
Mexican "justice" finds environmental activist guilty

Mexican "justice" has once again ruled against justice. Rodolfo Montiel, a "campesino" leader imprisoned for leading a successful opposition movement against logging operations by the US-based Boise Cascade in the state of Guerrero (see WRM Bulletin 26), was found guilty and received a sentence of six years and eight months, in a sentence issued by Fifth District Court Judge Maclovio Murillo. Montiel, together with his colleague Teodoro Cabrera, have already been imprisoned for 15 months. Cabrera was also found guilty and given a 10-year term.

Mexican and international environmental and human rights organizations have reacted against the sentence, arguing that there are evidences that the charges against them were all fabricated and confessions obtained under torture. The Human Rights Centre Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez, which represented the two peasant leaders during the process, will appeal both the verdict and sentences. The organization has questioned whether a report issued by the government's own human rights commission, stating that the two accused had been tortured to declare themselves guilty, was taken into account. Amnesty International has adopted both Montiel and Cabrera as prisoners of conscience, and the Sierra Club has started a campaign for their release.

The case of Montiel and Cabrera exemplify many wrongdoings, among which we wish to highlight the difference --in Mexico and in a large number of other countries throughout the world-- between law and justice. The law allowed a company from the US --Boise Cascade-- to destroy forests and local peoples livelihoods in Mexico. Local people reacted believing that justice was on their side, but their actions were declared unlawful. Their leader was imprisoned and unlawfully tortured, this being a pre-requisite to be able to "lawfully" declare him guilty of violating the law. Justice has been done! Everyone knows, however, that this is but a parody of justice and now environmental and human rights groups are trying to exert pressure on newly elected president Fox, who is expected to concede a reprieve to both accused peasants. This would be a auspicious sign of pacification and an act of --finally-- true justice.

Article based on information from: "Mexico Finds Activist Guilty In Drug Case. Peasant won Goldman environmental prize" by Wendy Patterson, San Francisco Chronicle, 29/8/2000, sent by: Pat Rasmussen, Leavenworth Audubon Adopt-a-Forest, 1/9/2000,