
Why an International Day Against Tree Monocultures?

All “international days” concern problematic issues of global importance that need to be addressed by society as a whole. The expansion of tree monocultures has resulted in so many social and environmental impacts that it gave rise to the idea of establishing an International Day to raise the issue at the global level. The date of September 21st was chosen following the lead from local networks in Brazil, who in 2004 decided to establish this date –which is Tree Day in that country- as a day of struggle against tree monocultures.

The date coincides with the UN Day of Peace, which is precisely what local communities affected by plantations wish: peace to live in harmony with nature and with other human beings. Tree plantations are destroying such peace and the need for raising this issue on a specific day at the international level stems from a number of issues:

The first and more important is that many people –in 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.

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. The companies’ power –expressed through different mechanisms- result in partial or total control over government and media, who become “partners” of their investments. As a result, whenever local people stand up for their rights against plantation companies they are defined –together with their supporters- as “troublemakers”.

Plantation companies are further empowered by international bodies, forestry departments and mainstream forestry professionals, who –against all evidence- insist in defining tree monocultures as “planted forests” and as having similar positive roles as true forests. As a result, plantation opposers are classified as either ignorant or having hidden political agendas.

The above combination of corporate, government, professional and media influence is what maintains most people ignorant about the negative impacts of monoculture tree plantations. There are of course government officials, foresters and journalists who either oppose such plantations or are at least open to look into the existing evidence, but they are still a minority suffering the same constraints imposed by power.

And if things weren't bad enough, large-scale tree plantations are currently being promoted as a false solution to climate change in two manners: On the one hand the European parliament and others are pushing for so-called "second generation" agrofuels based on wood, which will lead to the rapid expansion of monoculture tree plantations, including of genetically modified trees. On the other hand, several Southern countries have stepped up their attempts to finance the expansion of large-scale

plantations as carbon offset projects or to use tree plantations to compensate for the loss of forests when these countries apply for funding from a potential mechanism under the Climate Convention.

Such is the context within which this International Day Against Tree Monocultures is taking place. There now exists abundant documented evidence about the social and environmental impacts of plantations, but governments, international bodies and mainstream foresters choose to ignore it. There are abundant cases to be reported –of environmental destruction, human rights violations, extreme working conditions, impacts on women- but the mainstream media chooses not to report them.

On this 21 September 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.

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 protect 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.

Friends of the Earth International - Global Forest Coalition - World Rainforest Movement