
Brazil: Another legal battle to save the forests

In May 2000, a parliamentary initiative that would have resulted in the legalization of forest destruction was defeated as a result of a strong national and international campaign to save the forests (see WRM bulletin 35). However --in an apparent electronic "inertia"-- during the following months many people continued receiving calls for action through the internet asking them to send messages to the Brazilian government, ignoring the fact that the proposed legislation had already been shelved.

It is important to clarify the above confusion, because a new battle is now under way and a large number of organizations in Brazil --national and international-- are struggling against the same enemy they defeated a year ago.

In March 2001, the same parliamentarians as before --12 representing the interests of large landowners in a parliamentary committee composed of 16 members-- again began trying to introduce changes to the current legislation that provides legal protection to all the forest ecosystems in the country. This parliamentary committee aims at approving in May 30 a number of changes which would legally allow the deforestation of 50% of all landholdings in the Amazon and up to 80% of those in the endangered "cerrado" forest, to give way to extensive cattle raising and large scale soya and cotton monocultures. The project reduces and in some cases eliminates Areas of Permanent Preservation --which ensure the conservation of water resources-- and even allows the plantation of monoculture pine and eucalyptus plantations in areas currently reserved for the protection and rational management of native forests. Additionally, mangroves would be open to conversion to shrimp farming without even the requirement to carry out environmental impact studies.

In a similar manner as last year, a large number of NGOs are actively involved in the struggle to defeat this new initiative and have launched a campaign to protect the forests: "SOS florestas" (SOS forests). The campaign committee is composed of the following organizations: Friends of the Earth-Brazilian Amazon, Conservation International, FASE, Funatura, Fundação Vitória Amazônica, Greenpeace-Brazil, Imazon, Ipam, Instituto Socioambiental, Rede Mata Atlântica and WWF-Brazil. Among their many activities, they have created a web site: <http://www.codigoflorestal.com.br> (only in Portuguese), to disseminate information and to send messages to the government. Those interested in supporting the campaign can send a message to marco@wwf.org.br or get in contact with any of the above organizations.