

The protection of ancient forests

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Ancient forests are among the greatest living expressions of three billion years of evolution of life on earth. They contain as much as 90 per cent of the world's land-based species, literally millions of types of flora and fauna from owls to orchids, bears and beetles. Many of these species will not survive unless we protect large areas of the remaining ancient forests. Biologists generally agree that the rate of species extinction is now 100 to 1000 times as great as it was before the coming of humanity. Palaeontologists recognise six previous mass-extinction events during the past half-billion years. The last and most famous occurred 65 million years ago and ended the age of dinosaurs. Researchers of biodiversity agree that we are in the midst of the seventh mass extinction. Even if the current rate of habitat destruction were to continue in forest and coral reefs alone, half of the plant and animal species would be gone by the end of the 21st century.

Already 80 per cent of the world's large areas of ancient forests have been destroyed or degraded, much of it in the last three decades. Of the one-fifth that remains intact, illegal and destructive logging is the single largest threat. An estimated 10 million hectares of ancient forest are destroyed or degraded each year - that's an area the size of a football pitch every two seconds! Ancient forests the size of Europe could be destroyed in the next few decades.

As many as 150 million indigenous people live either in or near ancient forests. In many cases, the range of native plant and animal species found in ancient and frontier forests provides the basis for survival of forest dwelling peoples, and remains fundamental to the survival of indigenous and traditional cultures.

Tony Blair and illegal logging

At the 1997 G8 Summit in Denver, leaders of the G8 states agreed to develop an Action Program that included eliminating illegal logging and international trade in illegal timber. At the G8 summit in Birmingham the G8 announced the Forest Action Program and committed themselves to its implementation. They agreed to report back on their progress at their G8 Summit in July 2000. The year 2000 is now upon us, yet illegal logging continues to flourish. The G8 program advocates focusing on domestic actions in the G8 member countries. This is particularly relevant to the UK, as our country is a major customer of timber products from countries where illegal logging in ancient forests is currently the norm rather than the exception.

Keeping the Amazon alive

The Amazon is one of the biologically richest areas in the world containing more than one-third of the world's remaining ancient forests and supporting up to 50% of the planet's animal and plant species. The Amazon contains more than 2.5 million species of insects, more than 3000 species of mammals and more than 60,000 species of plants. There are more than 2000 fish species in the Amazon, more than in all European rivers.

Logging companies threatening the Amazon

- With the depletion of SE Asian and Central African forests, the Amazon is being targeted by transnational corporations (TNC's) to be a key source of tropical timber in the coming decades.
- In 1997, the Brazilian Government estimated that 80% of all logs cut in the Brazilian Amazon are extracted illegally.
- Today, a handful of large companies from Europe, the United States and Asia control more than 12 per cent of the region's processing capacity and almost half of its export value.

Greenpeace challenges illegal and destructive logging

Investigations carried out last year by Greenpeace uncovered evidence of companies based in the UK trading with several transnational companies that are regularly buying logs from sources with an illicit track record. In Amazonas State, all plywood and veneer exporting companies were found to have been involved in illegal logging in the previous two and half years including the Malaysian giant WTK that regularly exports plywood to the UK. In Para State, the largest exporters were found to be regularly buying from illegal sources, including the Japanese logging company Eidai that exports plywood to the UK.

The examples of illegalities shown below are clearly only the tip of the iceberg. The amount of illegal logs would be found to be much greater if the Brazilian Government's inspection structure was stronger. They currently rely on only one inspector per 4 million hectares, an area the size of Switzerland.

Greenpeace has been monitoring a number of multinational timber companies in the Amazon, which include:-

WTK/Amaplac

Amaplac SA is part of the Malaysian group WTK and owns 313,798 ha of forest and plywood mills in Amazonas State. The company is planning to log this area in the near future, but currently relies solely on third party

log suppliers for its plywood production.

During the log transport seasons from 1997 to 1999, the company was found to be among the top 10 companies fined in Amazonas State for possessing illegal logs. Some 14 of its third party suppliers were fined during this period for the illegal exploitation, transport and sale of logs. As recently as May 1999, Amaplac was charged with buying logs without the necessary Authorisation for Transport of Forest Products (ATPF). The majority of Amaplac's plywood and veneer is exported to the UK. In 1997, exports were worth US\$6.3 million.

Eidai do Brazil

Eidai do Brazil is owned by Eidai Inc. in Japan. Between April 1998 and October 1999, Eidai received more fines for infringement of national forestry legislation than any other company in the State of Para, being fined by IBAMA as many as 15 times during this period. Three of the company's third party suppliers were fined during the same period for transporting logs without the necessary ATPFs.

During a lengthy field investigation in Para State in 1999, Greenpeace was able to identify an illegal supply of Faveira logs to Eidai, using a simple technology based on ultraviolet paint. IBAMA officials fined the company and confiscated the logs under the new Environmental Crimes Law. During the same operation, IBAMA also apprehended and fined another logging truck delivering undocumented timber to Eidai.

Eidai is the largest processed timber exporter in Para State and sells plywood and veneer to the USA, Japan, the UK and the Netherlands. In 1997, exports were worth more than US\$31 million.

Amazonian solutions

Greenpeace is planning its biggest ever campaign to protect the Amazon but it is a complex region. With 20 million people living there it is clear that to save the rainforest will mean finding real economic alternatives and solutions to destructive logging. A vital part of Greenpeace's Amazon campaign is to identify viable alternative activities that could act as a 'solution' to destructive logging.

Rubber tapping, a traditional activity carried out in extractive reserves, is one of the available solutions. It does not endanger the forest, as it is not necessary to fell trees to extract rubber.

By helping rubber tapping families to survive and raise their families in extractive reserves, the forest can be protected. This means finding technologies that will allow them to produce products for domestic and international markets while at the same time acting as guardians of the forest.

In 1999, Greenpeace set up a partnership with the University of Brasilia,

the National Council of Rubber Tappers and the National Centre of Traditional Populations. It funded a project for 40 rubber tapping families, using a new Tecbor technology developed by Professor Floriano Pastore of the University of Brasilia.

The Tecbor technology is a method for congealing rubber. Instead of the traditional and unhealthy smoking process, pyroligneous acid is used. The result is rubber ready for use by industry. This cuts out the middlemen and is therefore of maximum benefit to the communities.

The rubber tapping families involved in the Greenpeace supported project live in the Jurua Valley, located in the heart of Amazonia State. They have learned how to use the Tecbor technology, and have adapted and improved it to suit local conditions. They are now producing 100% native, high quality, natural rubber sheets. The production of latex takes place during the Amazon dry season, between May and November.

Greenpeace is currently manufacturing the first batch of rubber sheets into computer mouse mats. During the next 12 months the Greenpeace Tecbor project will have the potential to produce a further 100,000 computer mouse mats, and to develop other rubber products.

Greenpeace and the Deni Indians

In April, 2000 Greenpeace announced a joint project to assist the Deni Indian communities of the Brazilian Amazon on self-demarcation of their traditional lands. The Deni land has been under threat from the Malaysian company, WTK, since 1995 when the multi-national logging giant first started negotiations which ended in their purchase of over 313,000 hectares of forest from a Brazilian businessman. Approximately half of the WTK land overlaps Deni Indian territories. The Deni live in the western part of Amazonas State in Brazil, on the Cuniua river (a tributary of the Purus River) and the Xerua River (a tributary of the Jurua River).

Land demarcation is the legal instrument by which the Brazilian government recognises indigenous rights to traditional territories. The Deni land stretches over 1,600,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest. Demarcation is a lengthy legal and physical process that includes mechanical and social surveys to confirm the range of traditional lands and, when complete, prohibits all forms of industrial development.

The meeting to announce the demarcation effort was attended by 12 Patarahus (Chiefs) from the four Deni villages of the Cuniua River. Also attending was Brazilian government official Artur Ribeiro Mendes, Co-ordinator of PPTAL (Program for Indigenous Lands Demarcation of the Legal Amazon) and representative of FUNAI (The National Foundation of the Indian).

The Greenpeace activists and members of the Deni communities also joined together in a symbolic demonstration on the banks of the remote Cuniua River and called for WTK to leave the Deni lands.

Greenpeace has joined together in partnership with two indigenous peoples' organisations, CIMI and OPAN, to meet the Deni's request for assistance with the demarcation. CIMI (Missionary Indigenous Council) is a non-profit organisation that has been promoting the autonomy of the indigenous people of the Purus River basin for over 25 years. OPAN (Native Amazon Operation) was founded 31 years ago and has extensive experience with self-demarcation processes as a result of their work with the indigenous Kulina nation. The groups first visited the Deni communities in May 1999.

Greenpeace is calling for: -

- Logging only in specific areas in accordance with strict ecological and social criteria, through certified operations such as the Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC);
- Expanding areas of ancient forest used for other ecologically responsible activities such as rubber tapping;
- Proper demarcation of indigenous lands.

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FULL BACKGROUND ON THE GREENPEACE AMAZON CAMPAIGN PLUS ANIMATIONS, PICTURES AND ONLINE MOUSE MAT SALES AT:

<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk>