
Argentina : The destruction of the Misiones forest amounts to the genocide of the Mbya Guarani

In the Province of Misiones, located in the northeast of Argentina, the authorities of the ancient Mbya Guarani people (see WRM Bulletin N° 87), who inhabit what is today the Yaboti Reserve, have resorted to criminal justice to denounce the governor of the Province, Carlos Rovira, for genocide.

The Mbya Guarani, the ancient inhabitants of the Misiones forest who lived for centuries as part of it, without feeling they were its owners, have seen their territory threatened when the Mocona Forestal S.A. company, with the endorsement of the Provincial Government, started deforesting what is their means of life and subsistence.

At the legal presentation, the Chiefs described how their communities have been organized for centuries, and denounced the government of Misiones for trying to impose on them organizations that the government officials invent "to divide us and thus better control us."

Raul Montenegro, 2004 Alternative Nobel Prize winner and president of the Foundation for Environmental Defence (Fundación para la Defensa del Ambiente - FUNAM), affirms that "the large number of trees that the Mocona Forestal S.A. company logged in Yaboti, in spite of the ban, shows that the silent genocide and brutal destruction of the forest continue."

Over the past few months, various children from the communities have died of malnutrition. Since August 2004, Chiefs and members of some 40 Mbya Guarani communities have taken turns to wait in the central square of the provincial capital Posadas to ask for recognition of their rights, the devolution of their ancestral territories and the resignation of the Director of Guarani Affairs. So far, the Governor has refused to receive them.

"While Mbya Guarani children die of malnutrition because white men log their forests and exclude them, the governor of Misiones and various foreign organizations built a Biological Station, with air conditioning, heating and every comfort," Raul Montenegro recalled ironically. "Conservation is not the launching of a biological station for foreigners, however well-known they may be, to play at being explorers. Conservation is protecting what little is left of the forest through joint work with indigenous communities, the government and other sectors of society," denounced Montenegro.

Ariel Araujo from the Coordinating Council of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations from the Chaco and Misiones Region (Coordinadora de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas de la Región Chaqueña y Misiones - COPIRECHA), the organization that accompanies the Mbya in their struggle, stated that the government's lack of sensitivity "is overwhelming and incomprehensible. They do not mind seeing children, women and men suffer. All they want is for the indigenous people to continue doing what they are told to do by the white man, what the government says."

In their presentation to the court, the Chiefs say that "we have settled at the Plaza 9 de Julio in the City of Posadas, which represents 'the freedom' of the white people, and in the shade of the statue representing 'their freedom', to ask for the massacre of our children and old people to cease."

Facts show that the death of the forest is the death of its people. For this reason, its conservation is a social imperative, and the contrary, as denounced by the Mbya Guaraní people, is an environmental crime and genocide.

Article based on information from “Indígenas Mbya Guaraní denuncian penalmente por genocidio a Gobernador Rovira y Ministros de Misiones (Argentina)”, sent by the Indigenous Information Service SERVINDI, N° 35, e-mail: servindi@amauta.rcp.net.pe ; “ Vergonzoso: el gobernador Rovira recibe a dos ingleses y un estadounidense interesados en Yabotí, pero no a indígenas guaraníes que están en la plaza de Posadas desde hace 52 días”, FUNAM, <http://www.funam.org.ar/ingleses.htm>