



plantations are not forests

position paper

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Tree plantations are not forests. They are a monoculture which causes huge impacts throughout the world. Plantations are a huge number of very rapidly growing single species of trees of the same age that are sawn to occupy considerable land areas, with very high consumption of soil nutrients and water. When they reach their reproductive cycle, they are all cut down to the ground. Plantations are uniform agricultural systems which replace in many cases natural ecosystems or agro-ecological systems which are richer in terms of biological and cultural diversity, and where many peasant and indigenous communities live.

As a part of the agribusiness model of production, plantations are pursued for the production of cellulose pulp to produce paper, timber, oils and agrofuels. Plantations are not as biologically and socially rich as forests; on the contrary, they cause serious negative impacts: displacement of entire communities, violation to the rights of the Peoples, decay of local culture, generalized violence and pesticides contamination, loss of biological diversity and alteration of hydrological cycles. Besides, these impacts are most detrimental to women.¹

We are aware of the fact that there is a strong tendency towards the expansion of tree, oil palm and soybean monocultures in the whole world. According to information provided by FAO, by 2030, the global area occupied by tree plantations will increase by 30%. Markets for cellulose pulp and products produced from palm oil are constantly growing, at a rate that is expected to be increasing as a result of the growing demand for agrofuels.

In addition, during the last years, big forestry and paper companies have relocated from their original regions in Europe and North America to embark on an aggressive race over the territories and natural resources of the South, where they are currently one of the main obstacles to the processes of land redistribution and democratization of social relations in the countryside. Transnational cellulose and forestry corporations are strongly rooted as the actors that are currently achieving most in terms of economic, political and financial power, and in terms of the imposition of a certain model of production, as well as cultural and ideological power.

To make matters worse, through the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol and in the framework of the efforts to address climate change, large scale tree plantations have been considered as carbon sinks. With this discourse, the logic that has facilitated climate change is locked in and persists: the North will continue their CO₂ emissions, while allocating limited funds for a fictional cleaning of the atmosphere in countries of the South, where it is cheap for them to do so.

For this purpose carbon credit schemes have been created, whereby the tons of carbon that are absorbed by large scale tree plantations are negotiated to the highest bidder and used by big polluting companies to comply with the emissions reductions required by the Kyoto Protocol. This, in addition, has served the interests of all the promoters of the global business of large scale plantations, legitimizing them and providing funds to develop them.

¹ For more information, please read the report by Friends of the Earth International and the World Rainforest Movement: <http://www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs-members/women-raise-their-voices-against-tree-plantations>

This is without a question a fictional solution, because there are serious doubts about the additionality (how much carbon do plantations really absorb) and permanence (how long does that carbon stay absorbed) of the carbon that is supposedly absorbed by larger scale tree plantations. The results of the use of tree plantations as carbon sinks are so uncertain, that it has not been possible to proof and verify to which extent they contribute to the reduction of climate change. New proposals, such as REDD, may follow the same path and cause further negative impacts throughout the world.

All in all, tree plantations seriously undermine people's food sovereignty and the achievement of social, cultural, political, and economic and climate justice.

International fora play an important role in the promotion and advocacy for tree plantations: the FAO itself is a strong supporter of this model, and it systematically promotes the alleged environmental and social benefits of plantations, despite the great amount of evidence to the contrary around the world. Moreover, it is the FAO that keeps allowing tree plantations to be erroneously considered as forests. In the framework of the systemic global crisis, this organization is calling for "*increased attention to 'green development'*", including "*planting trees, increased investments in sustainable forest management, and active promotion of wood in green building practices and renewable energy*".² Despite the serious impacts that tree plantations are causing to biodiversity, the Convention on Biological Diversity has not issued any statement against them.

Critically, according to the Kyoto Protocol there are even forests without trees. According to decision 11/CP.7, annex 1 (a) adopted in Marrakesh, "*areas normally forming part of the forest area which are temporarily unstocked as a result of human intervention (...) but which are expected to revert to forest*" are to be regarded as forests and included in that definition.³ In this way, global institutions legitimize an activity which is detrimental to life and which only benefits a small group of capitalists.

The struggle against tree monocultures is an ongoing daily struggle for members of Friends of the Earth International: our organizations in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines fight against palm oil plantations in Asia; in Africa there are struggles taking place in Swaziland and South Africa against plantations to produce cellulose, and against rubber tree plantations in Nigeria; while in Latin America, organizations in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil are struggling together against plantations to produce cellulose pulp, and in Central America there are struggles against plantations to obtain wood. In Europe, our organizations are exposing and denouncing the corporations that are involved in this business, and carrying out solidarity actions. La Via Campesina and Friends of the Earth International have a joint campaign against Stora Enso to denounce and resist the serious impacts that this company is causing in the Southern Cone of South America.

Resistance and people's struggles against tree plantations are strong. For this reason, there are mobilizations all around the world, which contribute to strengthen alliances and obtain victories.

² <http://www.fao.org/news/story/es/item/10621/icode/>

³ <http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:w1jLtM5o4UcJ:unfccc.int/resource/docs/cop7/13a01.pdf+kyoto+protocol+marrakesh+decision+11/CP.7+annex+1&hl=es&gl=uy>, page 58.