Statement by forestry professionals and students - Monoculture tree plantations are not forests

See here the press release

Throughout the world, governments are actively promoting the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, despite the serious social and environmental impacts already witnessed on existing plantations. The promoters of this model claim that plantations are forests, which simply is not true. Plantations are not forests. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues in the forestry sector support this model, and our teaching institutions continue to train new generations of forestry professionals to perpetuate and expand this type of forestry model, aimed at seeing forests where they do not exist.

This is why we feel the need to publicly state not only that monoculture tree plantations are not forests, but also that these plantations result or have resulted in the destruction of our native forests and of other equally valuable ecosystems that they replace.

Those who know the most about this issue are the local populations who directly suffer the impacts of plantations, such as:

- Loss of biodiversity (and the resulting loss of food, medicines, firewood, and materials for housing construction and crafts, among others).

- Changes in the water cycle, resulting both in the decrease and depletion of water sources and the increase of flooding and landslides.

- Decreased food production.

- Soil degradation.

- Loss of indigenous and traditional cultures that depend on the original ecosystems.

- Conflicts with forestry companies over the ownership of land in indigenous territories and those of other traditional communities.

- Decreased sources of employment in traditionally agricultural areas.

- Expulsion of rural populations.

- Destruction of the natural landscape in tourism areas.

For reasons like these, we forestry professionals who strive for the conservation of forests and recognise the basic rights of the peoples who live there must take the side of those who truly defend the forests – the local communities – and oppose the expansion of monoculture plantations.

We want to stress that this process is not beginning today, but in fact dates back to the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. At that time, a group of forestry students and professionals agreed on the need for “another kind of forestry training based on a different way of seeing the world, in which forests are not seen simply as wood, but rather as what they really are: diverse ecosystems made up of forest flora, fauna and peoples.” In line with this position, we clearly declared ourselves “against the establishment of large-scale monocultures or homogenous tree plantations.”

Today, within this framework, we are calling on forestry students and professionals to adhere to this declaration and to begin a process, inside and outside educational institutions, that will make it possible for those of us who enter this profession to actually do what we thought we would be doing when we entered it: defending forests and the peoples who depend on them.

Click here to download the statement with the signatories up to 06th October 2008