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## South Africa: resistance to tree monocultures in grasslands

Even if natural forests in South Africa do not occupy more than 300,000 hectares, this country is an important exporter of wood products. They come from pine and eucalyptus plantations that quickly expanded during the last decades. Large corporations -as SAPPI and MONDI- and the South African State itself -through SAFCOL- have been responsible for the expansion of tree monocultures in grasslands. Nowadays plantations have reached 1.5 million hectares and the powerful pulp industry intends to increase the area by 600,000 hectares more. Companies are also aiming at setting up extensive plantations in neighbouring Mozambique. In this period of globalization, MONDI is expanding abroad and in May 1996 became one of Aracruz Celulose's main shareholders.

In spite of the propaganda efforts developed by plantation companies, who are trying to show themselves as champions of nature conservation, opposition is increasing. The effects of tree monocultures, causing grasslands biodiversity reduction and water resources shortages are apparent. Air and river pollution by pulp mills has also been denounced. Small peasants are being taken over partially or totally and forced to move their cattle or even to migrate and abandon their lands. People are reacting against this invasion and in some places direct actions have been taken. In the Kwazulu Natal area, 2,825 hectares of plantations were damaged by arson, a type of action that was responsible for most plantation fires during 1997.

People are organizing and increasingly challenging the spread of plantations. TimberWatch, a South African network, is currently monitoring the expansion of plantations in that country. Another movement (SAWaC, South African Water Crisis) was formed by a group of individuals who recognize a looming water crisis in Southern Africa and are working to overcome it. SAWaC has denounced that monoculture tree plantations are one of the major causes of this crisis. They have been established mostly in the transitional areas from the coastal lowlands to the high veld, the areas of highest rainfall and very high biodiversity, thereby impacting on these two crucially important resources.