
Brazil: The Alert Against the Green Desert Network demands a change in the forestry model

One hundred organizations from Espirito Santo, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais gathered on 28 and 29 June in Porto Seguro, Bahia, at the Second National Meeting of the Alert Against the Green Desert Network. These organizations prepared a letter which shall be sent to President Lula, parliamentarians and to the World Bank, demanding that greater attention be paid to the problem we describe here below.

"We the undersigned, representatives of Quilombola,* Tupinikim, Pataxo, Guarani, fisher-people and peasant communities, and tens of organizations present at the II National Meeting of the Alert Against the Green Desert Network, a movement that struggles against the expansion of monoculture eucalyptus plantations for the production of cellulose and charcoal in Espirito Santo (ES), Bahia (BA), Rio de Janeiro (RJ) and Minas Gerais (MG), denounce the serious violation of economic, cultural and socio-environmental rights committed by this exporter agro-industrial complex.

Over the past four decades, this complex has destroyed the local communities' way of life. The companies in this sector continue to invade their lands and have caused rural exodus with the consequent dispersion of many communities. In such regions, the rivers have been degraded by pollution caused by wide-spread use of pesticides and a process of desiccation, linked to large-scale plantations, compromising fishing and the quality and quantity of drinking water. The Aracruz Cellulose Company diverted the Doce River to ensure the abusive consumption of 248 thousand cubic metres of water per day, free of cost, by its three pulp mills.

With their development discourse, the companies have encouraged an enormous migration of workers seeking the promise of employment. Today, the results are thousands of former workers, many of them mutilated by unhealthy work, dismissed as a result of a violent and noxious process of automatisisation and out-sourcing. These peoples' loss of dignity is manifest through the existence of a high rate of child prostitution in the neighbourhoods where the abandoned former workers now live. In the midst of eucalyptus tree monoculture plantations, people opposing and resisting them are losing their cultural identity and wealth and are literally suffering a process of deep isolation. Those who oppose this inhuman project are exposed to attempts at co-option and even threatened with death.

Unfortunately, the State has been an accomplice to these companies' practices. For four decades now, it has been granting loans through the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) and illegal permits for plantations --not respecting permanent preservation reserves-- and factories, one of them built on a former indigenous village. Furthermore, the exporting companies have debts with the Social Security (INSS in Portuguese) and benefit from the Kandir Law, giving rise to dramatic situations such as that of Espirito Santo, where the government of this State owes the Aracruz Cellulose Company over 100 million reales on credit from the ICMS (Tax on the Circulation of Goods and Services). At the same time, the State has not given the local population any options, on the contrary, it is increasingly showing its complicity with company interests to the detriment of its social responsibility and in view of this vacuum, the companies have taken on some State functions, generating a perverse relationship of dependency and de-structuring the local communities' social

organization.

The signatory organizations consider that the consequences of all these problems are related to the present development model funded by the central government and by international organizations whose only objective is to profit from funding in detriment to the way of life of these populations.

Attempts to revert damage caused by perverse company strategies, for example the introduction of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Green Seal for sustainable management of monoculture tree plantations, have not been able to revert such negative impacts and, what is worse, have been insufficient to reorient the rationale of this agro-industrial model. We recall a recent publication, prepared by a group of Alert Against the Green Desert research workers, showing the flagrant lack of sustainability of the Plantar and V&M Florestal Company eucalyptus plantations in Minas Gerais, both of which have been certified by the FSC.

Furthermore, the Network states its opposition to the application of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), to the large-scale plantations of these same mining companies, because it considers that such a mechanism continues to favour the countries of the North, insofar as they would not have to reduce their release of pollutants contributing to global warming and because, by increasing the area of plantations, CDM is worsening the impoverishment of the populations of the South.

We affirm that there are contradictions between investment in this agro-industrial complex and the Central Government's Zero Hunger Plan. On the one hand, considerable investment, such as that of the factory Veracel Celulose plans to build in Bahia, continues to favour monoculture tree plantations that are mainly aimed at production for export to rich countries, creating very few jobs, legitimising large-scale land-holding, preventing agrarian reform and further increasing rural exodus and the despair of thousands of families that will be left with no land and no subsistence. On the other hand, the Government has launched a Zero Hunger Plan, attempting to encourage food production, while the best arable lands continue to be occupied by tree plantations. Macro-economic policy goals cannot be achieved by sacrificing the living conditions, health and work and the way of life of workers and communities that need water, land, fish and hunting in order to avoid becoming part of the growing contingent of the unemployed in the cities.

It is not enough to come up with provisional ways out of the present economic model. The route taken by a model revolving around capital accumulation and unrestrained consumption must be radically changed. Another development rationale must be built, in which the central aspect is the human being --men and women-- as a whole, and the way in which the planet's natural resources are being used is changed. Aware of the lack of sustainability of the present model, the movements and communities members of the Alert Against the Green Desert Network have discussed and implemented new production experiences that value biodiversity and local knowledge and therefore, build up a different relationship with the environment.

In view of the dramatic and unsustainable socio-environmental picture we have drawn and which directly affects many thousands of people, we, the communities and organizations signing here below consider the proposal made by the sector to increase plantations from 5 million hectares to 11 million hectares over the next 10 years to be unacceptable. Furthermore, we consider that it is an imperious and urgent necessity that the preparation of the new Pluri-Annual Plan (PAP) and the government's industrial policy should contemplate the suspension of the expansion of fast-growing monoculture tree plantations in Brazil. Porto Seguro, 29 June 2003 (signatures follow)"

* From the word "Quilombo": a refuge for slaves running away from their masters. (Translator's note)

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