Public letter of the International Meeting "How to Resist Monoculture Plantations"

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"How to Resist Monoculture Plantations"

21 September, 2021 – International Day of Struggle against Industrial Tree Plantations

We, about 60 members of rural communities facing industrial tree monocultures on their land, coming from the provinces of Manica, Sofala, Zambézia and Nampula in Mozambique and from the province of Iringa in Tanzania; together with allies who support these communities; met – due to the pandemic only in small groups and interconnected by computers and mobile phones – during the 21st and 22nd of September 2021 at the international event “How to Resist Monoculture Plantations”.

For years, these communities have resisted the eucalyptus monoculture plantations of the Green Resources company in Mozambique and Tanzania, and those of Portucel and Investimentos Florestais de Moçambique (IFM) in Mozambique, as well as the rubber tree monoculture plantations of Mozambique Holdings in Mozambique.

The members of the communities present decided to break the silence imposed by the pandemic and denounce once again that the eucalyptus and rubber tree companies arrived on their land – in some cases many years ago – with promises of development, a future with schools, hospitals, energy and bridges. However, they denounce that none of these promises were fulfilled. Worse still, eucalyptus and rubber trees occupied and destroyed the fertile farmland, and today families no longer have food and some have nowhere to live. If eucalyptus were food, it would be much better, but it is not. In addition, companies destroy native trees and use chemicals that contaminate the soil and water. Wells and rivers have dried up and drinking water has become scarce. Instead of building bridges, companies destroyed bridges with their heavy machinery, without concern they should repair them. Communities are afraid to cross plantation areas. Even already occupying large areas, companies want to take over even more land.

We see and analyse that this whole situation is causing a lot of suffering, a lot of hunger in the communities, and affects women in a particular way. The Government opened the door to foreign companies and investors, and closed it to the people. What is happening is a new form of colonialism where the company is the new colonizer of lands where communities have lived for many generations.

Even though the companies justify that they consulted with the communities, there was no consultation where they could accept or refuse the company; there was a lot of manipulation of information and broken promises. The promised jobs do not exist, just a few, but mostly seasonal and poorly paid. Compensation payments have been absolutely negligible, insufficient to acquire another farm outside the community.

When someone decides to farm on land that the company claims is theirs, the person is intimidated and threatened. This also occurs when someone lodges a complaint with their local leaders or officials. In this case, nothing is done because these authorities usually receive something from the companies or are equally intimidated and disrespected by the company. To make matters worse, in some cases it is not just the police and the company, but the community leaders themselves that intimidate and threaten members of their own community if they file a complaint. Nor are organizations that support communities spared from intimidation. Recently, the Suhode Foundation team in Tanzania was illegally detained by the police for 19 days. All their equipment was confiscated and remains in police possession to this day. Certainly, Green Resources is behind this, in an attempt not only to divide communities, but also to prevent civil society organizations from continuing to support them.

We demand that communities and organizations that support the communities have their rights – ensured in various national and international legal instruments – fully guaranteed; that our governments defend the people and not the companies; that intimidation and threats from companies and authorities as well as community leaders stop; that our governments, instead of protecting companies, order that they be investigated for the multiple violations they are committing; that officials discuss the future with communities, so that communities can actually participate in the planning that aims to guarantee their permanence on the land, today and in the future, and improve their living conditions going forward.

Even if companies do not stop expanding, even if they try to intimidate and threaten us, we are committed to continue to unite in the fight against monocultures and the destruction and encroachment of land; even if companies and governments insult us, we will continue to look for ways for communities to retake their territories – some communities in Tanzania have already done so; even if they threaten us, we will continue to raise our voices more and more, and together we will continue to expose the situation of communities and denounce the actions of companies; even if they won't listen to us, we won't give up calling on our governments to join with their communities, communities that they should defend and protect above all.

We believe that together we will be stronger to resist monocultures and all kinds of usurpation of our lands, especially on this 21st of September, the International Day of Struggle against Industrial Tree Monocultures.

September 21, 2021 – Plantations are not Forests!

Membros das comunidades Rurais
Ação Académica para o Desenvolvimento das Comunidades Rurais – Adecru
Associação de Jovens Combatentes Montes Errego – AJOCME
Fórum Carajás – Brasil
Fundação Suhode Tanzânia
Justiça Ambiental – JA! – Amigos da Terra Moçambique
Missão Tabita
Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB) – Brasil
World Rainforest Movement (WRM)