Venezuela: resistance to Smurfit continues

The communities of Morador and Tierra Buena in Venezuela's continue struggling against pulp and paper transnational Jefferson Smurfit, responsible for deforestation activities and for the set up of vast tree plantations in Portuguesa State, and questioning the authorities' attitude in relation to this conflict. The WRM has been actively supporting this struggle (see WRM Bulletins 18, 20 and 22).

During May the mobilization continued. On May 11th a group of peasants of Morador and Tierra Buena symbolically occupied the headquarters of the National Agrarian Institute (Instituto Agrario Nacional - INA) to protest for the lack of response of this agency in relation to the peasants' claims for new lands and the expropriation of "La Productora" estate, currently in the hands of Smurfit.

On the following day, a group of peasants of Tierra Buena blockaded highway nr. 5 to protest for the deterioration of the road connecting their village with that highway. This road is essential for the trade of their agricultural products.

On May 13th about 500 peasants from Morador, Tierra Buena and nearby communities gathered in an assembly, which concluded by giving a 30-day deadline to the new national authorities to act in relation to the expropriation of "La Productora". This is seen as a decision to make the government decide if it will govern por the peasant majorities or in favour of the globalizing forestry model.

Smurfit has responded by trying to improve its public image by launching a public relations press campaign in local newspapers, carrying articles which highlighted some minor donations to Tierra Buena as large sums of money dedicated to assist the local community.

Such situation forced the local Neighbours' Association to call for a referendum, which took place on May 24th, the result of which was that a vast majority of voters rejected the presence of Smurfit in Tierra Buena. The fact is that the company is increasingly isolated, while the mobilization capacity of local landless peasants is increasing. As local people say, the new government -which came to power on a social justice platform- needs to decide if it will support local peasants or a large transnational. We sincerely hope it will chose the former.

Source: "Acontecimientos recientes en el área de Morador-Tierra Buena". Alfredo Torres, 4/6/99.