as insecticides, to contain more cellulose, to be flowerless and seedless. They are therefore now moving into the genetic engineering of trees to adapt them to their needs.

The following articles provide evidence on the issues raised above, but constitute only a small sample of the information WRM has been documenting and disseminating for many years, mostly based on the direct experience of people impacted by plantations. The evidence is now so overwhelming that it cannot be ignored anymore. As stated in the editorial of this bulletin, we hope that the CBD will begin to take action.

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- Brazil: Peasant women's action against monoculture eucalyptus plantations on International Women's Day

International Women's Day had an unusual celebration in Brazil. At dawn on 8 March, close on 2 thousand women farmers linked to the Via Campesina organization took lightning action at the facilities of the Aracruz Celulose pulp mill company in the Municipality of Barra do Ribeiro near Porto Alegre. The Barba Negra establishment is the main production unit for eucalyptus and pine seedlings to supply their Guaiba factory. It even has a laboratory for cloning seedlings.

The expansion of monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the State of Rio Grande do Sul has been transforming the region into an unproductive "green desert" from the standpoint of food sovereignty. According to Cristiane Gomes, the MST national coordinator, criticism of the "green deserts" covering vast stretches of land that could be used for the production of food for families awaiting the agrarian reform, is getting stronger among social movements. Furthermore, industrial plantations of eucalyptus deteriorate the soil and consume great amounts of water: each eucalyptus tree can consume 30 litres of water per day.

The Aracruz Celulose Company owns the greatest expanse of industrial eucalyptus monoculture plantations: over 250 thousand hectares planted on its own lands; in Rio Grande do Sul alone it has 50 thousand hectares. With two other companies –Votorantim and Stora Enso- the area covered by eucalyptus in the State is close on 250,000 hectares. The factories of Aracruz Celulose produce 2.4 million tons per year of bleached pulp, contaminating the air and the water and damaging human health.

According to Via Campesina, eucalyptus plantations generate one job per 185 hectares, while small properties generate one job per hectare. However, Aracruz Celulose is the agro-industrial company receiving the greatest amount of public funds - close on 1,000 million dollars over the past three years.

"If the green desert continues to grow, shortly we will be lacking drinking water and land to produce food. We cannot understand how a government that wants to end hunger is sponsoring the green desert instead of investing in the Agrarian Reform and Peasant Agriculture," states the Via Campesina declaration, specially prepared to be given to the participants at FAO's Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development.

As a reaction to this process, 37 coach loads of women arrived at the nurseries where the company prepares eucalyptus seedlings for the gigantic industrial plantations that supply their pulp production. At dawn and during 20 minutes, the group destroyed various greenhouses and approximately 8 million eucalyptus seedlings. They then returned to Porto Alegre to take part in the march organized by Via Campesina to commemorate International Women's Day.

Together with close on 1,500 members of the Via Campesina Brasil camp set up that week in conjunction with the above mentioned Conference, they marched some 5 kilometres to the place where the FAO event was taking place to submit their declaration on agrarian reform and rural development to the representatives of 81 countries present there. When they arrived, the Military Police tried to prevent the women from approaching the entry. Finally, the representatives of the Ministry of Agrarian Development and FAO obtained permission for 50 representatives to enter the meeting. The Minister of Zimbabwe, who was chairing the plenary, interrupted the session to give the floor to two Via Campesina militants, who read out the movement's declaration.

"We are against green deserts, the enormous plantations of eucalyptus, acacia and pine trees for pulp covering thousands of hectares in Brazil and in Latin America. In the State of Rio Grande do Sul alone there are already 200 thousand hectares of eucalyptus plantations. Where the green desert advances, biodiversity is destroyed, soil is eroded, rivers dry up, in addition to the enormous contamination generated by the pulp mills affecting the atmosphere and the water and threatening human health," affirmed the women in the Via Campesina declaration. They also expressed their solidarity with the indigenous peoples whose lands were invaded by Aracruz Celulose in the State of Espírito Santo (see WRM Bulletin No. 102).

The women's action resulted in angry protests from different government officials and in similar reactions from the main media and even from some non governmental organizations. However, when Aracruz robs their lands and forcibly evicts the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples, when the company occupies thousands of hectares or productive land and plants them with eucalyptus, when those plantations deplete the local water resources, when its pulp mills pollute water, it does it with the government's blessing and without opposition from that media or from those organizations that today are attacking the Via Campesina women's action. The real question should then be: who attacked first?

Article based on information from: "[8 DE MARÇO] Mulheres da Via Campesina ocupam fazenda da Aracruz no RS", *Via Campesina*, 08/03/2006, http://viacampesina.org/main_sp/index.php; "As lágrimas da Aracruz e a coragem das mulheres camponesas", Cristiano Navarro, Conselho Indigenista Missionário, <http://www.cimi.org.br/?system=news&action=read&id=1800&eid=259>

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- New WRM report on industrial tree plantations in Cambodia

This month, WRM publishes a new report titled "The death of the forest: A report on Wuzhishan's and Green Rich's tree plantation activities in Cambodia". The report records the impact of two companies' tree plantations on local communities and their livelihoods. For security reasons, the researchers of the report wish to remain anonymous.

2005 was another bad year for democracy in Cambodia. Prime Minister Hun Sen used defamation law suits to arrest or intimidate members of the political opposition, media, trade unions and NGOs.

Then, in January 2006, Hun Sen released four human rights activists on bail. He announced plans to change the law on defamation. In February, opposition leader Sam Rainsy returned to Cambodia, after a year of exile in France. And, in March, Hun Sen promised to crack down on corruption and speed up changes in the judicial system.

This is, sadly, a familiar ritual. About half of Cambodia's annual budget comes in the form of foreign aid. Just before the Consultative Group Meeting, where aid agencies decide how much money to give to Cambodia, Hun Sen promises to ease off on repression, corruption, forest destruction and evil deeds in general. The aid agencies play their role in the ritual and pretend to have forgotten that Hun Sen made precisely the same promises just before the previous Consultative Group Meeting.

In December 2004, at the last Consultative Group Meeting, Hun Sen's government committed to meet a series of targets (or Joint Monitoring Indicators, in Consultative Group jargon). The World Bank's Country Director, Ian Porter, says that the Joint Monitoring Indicators "are a step in the right direction towards strengthening partnerships for reform and working toward common goals of strengthened systems of accountability in Cambodia."

Let's look at an example of what accountability looks like in Cambodia. In December 2004, the government promised to "Increase transparency of state management of natural resources through immediate public disclosure of existing contracts and compliance status (royalties and other key provisions) of contracts governing economic land concessions, mining concessions, fishing lots and continued disclosure of status of review of forest concessions."

The government failed to release the contracts. Instead, the Ministry of Agriculture released incomplete records of just some of the land concessions.

Yet in the 2006 Joint Monitoring Indicators, the target is weakened. No mention is made of releasing contracts. The government is asked to "disseminate all relevant sector information on the activities of government

agencies". Who decides what is "relevant" is left unexplained. The information is to be posted "periodically" on the Technical Working Group on Forestry and Environment website. The word "periodically" is left undefined.

At the 2006 Consultative Group Meeting, the aid agencies promised to cough up US\$601 million, even more than the US\$504 million they agreed to give in 2004.

Hun Sen has held on to power in Cambodia for more than 20 years. Even after losing the UN sponsored elections in 1993, he clung onto power through a coalition with his political opponent Norodom Ranariddh. In 1997, he ousted Ranariddh in a bloody coup d'état. Between the coup and elections the following year, Hun Sen handed over more than one million hectares in logging concessions and land concessions. Between July 2003 and July 2004, during another political deadlock which prevented the formation of a government, Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party handed out yet more land. Several of these concessions are for large scale industrial tree plantations.

Pheapimex, a notorious Cambodian logging company, has benefited from many of Hun Sen's handouts. Pheapimex controls a total of seven per cent of the land area of Cambodia. The company is owned by Chheung Sopheap, a close friend of Hun Sen. Her husband, Lau Meng Khin is a director of Wuzhishan, which in 2004 started clearing forests in a 315,000 hectare plantation concession, originally awarded to Pheapimex.

Writing in Mother Jones magazine this month, Scott Carrier describes the political system in Cambodia as "shaped like a pyramid, where the people on the top can commit unspeakable crimes and the people on the bottom have no rights at all. Money, in the form of bribes and extortions, flows upward through the pyramid, and violence comes back down. This is the cultural mechanism of impunity."

Carrier is writing about slavery, but his description of political corruption in Cambodia explains how prime minister Hun Sen has got away with handing over vast areas of Cambodia's land to his business associates and friends. What it doesn't explain is why year after year, the aid agencies agree to throw money at one of the most corrupt governments on the planet.

By Chris Lang, e-mail: chrislang@t-online.de, www.chrislang.blogspot.com .

The report "The death of the forest: A report on Wuzhishan's and Green Rich's tree plantation activities in Cambodia" is available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Cambodia/BookCambodia.html>

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- Nicaragua: The Indio Maiz Biological Reserve threatened by gmelina plantations

The Indio Maiz Biological Reserve is located in the southeast region of Nicaragua, covering an area of 3,180 km². It is called after two rivers, the Indio and the Maiz. It is one of the most important biosphere reserves in the country and contains a tropical rainforest, wetlands and lagoons hosting diverse fauna: jaguars, harpy eagles, green macaws, manatees, sawfish and crocodiles. In the forest you will find cedar, mahogany, almond, medlar, manu and maria trees, among others.

However the forest and the rich biodiversity that inhabits it are threatened by an activity that appears to be quite contradictory to the concept of "reserve." According to complaints by Nicaraguan young peoples' organizations (Jovenes en Acción and Comunidad Ambientalista), in the secondary forest (over 20 years old) of the reserve's buffer zone, the Costa Rican company Maderas Cultivadas de Costa Rica S.A., has established monoculture teak and gmelina plantations. So far they have installed 3 thousand hectares of gmelina but the company has purchased 5 thousand hectares and the project considers extending it to 8 thousand hectares.

This activity in turn leads to logging, generally of valuable woods, while the area is cleared for plantation. According to the complaints filed with the Environmental Procurator's Office in Managua, the company – as part of forest management – illegally set fire to stubble and non-valuable woods that had been left on the ground. The

fire advanced dangerously towards nearby houses. This was detected by a field visit carried out by members of Comunidad Ambientalista in November 2005.

The following month the young people followed up on the case in Managua, but found the unpleasant surprise that it had been filed and no one had any knowledge of it. Again, with the effort of the young people, they raised funds by holding concerts and selling T-shirts to enable the Commission to visit the location, document the damage and take photographs. There they observed that 5,000 hectares have been purchased, a numeric tagging has been made of the trees and the plantation is progressing. Apparently the company wants to extend the plantations to 8,000 hectares.

During the three days the young people spent in the area, supported by the community that gave them shelter and food, they observed that many springs and small streams have dried up and that the water comes out with a whitish colouring. Furthermore, they verified irregularities in the company's actions. According to their complaint, the company bypassed municipal law and presented itself directly to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAG-FOR), which has granted them permits to log (both for secondary forest and for the primary forest where they operate) when in fact it should have been the INAFOR (National Forestry Institute) municipal authority that granted them.

The young people reported that the company tried to meet with them, but they did not accept as they had been informed that the company had attempted to buy some of the leaders of the local voluntary juvenile group with five thousand dollars.

The position of the young people's organizations is: We Do Not Want Gmelina Companies in the Municipality!

Article based on personal information sent by Engels Obregón, Comunidad Ambientalista, e-mail: eobregongautama@yahoo.com

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- Papua New Guinea: Local NGOs challenge World Bank loan for oil palm scheme

Papua New Guinea has a communal land system that has allowed most rural communities to make a decent living from the free and easy access to land, clean water and the abundance of natural resources. However, the introduction of cash crop plantations undermines their customary systems and structures bringing up negative environmental and social impacts.

Oil palm is a case in point. Typically pushed from outside and export-oriented, it counts on funding by the World Bank. However, the project has encountered local opposition. Small landowners have warned oil palm interests to stay out of their land (see WRM Bulletin N° 74). Now, facing the forthcoming World Bank Board meeting that will deal with approval for disbursement of Papua New Guinea Smallholder Agriculture Development P079140 loan, several Papua New Guinean NGOs are strongly opposing it and have circulated a letter for endorsement, addressed to the Board of Executive Directors of the World Bank Group asking them not to approve any more loans for oil palm plantations and processing.

This kind of scheme will not render any good for the people. Their demand is well grounded, as the letter exposes: "Oil palm is risky: We are opposed to having more oil palm projects in Papua New Guinea because of the adverse social and environmental problems found in existing oil palm areas. Oil palm price is highly dependent on the world commodity price which can be volatile. Given the massive oil palm expansion program in other countries especially Indonesia, the risk of a slump in price is very high."

"Oil palm is environmentally destructive: The World Bank project document downplays the environmental impact of oil palm. Our country has already suffered the adverse impacts from oil palm in those provinces where it is grown. PNG's track record in ensuring environmental sustainability is abysmal. The Department of Environment and Conservation's monitoring capacity is limited by a chronic lack of resources. It has neither the capacity nor

the required expertise to monitor the wide ranging and relatively complex environmental issues related to oil palm."

"Oil palm is bad development: Over two decades of oil palm growing in Papua New Guinea has resulted in little if any real development outcomes for our country. In fact we see a regression of living conditions and standards in places where oil palm is grown. Our Government offers tax breaks and tax credits for the oil palm industry operators but this considerably limits the economic benefits to PNG. Growers who toil and sweat in the hope of better living standards -as promised by those who got them into oil palm growing- are disappointed and angry that they have been given mere empty promises whilst the resources on which they are dependent for survival are now degraded and polluted. Much of their oil palm income goes back to paying for costs incurred in the establishment of their oil palm plots."

"Oil palm is forced upon our people: Oil palm growers inform us that they only grow oil palm because they need money to pay for the ever increasing school fees so that their children can be educated. Ironically, school fees have been imposed on us precisely because our Government heeds advice from a foreign power such as the World Bank to adopt the user-pay system so that revenue is directed to repay debt. For a developing nation like PNG, education and basic health care are essential services which should be priority areas for revenue PNG gets from other sectors. The World Bank should exert pressure on our leaders to fulfil these fundamental needs and responsibilities, and not on ordinary PNGeans to sacrifice fertile land, pristine forests and healthy waterways for a cash crop which no rich industrialised nation in the world wants to have in its own backyard. It is obvious that rich nations are merely pushing oil palm growing in countries like PNG because it is a labour intensive, nutrient hungry and polluting crop, so that their industry can have access to cheap oil."

The project is also bad for the country: "Oil palm increases balance of payments problem for PNG: Growers become too reliant upon a monocultural cash crop. What is left of their hard earned cash income from oil palm merely ends up enriching foreign corporations, owing to the widespread consumption of imported rice from Australia, tinned fish, tinned meat and a range of other poor quality consumer products from Indonesia and China. This increases our balance of payments. PNG should be assisted and supported to produce food and other sought-after domestic necessities internally, so that cash is circulated within the country for the benefits of our communities and to reduce our country's precarious balance of payments."

"Increase national indebtedness: This loan, if approved, will increase the debt burden of Papua New Guinea with no real development gain. We fear that increasing debt level in the face of governance failure will lead to the further devaluation of the Kina [local currency], adding greater burden to our people and our precious environment. This will inevitably lead to more hardships for our people and further pressure to exploit the relatively healthy environment, which over 80% of our people depend on for their survival. This is essentially poverty creation, not reduction!"

Furthermore, the funding comes to a country where governance is under challenge: "The Government of Papua New Guinea is unaccountable. Papua New Guinea has a long track record of governance failures, mismanagement and misuse of public funds by those in power. This has rendered most development assistance useless and ineffective."

"Imprudent banking. It is irresponsible for the World Bank to disburse a loan for this project given the failure of the Forest and Conservation Project (FCP). Last year the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had to cancel its loan for a similar project entitled the Nucleus Agro-Enterprises project on ground of financial mis-management. Given that the risk involved is high and the World Bank has little leverage to influence outcome as a lender, it is a bad banking practice to embark on yet another project for oil palm expansion, and to provide another loan to PNG."

Too many risks for the sake of oil palm industry: "PNG becomes indebted to subsidise the palm oil industry: Although the project document claims that this is a scheme that would increase income for PNG, it is in reality a subsidy provided to the industry. Our people, especially the growers whom the World Bank has identified as needing assistance to get out of poverty, have ended up shouldering the bulk of the debt burden. It is on this

basis that communities have begun to reject oil palm projects, as evidenced by the statements of protest attached for your reference."

The NGOs conclude denouncing that the loan contradicts the National Goals and Directive Principles: "Our national constitution emphasises small-scale enterprises and respect for the PNG way, integral human development for our people, wise use and management of our natural resources for now and for the future. If the World Bank is genuinely interested in development in PNG, the five directive principles of the constitution provides a sound framework for a unique development approach we believe will be more beneficial for our country."

The full letter is available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/PapuaNG/WBLetter.htm>

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- Laos: Indian and Japanese pulp giants move in

For over a decade a network of interests has been pushing industrial tree plantations in Laos. The key organisation is the Asian Development Bank. In 1993, the Lao government approved a Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP), carried out with funding from the ADB and the World Bank, among others. The TFAP recommended logging the forests and establishing industrial tree plantations on degraded forest land.

Shortly afterwards, the ADB started its Industrial Tree Plantation Project which ran until 2003. The ADB rated this project as "unsuccessful". A Bank evaluation of the project stated that "people were driven further into poverty" as a result of the project (see WRM Bulletin 103). Unperturbed, the ADB started a new Forest Plantations Development project in January 2006. With this new project, the process of replacing villagers' commons, fields and forest land with monocultures is accelerating. The ADB's six-year project aims "to promote a sufficiently large area of industrial plantations to attract a pulpmill and/or one or more MDF [medium density fibreboard] plants to Lao PDR in the not too distant future."

In February 2005, a couple of months after an ADB-supported Private Sector Consultation Workshop in Vientiane, Oji Paper bought up BGA Lao Plantation Forestry's 154,000 hectare concession in Laos, one-third of which it plans to plant with industrial tree plantations. Oji Paper is one of Japan's largest pulp and paper companies and is the sixth largest paper and board producer in the world by volume. The company has a total of 140,000 hectares of overseas plantations operations in China, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil.

In March 2006, the Indian Aditya Birla Group announced that it will invest US\$350 million in industrial tree plantations and a 200,000 tons-a-year dissolving pulp mill in Laos. The Lao government has leased 50,000 hectares to the Group for 75 years. Three companies, all owned by the Aditya Birla Group, will invest in the project: Grasim Industries (India) which will own 51 per cent; Thai Rayon (Thailand); and PT Indo Bharat Rayon (Indonesia).

The pulp mill is planned to be built seven years after the first eucalyptus trees are planted. The pulp will be exported to Aditya Birla's rayon fibre manufacturing operations in Thailand, India, and Indonesia.

The Aditya Birla Group has annual sales of US\$7.6 billion. The Group describes itself as "India's first truly multinational corporation". The Group has seven pulp and fibre plants, in India, Thailand, Indonesia and Canada, with a total capacity of 775,000 tons a year. It is the world's largest producer of viscose staple fibre. The Group's chairman, Kumar Birla, is one of the richest people in the world, with a net worth of US\$4.4 billion, according to Forbes magazine.

In recent months I have received several eyewitness reports about the impacts of industrial tree plantations in Laos. The following are edited extracts from these reports which, I'm afraid, will have to remain anonymous.

"It is now patently obvious driving along Route 13", writes one observer, "that what was healthy lowland forest just five to ten years ago is now being converted into eucalyptus plantations, including former flooded forest in the Nam Hinboun and Nam Pakan floodplains."

Oji Paper is clearing large areas of forest in areas close to the ADB-funded Theun Hinboun dam, between Route 13 and the Hinboun River. "It is a real disaster there," an anonymous critic tells me. "Many people, who have already suffered from catching less fish in the Hinboun River from the dam problem, are now getting the double problem with plantations. The company is getting all kind of forest now. The [Lao government's] Land and Forest Allocation process has completely failed in this aspect, because the process cannot keep or give forest to people, but is helping companies to clear forest and help them to grab all the land from the people. People simply have no space to breathe right now. ADB is really shameless to claim that they are helping the poor and the forest."

The ADB and the Lao government claim that the plantations are only being planted on degraded forest. But, "degraded forest is often another word for healthy, recovering forest with wide utility value to villagers and biodiverse in flora and fauna," as another writer points out.

The problem that the ADB seems unable or unwilling to grasp is that villagers are dependent for their livelihoods on their forest and common land. One observer describes how villagers collect "resin, firewood, mushrooms, insects and frogs in the wet season and grasses for roofs," from "fairly heavily disturbed dry dipterocarp forests". Villagers also use the land to graze cattle.

"People conclude that the plantations are not for their benefit, but are for the benefit of business," writes another critic. "Villagers have lost their land. Eucalyptus plantations are supposed to be reforestation and are supposed to be planted in degraded forests. But villagers say that eucalyptus plantations are very different to forest."

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- Uruguay: FSC certification greenwashes monoculture tree plantations

Two large national plantation companies (FYMNSA and COFUSA), a Finnish company (Botnia-UPM/Kymmene) and a Spanish company (Ence-Eufores), have received the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate. This certificate enables the companies to assure that their "forests" (of pine and eucalyptus!) are managed in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable manner. At least this is what the FSC mandate affirms. However, a recent study carried out in Uruguay shows the exact opposite.

With regard to biodiversity it is astonishing that none of the certification companies make any reference to the country's main ecosystem (grasslands) where the greatest number of plant species develop and on which a major part of the native fauna depend. The explanation is simple: these plantations are established precisely in grassland areas. The options were only two: either ignore the problem or refuse certification. SGS and SmartWood (the two certification companies involved) obviously chose the former.

To make matters worse, these large certified monoculture tree plantations are having impacts on water, implying a chain effect on the numerous plant and animal species linked to wetlands, ponds and streams, that either disappear or have less flow. At the same time they are impacting on the scantily studied soil flora and fauna. For many of these soil-dependent species, plantations result in either a food desert or a toxic environment.

The changes in biodiversity generated by these certified monoculture tree plantations have also had impacts on the local population. In effect these food deserts for the local fauna are empty of people. This turns them into excellent places of refuge for wild boar and foxes, which feed on the agricultural production of the zone, killing sheep and poultry and eating the farmers' crops, making it almost impossible for these people to survive.

At the same time, the destruction of the ecological balance resulting from these vast monoculture tree plantations has given way to a big increase in the population of poisonous snakes, which attack plantation workers and neighbouring inhabitants (and their animals). They now even find these dangerous snakes inside their houses.

For these and other reasons that have been verified in the above-mentioned study, it is clear that this is not "environmentally responsible" natural resource management.

Regarding social impacts, it has been confirmed that these plantations cause negative changes in the rural environment (much larger land holdings in corporate and foreign hands, depopulation of rural areas, disappearance of other productive activities, impacts on other agricultural outputs), scant employment under precarious conditions (outsourcing systems, temporary employment, low income, piece-work, scant compliance with labour legislation) and very little is contributed as benefits to the local communities. Therefore it cannot be affirmed that they are managed in a "socially beneficial" manner.

As to economic aspects, the study shows that the plantation companies have received all kinds of direct and indirect State support (subsidies, tax breaks, soft loans, the building of highways, maintenance of rural roads affected by the heavy lorries involved in the activities of these companies). This direct economic support, linked to the externalization of environmental impacts (on water, flora and fauna) and social impacts (cheap labour, poor working conditions, damage to other rural activities) have been essential for making viable an activity that without them would have been unviable. That is to say, this is in no way an "economically viable" activity.

The conclusion is clear: large scale monoculture tree plantations installed in Uruguay should have never been certified by FSC, precisely because they are "environmentally inappropriate, socially damaging and economically unviable." This certification grants a green label to an activity that is increasingly being questioned in Uruguay and that weakens those who seek an environmentally sound and socially beneficial development model... which is precisely what the majority of FSC members want certification to support.

* The study: "Greenwashing industrial tree plantations in Uruguay: a critical assessment of FSC-certified plantations", by Ricardo Carrere, will be published shortly in both Spanish and English.

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- GE trees: Countries Call for Global Moratorium at the COP8 of the CBD

The increasing use of biotechnology in the forestry sector has led to the spread of genetically engineered tree planting in at least thirty-five countries. Though --according to FAO-- most research is confined to the laboratories, many millions of GE trees have already been released in open field trials in China, North America, Australia, Europe, and India, and to a lesser extent, South America and Africa.

In the case of China, the State Forestry Bureau is unable to trace the 1.4 million GE poplars (*Populus nigra*) planted so far, engineered to be infertile and pest resistant. Plans to increase GE tree plantations in China are being considered. Applications to field test GE trees in the US have risen by over 70 percent in fifteen years. A Brazilian government project to sequence the entire genome of the eucalyptus tree is financed by companies that topped a poll representing the worst carbon sink project at the COP9 conference in Milan in 2003. The FAO however, misguidedly describes the "Genolyptus" project in Brazil as "cutting edge biotechnological research."

Amid the expanding risk of GE trees, alarm bells have been sounding about their impacts. Now it seems that some countries have paid attention to them. On 22 March, at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Eighth Conference of the Parties held this month in Curitiba, Brazil, delegates from countries around the world raised the call for a moratorium on the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment.

Iran was the first country to bring up the issue of the moratorium acknowledging that GE trees will worsen existing problems with monoculture tree plantations. As long as the CBD is the party that is responsible for this issue, Iran

stressed the need that this body should put on a moratorium and launch a global risk assessment regarding GE trees.

The moratorium proposal was supported by nine countries - Ghana, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran, Madagascar, Malawi, Philippines, Rwanda and Senegal. Ghana said that little attention has been paid to the issue of GE trees but concerns are emerging with regard to the impacts of GE trees on forests and human health. "Paragraph 9 from the SBSSTA recommendation ['new era concerning access to genetic resources'] is very weak. What will the COP do? A stronger message must be made. We are happy with Iran's suggestion for a moratorium", stressed a Ghanaian delegate.

The grounds for the ban on the commercial release of transgenic trees into the environment have been also laid down in the "Briefing Paper on Transgenic Trees" issued at CBD COP-8 by Global Justice Ecology Project, EcoNexus, Friends of the Earth International, Global Forest Coalition and World Rainforest Movement: "The pursuit of genetic engineering in forest research is principally corporate, shaped by the imperatives of private investment, market forces and government regulatory institutions. Novel forest tree phenotypes are created as a means to increase shareholder value of investor companies. And although potential benefits will accrue to shareholders, it is clear that ecological risks of certain transgenic traits engineered into trees are likely to be shared by all. Private investment in forest biotechnology is ... fueling the creation of novel transgenic phenotypes in trees at a rate that is outstripping public policy deliberation and scientific assessment of environmental concerns specific to trees", states the document.

"[The GE trees commercial release] will inevitably and irreversibly contaminate native forest ecosystems, which will themselves become contaminants in an endless cycle. The potential effects of commercial release of transgenic trees include destruction of biodiversity and wildlife, loss of fresh water, desertification of soils, collapse of native forest ecosystems, major changes to ecosystem patterns and severe human health impacts. Despite all of these predictably disastrous consequences, thorough risk assessments of transgenic tree release have not been done. Rural and indigenous communities in and around countries advancing commercial transgenic tree plantations will bear the greatest burden of the negative impacts of transgenic trees".

"Potential human health impacts are only beginning to be known. Health risks include increased exposure to hazardous chemicals applied to plantations of transgenic trees and harmful effects of inhaling pollen from trees that produce the bacterial toxin Bt. Engineering trees to produce Bt toxin could be far more dangerous. Pines are known for heavy pollination, spreading pollen for hundreds of kilometers. Establishment of plantations of pines that produce Bt pollen could potentially lead to widespread outbreaks of sickness".

"Given that genetic modification in trees is already entering the commercial phase with GM *populus* in China, it is very important that environmental risk assessment studies are conducted with protocols and methodologies agreed upon at a national level and an international level. It is also important that the results of such studies are made widely available."

The report concludes: "The damaging effects of conventional industrial monoculture tree plantations is already well-documented and is being resisted around the world. The addition of transgenic tree plantations can only worsen existing problems. Add to this the utter lack of credible risk assessment of transgenic tree release, especially on a global scale, and it becomes a matter of common sense that there must not be any further forward motion in the commercial development of transgenic tree plantations. The UN CBD must impose a moratorium on the technology and launch a thorough and global examination of the risks of transgenic tree release."

Article based on information from: "Briefing Paper on Transgenic Trees - Agenda Pt. 26.1 – CBD COP-8, Curitiba, Brazil", <http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/COP8.pdf>; personal communication from Orin Langelle, Global Justice Ecology Project and STOP GE Trees Campaign, and members of the Global Forest Coalition; "UN Cautions Over GM trees", Sam Burcher, ISIS Press Release 12/10/05, <http://www.i-sis.org.uk/UNCaution.php>

- Chile: Pulp mill destroy biodiversity and people's livelihoods

Black-necked swans used to have their habitat in the Carlos Andwandter Nature Sanctuary on the Cruces River, a Ramsar site located in the northern zone of the city of Valdivia in the Tenth Region. The black-necked swan (*Cygnus melancoryphus*) is a migratory bird native of South America. Its landscapes are the wetlands of the south of Brazil, Uruguay, nearly all Argentina and Chile from the Fourth to the Tenth Region. It feeds on plants and in the Cruces River on a waterweed, the luchecillo (*Egeria densa*). In addition to the fact that the black-necked swan became part of the local identity, the Rio Cruces Sanctuary led to the development of a considerable inflow of tourists, resulting in an important source of income and labour for the local people.

The Arauco and Constitución (CELCO) pulp mill started operating at the beginning of 2004, located at 32 kilometres to the southeast of the wetland. The mill operates with the ECF bleaching system (using chorine dioxide) and is fed by pine trees from vast monoculture plantations. It discharges its effluents into the Cruces River.

The mill had been operating less than a month when the communes of San José de la Mariquina in the west (close on 6 Km from the mill), Lanco and Loncoche in the north (some 30 Km away) and Valdivia in the south (some 60 Km away), protested because of the insupportable smell coming from the mill (see WRM Bulletin No. 83). In October of that same year there was an alert because of an anomaly in the wetland, corroborated by the presence of dead and dying swans, attributed to the lack of food as it was found that the luchecillo and other waterweeds had dried up. The Austral University of Valdivia presented a report showing that the heavy metals (including aluminium) that the mill was releasing into the water had destroyed the luchecillo, causing the death of 500 birds out of a total of 5,000 that rapidly migrated.

Furthermore, the diagnostic set out in a report by the World Wildlife Foundation made public on 22 November 2005 confirmed the reiterated complaints that the citizen movement of Valdivia had been making for over a year and that had remained unanswered by the authorities. In turn the Chilean Agriculture and Livestock Service made an analysis of the concentration of polychlorinated dioxins and furans in black swan tissues ("Study on the origin of the death rate and drop in the population of water fowl in the Carlos Anwandter Nature Sanctuary in the province of Valdivia") carried out by a laboratory in the United States. The results reveal the presence of polychlorinated dioxins and furans, showing that pulp mills bleaching with chorine dioxide release dioxins and furans, extremely toxic substances that bio-accumulate in the environment.

To face the Rio Cruces catastrophe, the 320 thousand strong population of Valdivia, responded immediately by setting up an association, Action Group for the Swans (Acción por los Cisnes). Multitudinous and unceasing participation and complaints provided a political status to the environmental problem, bringing it to international spheres. Some Euro-deputies became interested in the catastrophe and promoted a revision of the Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Chile. However, it is ironical that it is the countries of the North that are promoting the unsustainable consumption of paper and it is their demand for raw material that encourages the export of pulp from the South, with the social and environmental disasters this gives rise to. The production of pulp for export has become installed in many countries of the South, prodigious in productive land, benign climates, cheap labour and indebted governments. The good business for some is carried out at the expense of the environment and local populations, which suffer doubly, due to the destructive effects of the monoculture tree plantations and due to contamination by the pulp industry.

Although the CELCO mill was subject to fines and temporary closures during 2005, imposed by the National Environmental Commission (Comisión Nacional de Medio Ambiente - CONAMA), the mill still has the support of the Chilean government. Many ecologists believe that pressure had been put on CONAMA under the presidency of Eduardo Ruiz-Tagle to obtain approval for the project of the mill.

In the meanwhile, the swans have died or migrated, the mill continues to contaminate, the neighbours continue to get poorer with the disappearance of tourist activities and the contamination of their crops and their health is affected by the emissions and effluents from the mill. However, the mobilization of the people of Valdivia in

defence of their biodiversity also continues without reprieve. The Citizen Movement Action Group for the Swans, the Lonko Council of Pikunwijimapu, the Tralco Indigenous Community and the Steel Workers Trade Union Association of Valdivia have filed lawsuits: one is a criminal investigation at the Prosecutor's Office in Valdivia and the other a legal petition to the Council of State Defence. Furthermore, since the CELCO mill in Valdivia started operations, two actions for the enforcement of rights have been lodged, although both have been reversed. Mobilizations have not ceased. In January this year, over 2 thousand people marched against the pollution of the rivers of Valdivia and demanded that CELCO be closed down.

The slogan is: "for a new river region without pollution!" "We do not want to be told in a year's time that the Sanctuary is contaminated because we all know it. We ask for CELCO to be closed as it is an open secret that the company is responsible for the ecological disaster," pointed out Jose Araya, from the Action Group for the Swans.

Article based on information from the Acción por los Cisnes site: <http://www.accionporloscisnes.org/>; "Las papeleras de Michelle", by Eduardo Basz, <http://www.rionegro.com.ar/arch200602/01/o01j01.php>; "Plantas de celulosa que utilizan dióxido de cloro emiten dioxinas y furanos: la evidencia chilena", press release by RAPAL-Uruguay, 8 November 2005, <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/celulosa/evidencia.html>

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