September 21st - International Day against Monoculture Tree Plantations

This September we pay tribute once again to the men and women around the world who have taken up different struggles against monoculture tree plantations in defense of their territories, their forests and their way of life, as opposed to the greed of big corporations and investors who seek to exploit the same land for their own benefit.

This date was not chosen randomly in some office, but rather commemorates a meeting in Brazil in 2004 among people who had witnessed the direct impact of monoculture eucalyptus on their lives. They felt a specific date should be set to commemorate their struggle and serve as an additional means of reinforcement for the resistance effort and their battle to recover the territories lost to eucalyptus trees. Inspired by the events of that day in 2004, several battles have since been waged in Brazil to recover territories, in addition to actions taken by other resistance movements. With the idea of reinforcing the claim worldwide, the WRM decided to make September 21st an International Day.

Those familiar with the life of communities affected by monoculture oil palm, eucalyptus, rubber, acacia and pine trees have no trouble understanding the reasons behind such conflicts. The companies responsible for monoculture trees seek to take over the territories of native populations and control their ways of life and often end up dismantling and dividing communities.

The increasingly vertiginous pace at which these plantations are multiplying is the outcome of a process geared by multi-national companies, who profit from the "certification seals" that legitimize their actions. The latest report by the WRM (1) indicates that, in the past 20 years, the surface area covered by plantations around the world has quadrupled, with oil palm and eucalyptus trees in the lead. If it weren't for the resistance shown by the communities in different locations and countries, these areas would certainly be much larger.

We would like to take this opportunity to warn everyone about a new form of expansion in particular: large-scale monoculture tree plantations in Latin America, Africa and Asia, intended to generate energy sources for North American and European countries, and some in Asia. Instead of reducing their astronomic consumption of fossil fuel-sourced energy to make it more efficient, these countries are determined to maintain their current levels of consumption by resorting to so-called bio-fuel produced by tree plantations.

Trendy terms such as "renewable" and "green" are taking us back to colonial times, when it was common practice to take over vast territories belonging to indigenous communities in pursuit of guaranteeing the raw materials needed by the few in the countries of the Northern Hemisphere. The current situation should be seen as a direct attack on the food sovereignty of entire populations aimed at “feeding” the vehicles and power plants in industrialized countries with high levels of energy consumption.

This bulletin is intended to open a forum for debate on the worldwide battle against both bio-fuel plantations as well as “traditional” plantations involved in cellulose production, which continue to

multiply. In the end, the communities whose everyday life is affected by plantations couldn't care less about the specific use for which the plantations are intended—what they are concerned about is safeguarding and recovering their territories. We and many others share and support this aspiration, and hope this International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations serves to raise awareness and reinforce the struggle.

(1) “An overview of industrial tree plantations in the global South: conflicts, trends, and resistance struggles” has been written by WRM under the auspices of a project called EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade, see www.ejolt.org). The report can be accessed at http://www.ejolt.org/2012/06/an-overview-of-industrial-tree-plantations-in-the-global-south-conflicts-trends-and-resistance-struggles/