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## [Brazil: The 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network relights the flame of resistance](#)

In a historic gathering, the 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network (*Rede Alerta contra os Desertos Verdes*) from Brazil managed to meet again in September 2022, in the Far South of the State of Bahia. After the pandemic, and despite many difficulties owed to the economic and social situation of the majority of the population, peasant, *quilombola* (1) and indigenous communities, activists, organizations and social movements from various parts of the country came together and relit the flame of resistance in the face of the expansion of industrial-scale tree monoculture plantations that continue to invade their territories.

During the meeting, experiences of resistance were shared, information about the impacts of eucalyptus monoculture plantations and pulp factories was exchanged, and bonds of unity in struggles for land and life were strengthened. The meeting concluded with the publication of a letter in which the Network denounces the main impacts of a demonstrably unjust model, one that respects neither communities and their culture, nor the territories where it is deployed. (See below)

### **A Long-Running History of Resistance**

Major monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, pine and other trees have expanded in different regions of Brazil, chiefly since the second half of the 1960s. In the early stages, one of the main states was Espírito Santo, with the establishment of a company called Aracruz Florestal in Aracruz municipality.

Using the most sordid of means and with the full support of the country's then military government, this company grabbed lands belonging to Tupinikin and Guarani Indigenous Peoples, expelling much of their population. A few years later, it advanced further North in the state, taking over lands of *quilombola* communities and expelling much of their populations too. The company devastated the dense Atlantic Forest (known as Mata Atlântica) that existed in the region and planted large areas of eucalyptus, meant mainly for the production of pulp for export. Meanwhile, other companies advanced with plantations in the state of Minas Gerais, producing charcoal from eucalyptus to supply steel corporations.

From the mid-1980s onward, devastation holds firm and heads for the Far South of the state of Bahia. Monoculture plantations also advanced into peasant communities and large estates, areas later demanded by the MST (Movement of Landless Rural Workers) in order to settle innumerable landless families. With the country's re-democratization and the emergence of several social movements, conflicts became ever more evident, while the struggles managed to advance more.

A buildup of violations of rights of the most varied groups of communities, resulted in the creation in the late 1990s in Espírito Santo of a network of resistance to eucalyptus plantations: the 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network. It formed as a horizontal movement based on the concrete struggles of indigenous, *quilombola* and peasant communities impacted by eucalyptus monoculture and that sought to defend and recover their territories. A wide range of citizens, organizations, social

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movements, pastoral entities and churches joined these communities, ready to support their struggles and convinced of the need to confront capitalism, developmentalist thought and the large-scale tree monoculture plantation model based on large-scale projects that concentrated incomes and land. For example, beyond the MST, movements like the MPA (Small Farmers' Movement), the MLT (Movement in Struggle for Land) and Vía Campesina started participating and questioning eucalyptus monoculture and the limits of its expansion, as well as carrying out protest actions.

The 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network in Espírito Santo built connections with other regions affected by green deserts and gradually expanded, first to the states of Bahia and Minas Gerais, and later to Rio de Janeiro, Maranhão, Rio Grande do Sul and Mato Grosso do Sul.

Since then, the 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network has been a space for exchanging experiences and strengthening the resistance in various regions of the country. National meetings, seminars, publications, interventions and marches denouncing multiple violations have been undertaken, as well as direct actions of re-occupation of territories in Espírito Santo, Bahia and Minas Gerais.

The sector of tree plantations for pulp and paper in Brazil, subsidized by the State at different levels (municipal, state, federal) and arenas (executive, legislative, judiciary), and under successive governments of different ideological hues, continues advancing onto fertile arable lands and impacting communities. Aracruz Celulose was only an example highlighted because it was one of the first companies in the sector. There are other equally destructive companies like CMPC (ex-Aracruz), International Paper, Eldorado and Veracel (a partnership between Stora Enso and Suzano). The names might change – Aracruz became Fibria, and today is called Suzano – but the impacts and the crimes remain the same, as does the responsibility for the legacy of violations caused.

### **Letter of the 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network National Meeting Alert! Alert! September 21, 2022. Alert! Alert!**

On Tree Day, under the farcical mantle of “sustainable forest management” and “carbon neutrality”, pulp and steel corporations are intensifying their green propaganda, while celebrating their profits and arming their estates. While glorifying trees, they expand their eucalyptus monoculture plantations. With state support, agribusiness is more and more toxic. Monoculture = Monofuture.

We, the members of the 'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network, made up of indigenous, *quilombola*, babassu coconut breaker and peasant communities, activists, researchers, people's lawyers, labor unions, social organizations and movements, came together between September 16 and 19, 2022, at Escola Popular de Agroecologia e Agrofloresta Egídio Brunetto, Prado municipality, in the Far South of Bahia state, Brazil. During our gathering, we visited territories and exchanged experiences about the impacts of monoculture (mainly of eucalyptus) and the pulp industry on our lives, as well as about our resistance struggles and the building of other realities.

We once again denounce the fact that the expansion of monoculture plantations and their logistical and industrial chains produce countless environmental and social impacts, which result in losses in terms of biodiversity and quality of life, both in rural and urban areas.

One of its most perverse effects is the reduction in the possibility of generational succession among *quilombola*, indigenous and peasant families in their territories, with the abrupt worsening of conditions for agricultural and extrativismo (collecting and harvesting of fruits, medicinal plants, etc.), and consequently of their food security. This process marginalizes, criminalizes and expels

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communities from their ancestral territories.

Threats are constantly made in an attempt to expel the families that demand their territories in areas superimposed by eucalyptus plantations and agribusiness. These are made concrete by: attempts on the lives of members of these communities, as in the recent murder of 14-year-old indigenous male Pataxó Sarã (“root” in the Pataxó language), in the Comexatibá (Prado/Bahia state) Indigenous Land; arson attacks, such as the one against the Ponto de Memória Mesa de Santa Bárbara of the Linharinho *Quilombola* Community (Conceição da Barra/Espírito Santo state); and politically-motivated arrests, like that of teacher, poet and cultural producer Flávio Prates, after an eviction in the area of the Nova Trancoso Encampment (Trancoso/Bahia state).

The spraying, including by planes and drones, of agrottoxins on plantations contaminates the soil, water courses, the flora and fauna, the crops and the dwellers of the surrounding areas. This situation will be made worse by the licensing of transgenic eucalyptus resistant to the herbicide glyphosate. Furthermore, the massive blocks of monoculture plantations are responsible for the drying up of springs, streams, lagoons and wells, and for impoverishing and degrading soil fertility, culminating in its erosion. This is owed to the replacement of biomes’ diversity by a single, serially-replicated plant.

The local environmental effects of monoculture make the affected communities more vulnerable to the unfolding climate emergency, especially the ever longer-lasting dry spells and the increase in the temperature of the Earth’s surface.

The transport of eucalyptus logs by trucks from the plantation areas to pulp factories damages the roads, makes a noise day and night, affects air quality by raising dust and emitting greenhouse gases, increases road kill of wild fauna and dramatically heightens the risk of road accidents. Numerous accidents have taken place, some fatal, in different parts of the country.

The socio-environmental impacts of pulp factories are also significant in terms of the major volumes of water used and of industrial effluents that make their way to rivers. The latter may contain extremely toxic substances like dioxins and furans, produced because of the whitening of paper with chlorine. These industrial plants produce high levels of noise and emit particulate material, soot, sawdust and sulfur compounds (that have a strong, characteristic odor) into the atmosphere. Such pollution can cause countless respiratory problems like coughing, irritated airways, difficulty breathing and asthma, as well as stinging eyes, vertigo, head aches, nausea, lack of appetite and emotional disturbances like irritability and depression. It can also lead to cardio-vascular problems. There is also the permanent risk of accidents to which workers and surrounding populations are exposed.

Different spheres of the State are linked to capitalist corporate actions. This alliance between the tree monoculture sector and the Brazilian State has its roots in the military dictatorship and continues to this day. It is expressed through: tax breaks and public financing; protection by the police/military apparatus; the non-execution of suits for the recognition and titling of *quilombola* territories and for the demarcation and collective titling of indigenous lands (the Bolsonaro government has made good on that promise and was the first with zero demarcations of indigenous lands); the approval by the National Technical Commission for on Biosafety (CTNBio) of transgenic eucalyptus varieties without studies about possible impacts on human health and the environment, and without providing information to potentially affected populations; the gutting of the environmental legislation and its licensing and enforcement agencies; and the absence of actualization of policies for the permanence of peasant, *quilombola* and indigenous populations in the countryside.

Given the above, we call upon the whole of organized civil society to demand, particularly from the

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Brazilian State, the following measures with extreme urgency:

- The collective titling of *quilombola* and indigenous territories, with effective guarantees of these people's sovereignty over their territories;
- The earmarking of new lands for a land reform process guided by agro-ecological principles;
- All demands expressed in the 1st Letter of *Quilombola* Communities from the Far South of Bahia of December 2021 must be met;
- No new licensing of transgenic trees, and no planting of transgenic trees already permitted by CTNBio;
- CTNBio must respect the precautionary principle and careful evaluation based on scientific data, for the release of transgenic trees, criteria scandalously not respected in the authorizations granted, as was well denounced and documented in the case of the H421 transgenic eucalyptus;
- The non-approval of Bill 1366/22, which is making its way through the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the National Congress) and seeks to remove forestry from the list of activities that are "potentially polluting" and "users of environmental resources", thus revoking the need for environmental licensing;
- Higher taxes, tighter regulation and rigor in environmental licensing and inspection processes of monoculture plantations and the pulp industry;
- A ban on the aerial spraying of agrotoxins;
- Guarantees of indigenous, *quilombola* and peasant communities' physical integrity. In defense of people's lives, not of corporations' interests.

We also stress that owing to the various violations of rights reported, we recognize the legitimacy and necessity of the re-occupation of territories belonging to traditional peoples and communities that had been invaded, pillaged and degraded by pulp corporations and other agribusiness monoculture plantations.

**September 21, 2022**

**International Day of Struggle against Monoculture Tree Plantations**

'Alert Against the Green Desert' Network

<https://alertacontradesertosverdes.org/>

(1) *Quilombola* communities are those formed by descendants of African people who were subjected to slavery and escaped to start quilombos in Colonial and Imperial Brazil.