
[Rio+20 shows that corporate power is limitless](#)

During the Rio+20 summit, incidents related to the event itself, such as the expulsion of a Mozambican activist, and the daily reality faced by the local population, who suffer at the hands of the big corporations sponsoring the official conference, demonstrated that corporate power has no limits.

Mozambican journalist Jeremias Vunjanhe arrived in Brazil on June 13 to participate in the People's Summit, an event organized by Brazilian and international civil society networks and social movements that took place before and after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, better known as Rio+20. But he did not make it past the airport, where he was stopped from entering the country by the Brazilian federal police and deported to Mozambique.

Jeremias and his organization, Justiça Ambiental-Friends of the Earth Mozambique, have tirelessly supported Mozambican communities impacted by the activities of Vale, a transnational mining company based in Brazil and one of the world's largest. Jeremias had already been the target of threats and intimidation because of his work on numerous occasions in the past.

If we look closely at the Rio+20 conference we can see that global corporate power has lobbied very effectively to defend its interests, both within the UN and on an individual basis with the governments of many countries, through its proposal of a "green economy" that promotes the privatization and commodification of nature as the right path towards a "sustainable" future. Moreover, it would appear that a group of large transnational corporations have gained de facto control over the UN and national governments, as well as other national institutions such as the police force and judicial system, which they use to defend their current and future interests through the criminalization and persecution of local communities and activists that could represent obstacles to them.

To see this reality, it was enough to look a bit beyond the Rio+20 meeting facilities. Civil society organizations in Rio de Janeiro, for example, organized so-called Toxic Tours, which provided a look at the "B-side" of the city. These solidarity visits included a meeting with residents of the community of Santa Cruz, on the west side of the host city, who suffer the impacts of the massive TKCSA steel plant, a joint venture between Vale and the German transnational ThyssenKrupp. There were also visits to communities in the municipality of Magé and the region of Duque de Caxias, among others affected by the operations of Petrobras, the Brazilian state-owned oil and gas company.

Following the visits, representatives of the three communities met together to share their experiences of the Toxic Tours at an event during the People's Summit. The residents of Santa Cruz denounced the pollution of the air and water, declaring that "we no longer eat rice and beans, now we eat iron dust," and highlighted the health problems suffered by the population and the tactics used by the company to co-opt local communities. They also reported that making a living from fishing is now practically impossible. "They want to hear us say that we are no longer fishermen," declared one local fisherman, while another lamented, "I used to be a man of the sea, but now I don't know what I am anymore."

A few days after Rio+20, we got a clear picture of the scope of the violence faced by fisherfolk in the

state of Rio de Janeiro when João Luis Telles Penetra and Almir Nogueira de Amorim of the Association of Men and Women of the Sea of Guanabara Bay (AHOMAR), an organization that defends artisanal fishing in the region, were brutally murdered. AHOMAR fights against the social and environmental impacts of the major industrial activities in the region that affect fisherfolk, and in particular, against a petrochemical complex owned by Petrobras.

Also during Rio+20, 300 indigenous people and their supporters held an event called Xingu+23 to protest the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon region. Promoted by Eletrobrás, another major Brazilian company in the energy sector, the dam will negatively impact thousands of people and destroy at least 50,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest. The police in Pará subsequently requested that the state justice system imprison 11 activists, including a priest who had celebrated mass and blessed the Xingu+23 meeting, and a local resident whose house had been destroyed by construction work on the dam. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, indigenous protestors briefly occupied the headquarters of the main source of financing for the dam, the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), which is using the Brazilian people's money to fund this million-dollar project.

The power of big corporations doesn't only affect communities who oppose their projects. It would appear that it is even capable of bringing down presidents, if we look closely at what happened immediately after Rio+20 in Paraguay, where the democratically elected president, Fernando Lugo, was ousted from power. The involvement of the powerful agribusiness sector in this incident is undeniable. This sector dominates the Paraguayan economy as well as its political circles, and includes transnationals like Monsanto that earn millions of dollars by promoting the use of genetically modified seeds in the country.

In the face of this reality, the message of the People's Summit is clearer than ever: we must take action. And the organizations and activists participating in the event began to do so by protesting against the arbitrary deportation of their fellow activist, Jeremias. After many protests, both national and international, the Brazilian government was forced to reverse its decision and allow Jeremias to enter the country. He travelled from Mozambique to Brazil once again and arrived in Rio de Janeiro on June 19, six days after his deportation.

At the airport in Rio de Janeiro, Jeremias was able to clearly see the two faces of today's world. On the one hand, the face of the corporations in the glossy posters placed throughout the airport to welcome him and other participants in Rio+20, featuring as one of the sponsors of the event the Brazilian company Vale, with which Jeremias is all too familiar. But the other companies mentioned in this article – Petrobras and Eletrobras – were also among the official sponsors of the UN conference.

Luckily for Jeremias, however, he was also able to see the face of the people, united and in struggle, thanks to the dozens of activists who were there to welcome him with a joyous celebration of this victory in the fight for justice.

Finally, let no one be fooled by the many "green" faces that corporations put forward to hide their violations, their true practices. As Jeremias himself stressed, all of the solidarity shown towards him must also be shared with all of the communities who suffer from the arbitrary acts and violations perpetrated against them by corporations. And we must continue to unite and step up our struggle against corporate power and in defence of life!

