
Social resistance against the World Forestry Congress

The Thirteenth World Forestry Congress (WFC) took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 18 to 23 October.

The history of these congresses started in 1926 in Rome. They are meetings that take place every six years in different host countries, attended by representatives of governments, civil society, the private corporate sector and the academic world.

There is a close relationship between these Congresses and FAO insofar as it takes part in their preparation, defining the agenda, the speakers and authors to be invited and the expert advisory committee. The output of these WFC takes the shape of recommendations that can be adopted by FAO with all the weight and influence this implies.

Coinciding with the opening of the XIII WFC, hundreds of representatives of peasant and indigenous movements and social organizations from Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and numerous Argentine Provinces, arrived in Buenos Aires.

Received by Vía Campesina and Friends of the Earth Argentina, hundreds of women and men, sometimes with their children, took part in three days of exchange of information and training meetings in addition to demonstrations and marches.

On 16 October, Food Sovereignty Day, they marched from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Plaza de Mayo where they assembled to read a proclamation and hold a market selling native seeds. The grass-roots organizations demanded food sovereignty, the halting of deforestation and the implementation of an agrarian reform that would guarantee that the communities can live and produce on their lands. Family and peasant farming are being trapped and evicted from rural areas by agribusiness, including monoculture tree plantations.

On Sunday 18 October, the venue was Plaza Italia, around the Festival of the “People who live with the Forests.” Amid music, singing and dancing, a colourful and energetic demonstration reached the doors of the nearby premises hosting the WFC. They bore banners with slogans such as “Plantations are not forests,” “Stop forestation. Yes to productive diversity. No to monoculture tree plantations,” “Monoculture plantations are not forests,” “Resisting agribusiness,” “Food sovereignty,” “Land, water and justice.”

The introduction of industrial monoculture tree plantations in Argentina has increased since 2006, when law 25080 subsidizing tree plantations was adopted. The commercial environment of this Congress is obvious in the formulation of the rounds of negotiations themselves and included on the official programme. Furthermore, a section is devoted to “planted forests.”

Therefore the Congress may well be an ideal platform for the expansion of the industry, legitimated by the academic world and concealed under the slogan of “Forest development, a vital balance.” Within the word “forestry” things as distant from each other as forest ecosystems with their

immensely rich biodiversity and the barren large-scale monoculture tree plantations - the “green deserts” - are put on the same footing. For the “people who live with the forests” present at the festival and the march, no confusion exists. They are very clear about the value of forests that provide them with life and sustenance. And painfully they know the negative impacts of tree plantations: the loss of water, loss of territory, loss of biodiversity, loss of food sovereignty, loss of their knowledge and with it, their culture and identity, and the loss of life itself.

For these reasons, in a very forceful way, they told the participants at the WFC:

NO to monoculture tree plantations

At the same time, they added:

YES to the defence of life

YES to territories in the hands of indigenous peoples and peasant communities

YES to an agriculture for Food Sovereignty

YES to the traditional knowledge of our peoples

And in their proclamation they announced:

“The struggle against tree plantations is also a celebration of life, of farming based on diversity in the hands of small peasant and indigenous farming families, of peasant and indigenous forest rehabilitation and of so many other existing real solutions. This celebration of life and of resistance, on this day of struggle against tree plantations, makes us more united along our path to build a new world.

**WE LIVE OFF THE FOREST, WE LIVE WITH THE FOREST, WE LIVE FOR THE FOREST...
OUR VOICES AND EARS IN OPPOSITION TO THEIR MONOCULTURE PLANTATIONS”**