
Brazil: Follow-up of Tupinikim and Guarani struggle against Aracruz Celulose

Following the violent eviction of the Tupinikim and Guarani villages by tractors of the plantation and pulp company Aracruz Celulose with the support of the Federal Police in January (see WRM Bulletin Nº 102), hundreds and hundreds of international messages of solidarity with the struggle of the indigenous people to recover their legitimate lands were sent to the Brazilian authorities.

The attention abroad for the police violence and the several irregularities involving the Judge's decision (being now investigated by the Federal Public Prosecution Service) that motivated the police action, led to the decision of the Royal House of Sweden to withdraw their financial investments from the Aracruz company (partner of the Finnish-Swedish company Stora Enso in the Veracel pulp mill in the state of Bahia). The Swedish royal family's private investment firm, Gluonen -which is owned by Crown Princess Victoria and her siblings, Prince Carl Phillip and Princess Madeleine- had valuable shares in Aracruz. The royals decided to sell their shares after media criticism increased, a move that was welcomed by Swedish environmental NGOs.

On 28 January, Tupinikim and Guarani, helped by supporting groups and movements such as students and the MST (landless peasants movement), reconstructed during a whole day the shattered indigenous village of Olho d'Água.

On the legal field, the Federal Public Prosecution Service in Espírito Santo is preparing a new appeal in which they demand the Federal Judge to give the Tupinikim and Guarani a right to occupy the area until a final decision on the demarcation is taken by the federal government.

On 30 January, with the support of several authorities, a delegation of 8 indigenous leaders had a 30-minutes meeting with President of the Republic Luíz Inácio Lula da Silva, at the Vitória Airport, at the end of a short visit of the President to the Espírito Santo State. Lula promised that he would send the Minister of Justice Márcio Thomaz Bastos to talk directly with the Indigenous Peoples in order to solve the demarcation issue.

Lula kept his promise. On 9 February, an indigenous commission of 20 chiefs and leaders had a meeting of one and a half hour with the Minister of Justice and the President of FUNAI (Federal Agency on indigenous issues), Mércio Pereira Gomes, who promised to publish the new study on the indigenous area (carried out in November/December 2005), which aims to update and to complement in some aspects the FUNAI-studies from the period 1994-1998.

The study by the FUNAI Working Group carried out in Espírito Santo was published at the end of February and proves the legitimacy of the indigenous lands, establishing their occupation from time immemorial and stressing the "successive subtraction of land from their traditional territory based on mistaken policies that have over the years restricted and to a certain extent made the rights and prospects of the Indigenous peoples unviable." The study is an update of a first work carried out by the Working Group in 1997, which also recognized the lands in the north of the State as indigenous lands. The confirmation of this study represents an important step forward in obtaining the final

homologation of the 18,070 hectares of indigenous land in the north of the State.

The study also reports on the transformation of the indigenous peoples' traditional way of life, imposed on them following the arrival of Aracruz Celulose in the region. The presence of monoculture eucalyptus plantations introduced and maintained by Aracruz Celulose was qualified as responsible for causing "deep transformations" in the environment "that the company insists on denying." In the opinion of the Working Group, the indigenous communities today face degradation of environmental conditions, such as the destruction of forests and fauna, dried up or contaminated rivers and impoverished land.

Before this, hunting was abundant and varied (giant armadillos, peccaries, spotted caviés, deer, guans, the tamandua ant-eater, the jacutinga and the jacupemba, the solitary tinamon and the coati). However, deforestation has caused the almost complete extinction of the native fauna. Presently, the still incipient breeding of domestic animals such as chickens, pigs, goats and cattle, complements available food and is an alternative source of income.

The scarcity of rivers and streams close to the villages is also reported in the study. According to the Working Group, rivers and streams in the region have been contaminated and there is also a transposition of the waters of the River Doce to the River Riacho to supply Aracruz Celulose, making traditional species used by the indigenous people disappear or considerably diminish and giving way to predatory and highly competitive species such as the piranha and the African catfish. Thus the Working Group technicians not only recognize the legitimacy of indigenous lands, but also the cultural, environmental and social damages arising from the arrival of Aracruz Celulose in the region.

The phases of the agreement between the indigenous people and the multinational company are also reported in the study, with data on demarcation as authorized by the former Minister of Justice, Iris Resende, who demarked only part of the indigenous land, and highlighting irregularities that have even been acknowledged by the Public Ministry of Espírito Santo. This demarcation, considered as illegal by the indigenous peoples, is responsible for the use of indigenous lands by third parties and for soil erosion, leaving them with scantily fertile land.

With the publication of this study, the 90-day period for the multinational company to reply and send its report to FUNAI has started running. For its part, FUNAI will have 60 days to analyze and sign a report that will be sent to the Ministry of Justice.

On 14 February 2006, the Federal Public Prosecution Service (Ministério Público Federal) in the Espírito Santo state sent to the Regional Federal Court of the 2nd Region in Rio de Janeiro an appeal in which attorney André Pimentel Filho demands that the indigenous people get permission to reoccupy the area from which the Police tried to evict them with violence on 20 January, until the final decision of the federal government (the decision of the Minister of Justice is expected in July/August of this year). If the Court accepts this appeal, it will mean that the indigenous people can return to the villages and maintain the occupation without being afraid of a new eviction.

The struggle of the Tupinikim and Guarani continues and they ask you to continue supporting it!

Article based on information from: "Follow-up on the violent Federal Police action against the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples in Brazil", Alert against the Green Desert Network, 10 February 2006, sent by Winfridus Overbeek, FASE – ES, E-mail: winnie.fase@terra.com.br; "Funai publica estudo que confirma ocupação de terras indígenas pela Aracruz Celulosa", Flávia Bernardes; "Royal News Swedens Royals Sell Forestry Shares", Femalefirst,

