

Indigenous peoples of Brazil fight to take back their land from plantations

by Alert against the Green Desert Movement
Saturday, 05 March 2005

In a historical meeting on 19 February with representatives of all the villages, the Tupinikim and Guarani People decided to prioritize once again the land struggle against Aracruz Celulose, the biggest eucalyptus pulp producing company of Brazil and the world, that still occupies 11 thousand hectares of already by the government identified indigenous lands.

In spite of this occupation of indigenous lands, Aracruz has FSC and CERFLOR certifications for part of its plantations. It also succeeded recently to get a 50 US\$ million loan from the IFC-World Bank, being considered a 'socially sustainable' company. Aracruz constructed its first pulp mill exactly on the place of the Tupinikim village called 'Macacos', and also expelled people from another more than 30 villages. The struggle of the Indians who resisted started in 1979 was the first big resistance struggle in Brazil against large-scale tree plantations, and from this struggle on, slowly, the Alert against the Green Desert Movement was 'constructed' and strengthened itself, and is now present in five states of Brazil.

We are fully committed to support the Indians in this important decision, and hope to count with your support, and please, help to spread now this important news.

Alert against the Green Desert Movement - Brazil

4 March 2005

Open Letter

OUR LAND, OUR FREEDOM

On February 19, 2005 we held a General Meeting of Tupinikim and Guarani People in the village of Comboios. With the presence of around 350 indigenous people of all the villages (Pau Brasil, Caieiras Velhas, Irajá, Trás Palmeiras, Boa Esperança, Piraquã-Açu and Comboios), we analysed the current situation of our communities and we discussed about the recovery of our lands, which at present, are in the possession of Aracruz Celulose.

As a result of our discussions, we make the following issues public:

- Formerly (until 40 years ago) we used to live well, hunting, fishing and planting our bean, corn and manioc fields. We were not dependant on anybody and lived on the fruits of our land and we were free. With the arrival of Aracruz Celulose we lost our lands, our forests and our rivers. We gradually became poorer and "prisoners" of the Aracruz project.

- In 1979, we started to struggle to recover our lands, always certain of our right. In 1997, the FUNAI identified 18,071 hectares as customarily occupied by us, the Tupinikim and Guarani people. Up to the present we have been able to get back only a small portion of our land. Approximately 11,000 hectares are still in the possession of Aracruz Celulose, under an illegal Agreement that authorizes the company to exploit and degrade our land, which is our mother and on which we have built our dignity and identity.

- But we clearly state that everything that Aracruz Celulose has returned to our communities is due to our struggle and our right. We also state that our struggle has not ended and that it will continue throughout our existence. Today, after many debates in our communities we have arrived to the conclusion that the Agreement with Aracruz has not been able to solve our problems, but on the contrary, it has caused even more difficulties for us, by creating economic dependence, splitting our villages and weakening our culture. The death of our culture is the symbolic death of our people.

- We have much responsibility as chiefs and leaders. We know that we cannot continue existing as indigenous people if we have no freedom and autonomy and if our lands are not demarcated, so that our children and grandchildren may have a safe future. 500 year ago they cut the trees that represent indigenous people and cultures; at present, due to our struggle, indigenous roots have sprouted again in the State of Esp rito Santo.

In view of all this, we have unanimously decided in this Indigenous Meeting, to struggle for the recovery of our lands, currently occupied by Aracruz Cellulose. The struggle for the land, that is also a struggle for the physical and cultural survival of Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous people will be, as from today, our main goal and we will not rest until we recover our lands completely.

LAND IS A RIGHT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Tupinikim village of Iraj , February 28, 2005

Tupinikim and Guarani Chiefs Committee/ES

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