
Guatemala: Agrofuels cause deforestation and displacement

In Guatemala, like in several other countries of the South, indigenous communities and the environment are paying a high cost due to the expansion of agrofuels. Deforestation, forced displacement, threats, illegal arrest and even murder are the signs of this encroachment.

The organization Salva la Selva (Save the Rainforest) has denounced a situation that has been occurring over the past three years in an area known as “Finca Los Recuerdos”, where Ingenio Guadalupe, one of the companies producing ethanol in the country, has been deforesting indigenous land to plant sugar-cane for ethanol production.

In the midst of a food crisis and increase in the price of foodstuffs, on 30 June this year, 60 K'eqchi families from La Isla, Caserío el Morador Semano, Corazón de Maíz and Teleman Punto 15, in Panzos, tried to recover part of their land to cultivate it and produce food.

According to Salva la Selva, in response “they were attacked by paramilitary forces associated with the company. During the attack, they shot at the indigenous people from a helicopter, and a 35-year-old man, father of three children had to be taken to hospital. The next day, families and representatives of the peasant organization CUC, carried out a peaceful protest, during which they were again attacked by the paramilitary forces who were accompanied by two representatives of Ingenio Guadalupe. There were shots, threats to kill and two women were illegally arrested.” In the area of Coatepeque similar attacks took place, this time involving the expansion of oil palm plantations for the production of biodiesel.

According to information supplied by CUC and by the international human rights organization Rights Action, these events are representative of what is happening all over Guatemala. Members of CUC have denounced the following: “We make people see that the Government does not have any clear measures to face the food and high price crisis and we make them responsible for the reaction and action taken by the population as this crisis becomes more acute.”

So far the measures adopted have been in support of agribusiness groups and, as has been denounced, to enable them to “illegally obtain land that belongs to indigenous communities and where violence committed by paramilitary forces and even by the State security forces is used to displace the communities.”

Environmental destruction and violation of human rights are promoted by the world financial system: in January this year the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), approved funding that enables the Guatemalan Government to develop a national strategy for agrofuels. This will inevitably be expressed in more deforestation, more land appropriation, more forced displacements, more violation of the indigenous communities' human rights.

IDB is one of the major financiers of the expansion of agrofuels in Latin America and is preparing private credits for an amount of 3 billion dollars. Rights Actions is exhorting people to address a letter to the IDB, denouncing the situation and demanding immediate suspension of all support and funding

of agrofuel production in Guatemala. This letter ends by stating: “The production of agrofuels in Guatemala has increased deforestation, desertification and accelerated climate change. It also increases hunger and violates the territorial rights of indigenous communities, increasing violent repression. Please immediately suspend your support of agrofuels in Guatemala.” (Accessible at: <http://www.salvalaselva.org/protestaktion.php?id=283>).

Article based on information from: “Empresa de agrocombustibles reprime violentamente a indígenas en Guatemala,” (Agrofuel company violently represses indigenous people in Guatemala), Salva la Selva, <http://www.salvalaselva.org/protestaktion.php?id=283>