# September 21: A tribute to Ricardo Carrere and to all those who struggle against monoculture tree plantations and in defense of life!

This past August 16, as many of you know, we lost our dear friend and colleague Ricardo Carrere. While Ricardo's passing has signified a huge loss for us, at the same time, he has left behind an extraordinary legacy.
This has become clear to us through the countless messages we have received from longtime colleagues and friends. But we have also been struck by the many messages sent by people who met Ricardo only once or on just a few occasions. These contacts, no matter how brief, left a lasting impact on people, as is reflected in the article about Ricardo written by Julien-François Gerber and Sandra Veuthey, included in this issue.

In the editorial for this month's issue of the bulletin, devoted to the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, we thought it would be fitting to share some of Ricardo's own thoughts and reflections on this date, gathered from the books, publications and articles that he wrote and generously left us with, as a tribute to his life and work.

Every year, with the enthusiasm and commitment he was known for, Ricardo would devote himself to promoting this international day of struggle, established in 2004 at a meeting of communities affected by monoculture plantations in Brazil. We should mention that this date is particularly significant, since September 21 is National Tree Day in Brazil.

What, in Ricardo's view, was the purpose of the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations? He tells us in his own words: "On this September 21 we therefore aim at providing visibility to the numerous peoples struggling against plantations, as a means of breaking the circle of silence and lies surrounding their plight. At the same time, our aim is to disseminate as widely as possible the evidence emerging from those struggles regarding the social and environmental impacts resulting from those plantations. Through this means, it is our aim to weaken government support to plantations and to expose those that either provide plantations with credibility or who misinform the public about the issue." (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Ricardo took a principled stand on the side of local communities affected by monoculture tree plantations. It was from these communities that he learned about and confirmed the serious negative impacts of these plantations, which he sought to communicate in a clear and direct manner: "Knowledge gained during the past decades, of the fact that plantations are established at the expense of local peoples' livelihoods and environment, has now reached such a level of certainty that it can no longer be ignored. In country after country, monoculture tree plantations have resulted in net loss of employment, forced or 'voluntary' evictions, appropriation of large areas of land by national and transnational corporations, depletion and pollution of water resources, biodiversity loss, soil impoverishment, destruction of local ecosystems – forests or grasslands – and in many cases in human rights abuses including repression, imprisonment and even death." (WRM Bulletin 110, September 2006)

One of the arguments that Ricardo used to justify the importance of the International Day Against

Monoculture Tree Plantations was the fact that most people would consider planting trees to be a good thing. As he wrote, “many people – in the South and North – are totally unaware about the social and environmental impacts resulting from large-scale tree monocultures and believe that planting trees is always positive. They are also unaware of the fact that these plantations are not aimed at improving local peoples’ livelihoods, but at feeding wasteful consumption in the North.” (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Regarding the reasons for this, he added: “The above situation results from a combination of factors, among which the fact that the voices of local peoples’ struggling against plantations are silenced through fear, repression or by being made invisible by the media. Both fear/repression and media invisibility result from the economic and political power of plantation companies, usually also involved in investments in the pulp, timber, palm oil or rubber industrial sectors.” (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Ricardo also criticized the tactics used by corporations to invade these local peoples’ lands, through empty promises and false scientific arguments: “The fact that none of these arguments has the slightest scientific foundation has not prevented their dissemination as ‘scientific truths’, not only by those who directly benefit – corporations – but also by the technical-bureaucratic apparatus – national and international – placed at their service. In this process, local wisdom has been ruled out as ‘ignorance’ and true ignorance has been placed on the pedestal of ‘science’.” (WRM Bulletin 146, September 2009)

He summed up the situation this way: “Essentially, the establishment of these large-scale monoculture tree plantations amounts to a war on the peoples and on nature. The mighty green army invades, destroys and cracks down on local populations, whose only ‘crime’ is defending what is rightfully theirs from the invader.” (WRM Bulletin 158, September 2010).

And he also noted: “Finally, we wish to stress that the struggle against plantations is something that has been imposed on communities, who are in fact protecting their livelihoods and local environments against corporate greed. It is a struggle that needs to be staged in order to protects forests, grasslands, wetlands, biodiversity, soils, water and people, all of which are being affected by these vast tree monocultures. It is, in sum, a struggle for life.” (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008).

Finally, in the September issue of the WRM bulletin last year, Ricardo paid tribute to the local communities around the world who fight against monoculture tree plantations, saying: “That is why, this September 21, we want to pay tribute to all the peoples who are struggling to defend their territories, and launch a call to step up the efforts to support them in the just defence of their rights.”

This September 21, 2011, we want to include Ricardo in that tribute. For WRM, supporting these struggles will continue to be a key priority.

Thank you for everything and *hasta siempre,* Ricardo!