
Ecuador: Logging company dresses in green while destroying forests in Esmeraldas

The Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A. logging company, belonging to the Alvarez – Barba family will end up by destroying the last primary forests existing in the zone of the Ecuadorian Choco, specifically in the province of Esmeraldas. However, this company that depredates forests has recently decided to dress in green.

In fact, by means of a forceful advertising campaign, that is to say, over half a page in the Quito newspaper “El Comercio,” on Sunday 3 February this year and in a entire “Trade supplement” covering four pages in the same newspaper on Tuesday 12 March, 2002, the managers of Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A. have tried to embellish, not only the company's face, but its whole image, by presenting itself to the public as a sacrificed ecologist body.

Although the central theme of the colour advertisement --in which naturally green prevailed-- is related to obtaining the “ISO 14001.96 certification in plantation and tropical forest management,” it is clear that the main intention of the company is to convince readers that although they are a company devoted to extracting and transforming wood, at the same time and as if by magic, they are preserving the tropical forest. The main title of the advertisement is very suggestive: “Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A., leaders in the preservation of the tropical forest.” In small boxes, appear real poems to the native forest: “Over 2,200.000 trees have been planted and managed in the Province of Esmeraldas since 1963, nine times more than the number we have extracted over the last 39 years.” “Responsible forest management guarantees survival of tropical forest native species.” And so on.

But what is at the bottom of this great concern over some “simple” publications by a logging company, when similar ones are published daily by nearly all the written press with national circulation? The answer is simple: the Awá Indigenous Nationality, organised in the Ecuadorian Federation of Awa Centres (FCAE), the surrounding Afro-Ecuadorian communes and other organisations that historically have opposed and oppose the true intentions and policies of Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A., have known it for a long time now.

Of course the community members of the Afro-Ecuadorian Commune “El Pan,” who are neighbours of the Awa, know Plywood Ecuatorian S.A. very well, as they were obliged to retain the company's tractors to make it to fulfil the many “commitments” it had entered into before extracting wood.

This same Commune cannot forget that in 1999 it tried to obtain a License for Forestry Use from the Technical Office of the Ministry of the Environment in San Lorenzo, Province of Esmeraldas and was surprised to find that Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A. had already and fraudulently obtained the Commune's Work Plan.

But there is much more. The Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A. company, far from complying with the principles it claims to uphold in its public advertising, through someone who forged the signature of the President of the “El Pan” Commune, sent a document under the title of “Purchase Contract for Trees”, with clauses and conditions totally prepared by the company, to be certified by a Notary

Public in the canton of San Lorenzo, Province of Esmeraldas.

For its part, the Ecuadorian Federation of Awa Centres, through its leader, Pablo Cantincus, Head of FCAE's Department of Legal Matters, lodged a complaint with the Technical Office of the Ministry of the Environment of the San Lorenzo canton, Province of Esmeraldas, reporting that intermediaries of Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A., headed by Boenerges Becilla, had come to the Awa community in Guadualito to encourage the community members to "sell their wood," knowing full well that the second degree Awa organisation was preparing its own Management Plan, and ended up by convincing them. They were paid ridiculously low prices for the wood and the company also started to extract this resource with no authorisation whatsoever, violating existing legislation.

Summing up, the true policies and practices of the Plywood Ecuatoriana S.A. logging company are there for all to see. Of course those who know them from the inside can describe episode by episode and in detail. Thus, these publications that would seem to be simple advertisements are a matter of concern, although for those who know the logging companies they look like simple embellishments, for those who live very far away from the scene of this tragedy, they may seem convincing and irrefutable truths. And it is particularly worrying that the international bodies called to direct serious processes for certifying wood, end up by granting "certifications" with romantic titles to companies whose objective is to put an end to the last remnants of nature.

Article based on information from: Luis Fernando Sarango, Boletín del Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas, March 2002.