
Chile: Mapuche question agreement between forestry companies and environmental NGOs

On 12 December, the Matte (CMPC companies), Angelini (Arauco) forestry groups and a number of Chilean and US environmental NGOs signed an agreement (see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Chile/article2.html>) whereby the companies have agreed to conserve the areas of native forest existing on their properties – representing 2.8% of the total surface of the native forests in the country – and not replace them by tree plantations.

The Mapuche Coordination of Organizations and Territorial Identities has questioned this agreement (see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Chile/article3.html>). In a declaration mainly aimed at American Lands Alliance, but also at the other signatories of the agreement, the Mapuche Coordination recognizes the value of the campaign promoted by these organizations in the United States in favour of the protection of the native forest and even their denunciation of the situation facing the Mapuche communities because of plantation expansion. However, the Mapuche Coordination considers that the conditions are not appropriate for negotiations with these forestry companies.

Furthermore, the Mapuche organizations also questioned the call to promote Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification or other similar schemes, because this implies endorsing forestry invasion and the serious conflicts that the Mapuche communities are facing, such as territorial conflicts, decrease and loss of water resources, poverty, migration, unemployment, clear-felling in a country that is generally mountainous, pressure and enclosing of communities, causing irreparable damage to their social, cultural and spiritual life.

CMPC and Arauco are among the entities controlling the timber market and have been protected by the Chilean State. They have triggered off conflicts that have ended in the militarization of Mapuche "reducciones" (Indian villages) with the application of laws inherited from the Pinochet dictatorial regime, such as the Law for State domestic security and the Anti-terrorist Law. The Mapuche have suffered from many arrests, persecutions, police repression and even the murder of 17 year-old Alex Lemun, by the Chilean police in the property of the Mininco Forestry Company (a member of the CMPC group) on 7 November 2002 (see WRM Bulletin No. 64).

Furthermore, the bill on native forests presently under discussion, establishes a subsidy of 5 Monthly Tax Units (Unidades Tributarias Mensuales – UTM) per hectare for those who fence in their properties, allowing for natural regeneration and the recovery of degraded forests. There is a bonus of up to 5 UTM per hectare to achieve the preservation of forests of high ecological value and to maintain biological diversity. In figures, conservation would become another business for the companies, and they would be collecting over 180 million dollars.

The Mapuche organizations consider that any negotiation with these companies may have negative effects on the fair statement of their needs, problems and respective solutions. It would only serve to continue consolidating international timber export markets, with their corollary of expansion of plantations, annexing Mapuche territory and benefiting from the vulnerability that these communities and small scale peasants are suffering from, to encourage them to be the ones to plant pines and

eucalyptus.

The forestry sector economic groups are directly responsible for the marginalization and oppression in which political networks maintain the Mapuche people. The Mapuche organizations, for their part, propose curbing forestry expansion to protect the natural resources and to transform the present political, social and legislative relations that this People face within the Chilean State. This is why they are underscoring the importance of understanding that Mapuche interests should not be opposed to the interests of NGOs regarding environmental protection and more specifically, that of forest conservation.

Article based on information from: “Acuerdo forestales, ambientalistas y Presidente Lagos”, MAPUEXPRESS, 15 November 2003, <http://www.mapuexpress.net> ; “¿Qué hay detrás de estos acuerdos? Acuerdo entre CMPC y Arauco con ambientalistas sobre el bosque nativo”, Homero Altamirano, 18 November 2003, published in the Llanalhue noticias newspaper (Cañete VIII Region); Letter from the Mapuche Coordination of Organizations and Territorial Identities to American Lands, Forestethics, Greenpeace, Defensores del Bosque, TERRAM, Instituto de Ecología Política.