

Illegal logging and destruction continues in the Amazon

Greenpeace demands all companies stop buying wood from illegal sources in Para State, Brazil

Sat 22 November 2003, Porto de Moz, BRAZIL

Greenpeace today protested against industrial level forest exploitation in the remote Porto de Moz region of Brazil's Para State. Activists painted "Crime" on 6,000 cubic metres of logs and on a barge used to transport logs, and marked the area with yellow tape as a "Forest Crime" scene.

The logs were discovered by Greenpeace in a remote riverside harbour at the end of a road leading from a registered Forest Management Plan. Government documents state that Mr. Paulo Pombo Tocantins, controls this area, and that he has links to Selvapad, a Brazilian-owned company, who has recently started exploiting timber in Para State. Pombo, one of the largest log traders in the Porto de Moz area, supplies companies such as Eidai do Brasil Madeiras S/A. Eidai sells to the US, Japan and into the European Union.

The recently released Greenpeace report "State of Conflict" showed clearly that all government-approved Forest Management Plans in the Porto de Moz region are based on false or insufficient land title documentation. Most of these plans are used to launder illegally cut wood outside of the boundaries of the plans themselves.

Greenpeace was tipped off last week by ribeirinhos (traditional riverbank settlers) about the problems caused by Selvapad, when the company cut a track through the forest that cut deep into community land. The ribeirinhos also reported that they had to physically stop 300 trees on their land from being illegally cut. According to community members, these trees would certainly have been "laundered" through Paolo Pombo's management plan documents.

Selvapad employees left the site suddenly during the night of November 19, with their heavy equipment that they had loaded onto a barge.

"We believe that the loggers left to avoid inspection and subsequent seizure of their equipment by Ibama," (1) said Nilo D'Avila, Greenpeace Amazon Campaigner. "Ibama inspectors are active in the region, attempting to stop illegal logging operations. It appears that these loggers were rightfully afraid that the information gathered by Greenpeace would be shared with Ibama inspectors, and that their operations could be shut down."

Three years ago, the ribeirinho communities from Porto de Moz, and from the neighboring Prainha area, started their fight for the creation of extractive reserves (2) in order to guarantee their rights to the land, and to ensure the responsible and sustainable management of the region's natural resources.

Greenpeace is urging companies to stop buying wood from the Porto de Moz and Prainha areas immediately, until the extractive reserves are created. The wood currently harvested is taken illegally or with irregular documents, and always in total disregard both for the environment and for the rights of the local people who depend on the forest for their very survival.

Greenpeace also calls on the Brazilian Government to suspend all logging operations in the area, and to immediately create the reserves Verde para Sempre (Forever Green) and Renascer (Reborn) to guarantee the responsible use of the natural resources by these traditional communities.

"Unless these reserves are created now, the illegal loggers will destroy the area before the local communities take charge of protecting these dwindling natural resources," said D'Avila. "The lives of the natural guardians of the forest will be destroyed along with the Amazon rainforest, one of the last great tropical forests in the world."

Notes to Editor:

1. Ibama is Brazil's Federal Environment Agency.

2 An extractive reserve is an area protected by law, recognized by the federal government, that guarantees that the families living in the area exploit the natural resources in a sustainable and cooperatively managed way. The reserve area proposed by the communities of Porto de Moz is approximately 1.3 million hectares and will shelter around 15,000 people.

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