
Brazil: Local peoples defend biodiversity in Espirito Santo

It is sad to see that, while the governments of the world --including the Brazilian government-- are preparing to participate in the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, some representatives of the people of the State of Espirito Santo, whose very threatened biodiversity is among the richest in the world, do not show the least concern over the matter.

On 6th March, the Federal Senator of Espirito Santo, Gerson Camata, at a speech given at the Federal Senate, stated that “the eucalyptus consumes the same amount or less water than the typical Atlantic forest ecosystem (the “Mata Atlantica”) and, in the same way as this forest, protects and retains water resources coming from rainfall.” The Senator shows that he does not really know the situation in his State, where innumerable streams and even rivers have dried up as a consequence of wide-scale monoculture eucalyptus tree plantations. It would seem that with this kind of statement, also defended by other Senators in the State and by the companies planting monoculture tree plantations such as Aracruz Cellulose, Senator Camata wants to promote the substitution of one of the few remaining areas of original Mata Atlantica (reduced to barely 8% of the area of the State), by monoculture eucalyptus tree plantations. He does not recognise the Mata Atlantica’s social, ecological, economic and environmental functions, already well-know in spite of their complexity. These, and other equally absurd statements by the Senator have outraged all the organisations involved in the Alert against the Green Desert Movement. The brilliant letter sent in reply by the Movement can be accessed (in English) at the following address:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/56/Brazil2.html>

It is also available in Portuguese at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/boletin/56/Brasil2.html>

The Senator’s discourse is a result of “offensive” action undertaken by the Aracruz Cellulose company over the past two weeks, when representatives of the company met with Federal Deputies and Senators from Espirito Santo together with high-level Federal Government representatives, including the Vice-President of the Republic, Marco Maciel. The objectives of this action by the company are two-fold: on the one hand they want the Federal sphere to put pressure on the State Deputies from Espirito Santo to avoid the establishment of a Parliamentary Investigation Commission (CPI), to look into the numerous illegal actions and violations of territorial, economic, social, environmental and cultural rights, committed by the Aracruz Cellulose company against the local population. On the other hand, Aracruz’ action is aimed at seeking support for a Direct Unconstitutionality Procedure to be brought before the Supreme Federal Court, seeking to annul State Law 6.780/01, which prohibits plantation of eucalyptus for cellulose in the State until an agro-ecological map has been drawn up to define in which sites eucalyptus can be planted and in which sites, not.

Aracruz wants to appeal to the most important Court in the country because so far its pressure on the Commission co-ordinating the agro-ecological mapping has not had any effect. The representatives of the State government on this Commission defended the view that there was no need for an agro-ecological map, given the existence of a Study made in 1992, on “Aptitude for Forestry of the Lands in Espirito Santo.” This study makes out that 34.68% of the State territory (some 1.7 million

hectares), is exclusively or preferentially apt for silviculture. It is important to note that it just happens to be the Aracruz Celulose company itself that co-ordinated this study. It is also equally important to note that, for the authors of the study, "forest" is a synonym of "silviculture," and that in Espírito Santo, silviculture is understood as the plantation of eucalyptus. Finally, it should also be stressed that, according to the conclusions of the Study, it was recommended to increase 9 times the present area of those same eucalyptus that have already caused and are still causing, serious social, environmental, economic and cultural impacts on the local communities. It is therefore not surprising that civil society representatives threatened to leave the commission and denounce its members and the Government if this study was adopted as the basis for the agro-ecological mapping.

The Alert against the Green Desert Movement firmly supports a serious, broad-based and participatory agro-ecological mapping and in this respect, has demanded that the State Commission co-ordinating the work, carry out at least 16 regional public audiences throughout the State of Espírito Santo. This proposal was accepted by the other members of the Commission. Three audiences have already been held, with considerable participation and in which a very clear conclusion has been reached: the population does not want Aracruz to continue buying land to plant eucalyptus. In some regions, such as São Mateus --a municipality that today has 50,000 hectares planted with eucalyptus-- the suggestion was made that Aracruz should be obliged to pull up the eucalyptus illegally planted in areas of sources and springs, on the borders of lakes and on stream and river banks. These places are those that urgently need a regeneration of the Mata Atlântica to restore and preserve water and biodiversity resources for future generations.

From the above the contradiction seems clear that, while the population shows concern and is mobilising itself to protect the State's biodiversity --an international commitment taken on by the Government-- some of its elected Deputies and Senators --as in the case of Senator Gerson Camata-- seem to be exclusively concerned by guaranteeing the welfare of the same company that greatly contributed to the destruction of the Mata Atlântica to plant eucalyptus. It is clear that if the company's desire to increasingly widen its monoculture tree plantations comes into being, the future of the population of Espírito Santo will be running a greater risk, while its biodiversity will continue to disappear. It is also equally clear and notable that, if it were not for the successful struggle taken up by wide, organised sectors of the population, the fertile lands of the State would continue to be covered --at the expense of the people and of biodiversity-- by unending and orderly lines of eucalyptus, which have been called by the local people "the green desert."

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