

International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations

by WRM and CEPEDES
Monday, 12 September 2011

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Dear friends,

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We would like to invite you to support the following action, which is being launched as part of the activities for the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations.

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This action is being coordinated by our friends at CEPEDES in Brazil, who have been working for years to support and coordinate resistance to the expansion of monoculture eucalyptus plantations and the pulp mill owned by Veracel Celulose.

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This transnational company (a joint venture of Brazil's Fibria and Swedish-Finnish pulp and paper giant Stora Enso) already operates an enormous pulp mill in the southern region of the state of Bahia, which is supplied by its 100,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations.

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Now it plans to expand the capacity of its pulp mill to produce 2.5 million tons of pulp a year. To ensure the supply of raw material for this increase in output it will need to at least double the area of its monoculture plantations.

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Veracel's expansion plans will only serve to aggravate the many serious impacts of its operations on local communities as well as on the local environment.

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This is why CEPEDES and other organizations in Brazil are coordinating a regional campaign to halt Veracel's expansion plans. If you would like to support this action, plus sign on to the following letter by sending your name, country and organizational affiliation (if any) BEFORE to cepedes@cepedes.org.br or ivonetecepedes@gmail.com

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Thank you for your support!

WRM and CEPEDES

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To the Governor of Bahia " Jaques Wagner

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With copies to:

The Attorney General's Office of the State of Bahia

The Federal Public Ministry

The Public Ministry of the State of Bahia

The Human Rights Committee of the Federal Chamber of Deputies

The President of the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES)

The Board of Directors of the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES)

United Workers Federation (CUT)

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Subject: Request for the cancellation of the licensing process for the expansion of Veracel Celulose

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August 2011

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Dear Mr. Governor:

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Through this letter, we the undersigned individuals and international organizations want to express our support for the request made to you by organizations and social movements in the extreme south of Bahia and Brazil for the cancellation of the licensing process for an expansion of the pulp mill and industrial monoculture eucalyptus plantations owned by Veracel Celulose S/A in the extreme south and south of the state Bahia.

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The problems caused by Veracel in the extreme southern region of Bahia are quite familiar to us, since we support struggles against large-scale monoculture plantations in various countries of the world, where the same negative impacts are almost always suffered. Our governments often invest large amounts of public resources in these types of projects, as well as offering a wide range of incentives, thereby hindering other possible economic activities and prospects in our regions which could generate more employment and income for the local population and better preserve the environment.

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In the case of Veracel and its expansion plans, we would like to highlight the following points which justify the cancellation of the process currently underway for the licensing of the expansion:

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- The Public Ministry of Bahia has confirmed irregularities and illegalities in the preparation and content of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Veracel Celulose expansion project. This led the Public Ministry of Bahia to issue a resolution (04/2011) on July 20, 2011 to initiate criminal investigation proceedings against Veracel, CEPEMAR (the firm hired by the company to carry out the Environmental Impact Assessment/Environmental Impact Report) and the government of the state of Bahia itself. On these grounds, on August 9, the Federal Court of Bahia ruled to suspend the licensing process.

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- In addition, Veracel has already been the subject of various investigations and court proceedings and has been prosecuted on numerous occasions by the competent bodies.

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- Veracel has occupied fertile arable flatlands to plant eucalyptus trees, thus posing a threat to the food sovereignty and security of the region.

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- Veracel's occupation of the region's flatlands has involved a system of large-scale monoculture plantations that require the regular use of toxic agrochemicals such as glyphosate and sulfloramid, which have been proven to endanger human health and the environment. This system threatens the survival of local communities and biodiversity in the extreme southern region of Bahia, through impacts that include a significant reduction in the availability of water in areas where large-scale monoculture eucalyptus plantations are established.

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- This is a company that has also occupied public lands and indigenous lands. It is inconceivable that Veracel should be granted a licence to occupy another 100,000 hectares, while the Pataxã's indigenous people have yet to be granted a comprehensive demarcation of their lands by the competent bodies, despite the fact that this is a constitutionally guaranteed right. It is equally unthinkable that a company whose current landholdings have been occupied on more than 10 occasions by landless rural workers' movements should want more land while these landless families have yet to be settled on land of their own. This is even more true given that settling families fulfils the social role of the land, as opposed to its occupation with monoculture eucalyptus plantations to serve the excessive consumption of disposable paper products around the world.

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- Approximately 1,000 lawsuits and other proceedings have been filed against Veracel in the region's labour courts, according to information gathered by various organizations and the Public Ministry in recent years. In addition, this is an economic activity that generates relatively few jobs given the large areas of land that it occupies. This is even more troubling in view of the fact that, in the case of Brazil, a huge amount of public funds are devoted to this activity by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). For the construction of the last pulp mill, an investment of 1.43 billion Brazilian reais (around 900 million U.S. dollars) from the BNDES resulted in the direct creation of a mere 741 jobs. With those same funds, tens of thousands of families could have been settled, providing them with land of their own and a source of income.

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- A report signed by the government of Bahia itself in 2008, entitled "Silvicultura de Eucalipto no Sul e Extremo Sul da Bahia: Situação atual e perspectivas ambientais" (Eucalyptus Silviculture in the South and Extreme South of Bahia: Current situation and environmental prospects) acknowledges the existence of various conflicts and underscores the serious lack of governability with relation to the eucalyptus plantation activity in the region.

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In dozens of countries, primarily in the Southern hemisphere, people are suffering for the financial gain of big eucalyptus and pulp companies, forever in search of cheaper places to operate in order to maximize their profits. We believe that the people who live in the regions where this type of production is expanding do not need more paper. On the contrary, they need support for other economic activities that offer real prospects for everyone and preserve the environment in a world facing critical environmental problems like global warming.

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Finally, in addition to the cancellation of the licensing of Veracel's expansion, we call on the government of the state of Bahia to urgently begin to compensate for the extensive liabilities to rural and urban workers, indigenous peoples, the general population and the environment of the region as outlined in this letter.

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Yours sincerely,

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