
[The Montevideo Declaration. A call for action to defend forests and people against large-scale tree monocrops](#)

Montevideo, June 1998

A call for action to defend forests and people against large-scale tree monocrops

In June 1998, citizens of 14 countries around the world gathered in Montevideo, Uruguay out of urgent concern at the recent and accelerating invasion of millions of hectares of land and forests by pulpwood, oil palm, rubber and other industrial tree plantations.

Such plantations have little in common with forests. Consisting of thousands or even millions of trees of the same species, bred for rapid growth, uniformity and high yield of raw material and planted in even-aged stands, they require intensive preparation of the soil, fertilisation, planting with regular spacing, selection of seedlings, mechanical or chemical weeding, use of pesticides, thinning, and mechanized harvesting.

As people from six continents engaged in fighting such industrial monocultures and near-monocultures have testified, the resulting radical conversion of the landscape, together with the disruption of social and natural systems, can threaten the welfare and even survival of local communities.

The following are the most frequently cited environmental impacts:

- * reduced soil fertility
- * increased erosion and compaction of the soil
- * loss of natural biodiversity
- * reduced groundwater reserves and stream-flow
- * increase in fires and fire risks

These effects frequently extend far outside plantation boundaries, with nearby or downstream areas being affected by erosion, desiccation and radical, sometimes irreversible changes in the local flora and fauna. All these impacts damage local peoples' lives and livelihoods.

Industrial tree plantations have in many cases been preceded by firing or clearcutting of native forests and have therefore become a new and major cause of deforestation. In agricultural areas, industrial tree plantations have undermined food security by usurping productive cropland and pastures, thus contributing to local poverty. In many cases they have resulted in forced displacement or forced resettlement of local people, in widespread human rights abuses and in violation of local peoples' land rights. Nearly everywhere they have been established, industrial tree plantations have destroyed people's livelihoods in agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry and gathering. The pitiful number of jobs they create -- insecure, seasonal, badly paid frequently dangerous, and susceptible to market cycles -- cannot compensate for the loss of employment that they cause.

Pulpwood plantations can be particularly huge. The scale of these plantations --most often of eucalyptus, pine or acacia-- is influenced by the immensity of the factories which process the trees they grow. A \$1 billion pulp mill may produce a half million to a million tons of pulp a year and divert an entire river through its machines as it squats amid sixty thousand hectares or more of plantations. The cost of reengineering and simplifying landscapes in this way can be paid only through massive direct and indirect subsidies-- including tax breaks, government handouts, infrastructure, research and suppression of labour organization-- captured through the exercise of political power. The power exercised by the industry locally tends to result in further subsidies, further expansion, political repression, hostility to democratic procedures, and contempt for local needs and landscapes.

The plantation industry is increasingly moving to the South, where cheap land, labour and water, fast tree growth, and loose environmental controls result in lower production costs. This encourages the current pattern of excessive and growing paper consumption in the North and parts of the South.

Assisting or underwriting the spread of industrial tree plantations is a set of supporting actors ranging from the World Bank and bilateral "aid" agencies to research institutions and university scientists. Money badly needed to support the development of local livelihood security (including the development of small-scale, locally-appropriate and environmentally-responsible paper production techniques using locally available raw materials) is directed into forestry research supporting the use of fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, biotechnology, cloning and a Green Revolution-like package of techniques which has proven to be detrimental to local environments and livelihoods. In the name of "development", other public monies are diverted to forestry consulting firms, pulping machinery manufacturers, and pulp and paper companies which are often also involved in logging native forests.

To counter growing resistance, the industry is attempting to "green" its image by presenting tree monocrops as "planted forests" and as carbon sinks. Although tree plantations have little in common with forests and although most of the carbon stored by plantations will be released to the atmosphere again within five to ten years, such myths are sometimes accepted by uninformed audiences.

In view of these concerns, we pledge our support to an international campaign to:

- * support local peoples' rights and struggles against the invasion of their lands by these plantations
- * encourage awareness of the negative social and environmental impacts of large-scale industrial monocrop tree plantations, and
- * change the conditions which make such plantations possible.

We therefore commit ourselves to joining the movements opposed to such plantations --movements which have already achieved significant successes. We are confident that the struggle against the industrial forestry model will at the same time help enable local communities to implement local solutions to local problems --solutions which will simultaneously have positive impacts on the global environment, and whose continuing evolution we also pledge ourselves to support.

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Yoichi Kuroda
Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN)
Japan

Witoon Permpongsacharoen
Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA)
Thailand

Marcus Colchester
Forest Peoples Programme
United Kingdom

William Appiah
Third World Network
Ghana

Larry Lohmann
The Corner House
United Kingdom

Chris Hatch
Rainforest Action Network
U.S.A.

Saskia Ozinga
FERN
United Kingdom

Wally Menne
Timberwatch Coalition
South Africa

Liz Chidley
Down to Earth
United Kingdom

Hernán Verscheure
Comité Nacional pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora (CODEFF)
Chile

Rosa Roldán
Instituto Brasileiro de Analises Sociais e Economicas (IBASE)
Brazil

Elías Díaz Peña
Sobrevivencia
Paraguay

Göran Eklöf
Sociedad Sueca para la Conservación de la Naturaleza
Sweden

Chad Dobson
Consumer's Choice Council

U.S.A.

Patrick Anderson
Greenpeace International

Silvia Ribeiro
Red de Ecología Social/Amigos de la Tierra-Uruguay
Uruguay

Roberto Bissio
Instituto del Tercer Mundo
Uruguay

Hilary Sandison
Imágenes
Uruguay

Raquel Núñez
Red del Tercer Mundo
Uruguay

Liliana Medina Cócaro
Voluntad Internacional de Defensa Ambiental (VIDA)
Uruguay

Ricardo Carrere
Movimiento Mundial por los Bosques - Coordinador Internacional
Uruguay