

Pulp company sends police to Indigenous lands in Brazil

by Alert against the Green Desert Movement
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The Alert against the Green Desert Movement in Espírito Santo wants to denounce publicly the authoritarian way and the lack of respect with which Aracruz Celulose has reacted to a legitimate protest action of the Tupinikim and Guarani Indians in Espírito Santo.

On 12 October, 84 indigenous families who live from collecting and selling rests of eucalyptus wood - that do not serve for pulp production - from plantations areas, started to cut, during several days, around 1000 eucalyptus trees that belong to the Aracruz company. The Indians transported the wood to the indigenous village of Caieiras Velhas. They did this as a protest against the decision of the company to stop providing rests of eucalyptus wood to these families who need to collect these rests as their main and hardly only alternative for work and survival. Aracruz claims that they have a new machine now that grinds the wood and then they can use these rests as fertilizer for their plantations.

Aracruz Celulose reacted to the indigenous protest in two ways. Immediately, the company went to the court of the state of Espírito Santo, requesting for a 'reintegration of their possession'. Directly, Judge Marcelo Pimentel from the 2nd Civil Court of the Aracruz town, conceded this 'reintegration'. At the same time, Aracruz sent a notification to FUNAI (National Indigenous Issues Authority), requesting that they should intervene in order to oblige the Indians to give back, within 72 hours, the wood that was cut.

On 18 October, a captain of the Military Police (MP), together with several police agents of the MP and the Police Intelligence Service, came to the indigenous area and announced that the next day they would come to fulfill the decision of the judge. The captain also affirmed that the Indians were stealing wood from the land of Aracruz Celulose and that they would pick up this wood to bring to the pulp mills. It is good to remember that the area where the trees were cut, already has been recognized as indigenous land, although it has not been demarcated yet because the Federal Government ceded to the pressure of Aracruz Celulose and reduced, in 1998, the size of the indigenous land that should have been demarcated at that moment. It is only therefore that Aracruz considers that this land is theirs.

On 19 October, around 400 Tupinikim and Guarani Indians were mobilized to wait for the Riot Police. The Indians were determined to resist. But the Riot Police did not appear to fulfill the judge decision, because of the interference of the State Government. Instead, a police captain, representing Aracruz Celulose, tried to convince the Indians to have a meeting at the Aracruz pulp mill (see picture above), but the Indians did not accept this 'invitation' and stressed that Aracruz should come to their villages and listen to the communities. One day after, Judge Pimentel revoked his own decision when he discovered that he was dealing with a conflict involving indigenous communities. It is worth while to remember that Aracruz, in its request to the State Judge for 'reintegration of its possession', cited the name of a non-Indian that was supposed to be a representative of the 84 families, in order to insinuate that the problem was not with the Indians, and to guarantee that the Judge would declare himself competent to judge in this case. Within Brazil, any legal issue involving indigenous peoples must be judged by a federal court.

It is important to stress also that the only claim the Indians make at this moment is that Aracruz comes to the indigenous villages - instead of the Indians going to the Aracruz office at the pulp mills complex -, in order to have a dialogue about the Aracruz' decision not to provide anymore the rests of eucalyptus that guarantee work and survival for more than 80 families. This is often the only alternative for communities living in the middle of a 'sea' of large-scale tree plantations. But instead of accepting this invitation for a dialogue in the village, Aracruz shows its most perverse face by sending the police to repress the Indians. The Guarani chief Antônio Carvalho remembered that: "When Aracruz entered in our lands, destructed our forests, killing our animals and fish, drying up our rivers, where was the police to repress those actions??".

At this moment, the Indians are waiting for the arrival, on Monday, of a group of FUNAI from Brasília that will try to intermediate this conflict. But, the Indians promise that their actions will go on if Aracruz is not willing to come to the village and talk in order to review its decision. The movements, organizations and communities that participate in the

Green Desert Movement in Espirito Santo showed solidarity with this action of the Tupinikim and Guarani peoples and condemn the reactions of the multinational company Aracruz, a company that claims to be socially responsible and that today is even holder of a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate that should guarantee that the actions of the Aracruz company are beneficial for local communities.

Vitória, 22 October 2004

Obs.: Pataxí Indians in the Extreme South of the state of Bahia, who claim the demarcation of an area where Aracruz Celulose and especially Veracel Celulose (owned by Aracruz and Stora-Enso) are planting eucalyptus, protested on the highway BR-101 against the invasion of their lands by these eucalyptus planting companies. They blocked the highway for about 19 hours and stopped until now at least 50 trucks loaded with eucalyptus from Veracel, eucalyptus that is being transported to the Aracruz pulp mills. The Pataxí will only liberate the trucks after a meeting with the President of FUNAI in Brasília. Six Pataxí Indians are in Brasília waiting for this meeting.

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