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## Adding Fuel to the Fire

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“Shock” is a common reaction when a crisis emerges... or when it comes to light. Governments all over the world – especially from the global North -, multilateral organizations, companies and citizens from all corners of the globe have been "shocked" and expressed their disapproval and disdain in one way or another to the current Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's reaction to the forest fires in the Amazon.

In this case, **expressions of “shock”, however, also provide a convenient smoke screen for governments, financial institutions and companies behind which they can hide their own role in and responsibility for this crisis.** The underlying causes of the fires point as strongly to them as they do to the current president of the extreme right in Brazil. Most of the media frenzy is characterized by superficial analyses and attention will die away as soon as the rains in the Amazon will have extinguished most of the flames.

Undoubtedly, the government of the extreme right in Brazil has been terrible news for Indigenous Peoples and their territories, and forests in general. Neither protection of forests nor respect for traditional ways of life and use of the Amazon are of interest to this government. The president himself keeps inciting violence against Indigenous Peoples and encourages the invasion of their territories by agribusiness and mining companies. He has even suggested that Indigenous Peoples should be “integrated” into society, a government policy that was – at long last - abandoned by Brazil's Constitution of 1988.

But let's also not be fooled. **Large-scale deforestation, including extensive burning across the Amazon, is not a new process.** President Bolsonaro and his aides in government are undoubtedly fanning the flames. But forests have been destroyed and the trees set ablaze before he came to power. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has been rising again since 2012. Many of the same governments, multilateral organizations and companies that are now claiming to be "shocked", have in fact, in one way or another, facilitated and benefitted from past as well as recent large-scale deforestation in the Amazon. **Their "shock" over the fires is tainted with hypocrisy.**

Indigenous Peoples have for centuries been at the frontlines, defending their territories and lives, inside and outside the Amazon. They see these forests as a fundamental part of their existence and livelihoods and they have shown over and over that they know how to conserve and coexist with these territories.

**Countless forest-dependent communities in the Amazon have also been long struggling** and continue to resist the logging industry, the meat industry, the ever-expanding monoculture plantations for the pulp and paper industry as well as the food industry with their ever-increasing demand for soy and palm oil, the mining industry, the mega hydro dams, the infrastructure construction of railways,

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roads, ports and waterways. This infrastructure does not serve people, it primarily serves the needs of these industries for ever faster transport at ever lower cost. **The corporate profits come at the expense of forests and forest-dependant populations.** (1) **They also fight against the false solutions to the environmental and climate crisis.** These false solutions start from a biased problem analysis and promote policies and programmes that leave the corporate drivers of large-scale deforestation untouched and instead restrict peasant farming and the use of and access to forests. Even worse is that many of these false solutions – REDD+, certification, zero-net deforestation pledges - also greenwash corporate destruction. (2)

Let's also not be fooled into believing that **Northern governments and multilateral banks like the World Bank** are the saviours of the day. They are still **key actors in driving deforestation**. The government of Norway, for example, has suspended donations allocated to the Amazon Fund due to grave concerns over the management of the Fund and the increase in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. But, in fact, the operations of companies of which the government of Norway is a co-owner - oil firm Equinor, fertiliser-producer Yara and aluminium producer Norsk Hydro – are implicated in deforestation. Norsk Hydro, for example, has a bauxite mine and a refinery in the Amazonian state of Para. The hypocrisy does not stop with the Norwegian government.

**Multilateral institutions like the World Bank have for decades promoted a destructive narrative of “progress and development” along with “free trade.” In reality, this “development through globalization” ideology meant subsidies and loans that funded and government policies that paved the way for corporations to invade and destroy forests and territories.** By 2014, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private-sector arm, was managing 156 projects in 34 countries worth US 260 million dollars for advisory services to promote private-sector development. The Bank's policy reforms prescriptions ease access to land at the expense of family farmers, pastoralists, and Indigenous Peoples. (3) Countless examples like this exist. (4)

Bilateral aid programmes also promote false solutions and make corporate destruction as a main driver of forest loss invisible by falsely blaming deforestation on peasant and indigenous farming. **The promotion of REDD+ by Germany's GIZ, Norway's NORAD and the US's aid agency USAID** is the latest – but far from the only (5) – example. In the Amazon state of Acre, for example, the German development KfW has been funding the REDD Early Movers programme. Not only has the programme failed in preventing the devastating rise in deforestation in Acre in the last year or so. It has also undermined Indigenous Peoples' resistance by presenting REDD+ funding to the government of Acre as a “donation”, and funding cultural activities in indigenous territories far away from the deforestation frontier while phasing out funding for demarcation of indigenous territories.

If you are “shocked” by the fires in the Amazon and other forested territories, **join in radical solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependant communities around the world to halt the underlying causes of deforestation.**

Join the struggle!

(1) See some examples from the WRM bulletin on forest dependant people's struggles against:

\* *Logging*: [The Mundukuru peoples in Brazil: forestry concessions imposed on indigenous lands](#), WRM Bulletin 217 and [Peru: Corporate logging devastates forests and local communities](#), WRM Bulletin 207,

\* *Pulp and paper industry*: [Women Stand Up to Fight the Suzano Paper Mill in Maranhão, Brazil](#), WRM Bulletin 244

\* *Oil palm plantations and mining*: [Mining company VALE promoting oil palm in Pará, Brazil: Impacts](#)

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of the “green economy”, WRM Bulletin 218

\* *Livestock farms*: [Living on the run: devastation of the Ayoreos' lives \[IP in isolation\] and land at the hands of livestock farmers](#), WRM Bulletin 216

\* *Food production*: [Food Production and Consumption: Resistance against domination](#), WRM Bulletin 230

\* *Hydrodams*: [Brazil: The Struggle of the Xinguara Peoples in the Amazon](#), WRM Bulletin 244

\* *Waterways*: [The Amazon Waterway in Peru vs. Flowing Rivers](#), WRM Bulletin 244

(2) See, for example, [Halting Deforestation? REDD and the protection of the fossil fuel and conservation industry](#), a compilation of articles from the WRM bulletin and declarations from Indigenous Peoples against REDD policies and programmes, September 2018

(3) [The highest bidder takes it all](#), Counter Balance, April 2019

(4) [Broken Promises, How World Bank Group policies and practice fail to protect forests and forest peoples' rights](#), 2005

(5) [As contradições da cooperação alemã na Amazônia](#), Ponto de Debate, (available in Portuguese)