

# Background information on WFC2015, and related Civil Society concerns

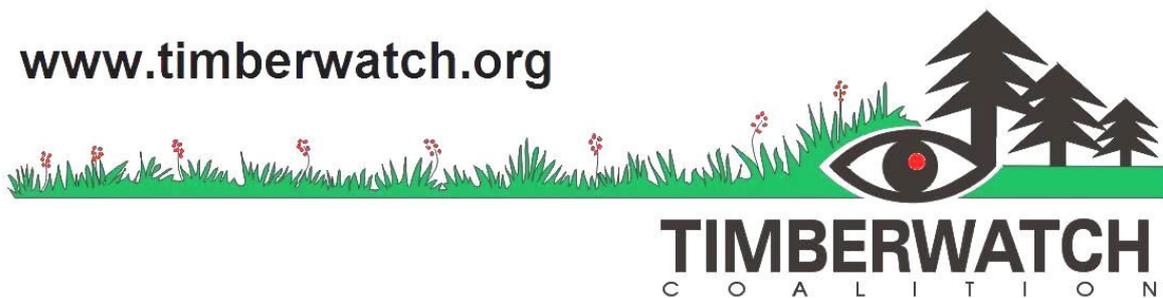
Making the voices of Global Civil Society heard  
– and heeded!

at the 14<sup>th</sup> World Forestry Congress (WFC2015)  
in Durban, South Africa, 7-11 September 2015



“Forests” and People: Investing in a “Sustainable” Future, or  
‘Corporations and Plantations: Undermining Earth’s Integrity’?

[www.timberwatch.org](http://www.timberwatch.org)



# Background Information on WFC2015

## XIV World Forestry Congress

(from <http://www.fao.org/forestry/wfc/85567/en/> )

*The Government of the Republic of South Africa will host the Congress, with the [Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries \(DAFF\)](#) as the focal point. The FAO Forestry Department will provide technical and administrative support and act as a catalyst: strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships and championing the role of forests and trees in a sustainable future free from hunger.*

*The FAO Forestry Department has appointed Tiina Vahanen as the Associate Secretary-General for the Congress.*

*Participation in the Congress is open for people from all countries, regions and sectors – public, private, educational, NGO and research. Participants may belong to a government organization, NGO, private company, scientific or professional body, a forestry society, or attend in a personal capacity.*

*Registration is required and there is a fee. More information about the Congress and how to register will be available in the main Congress website that will be launched soon. For further information, please contact FAO [WFC-XIV-Info@fao.org](mailto:WFC-XIV-Info@fao.org)*



According to information on the FAO WFC webpage: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/wfc/en/>

*“The Congress – the first to be held in Africa - is inclusive of people from all countries, regions and sectors, whether they belong to a government organization, NGO, private company, scientific or professional body, a forestry society, or simply have a personal interest in attending.”*

However it has failed to mention that participation at the WFC is will most likely be skewed in favour of including mainly representatives of timber industry organisations, government forestry departments, and, of course, officials from the FAO and other United Nations Agencies. It further stated:

*“The broad participation and inclusive discussion on forestry issues [at the WFC] will facilitate their mainstreaming in global agendas on sustainable development as well as building new partnerships.”*

But the kinds of discussions that will take place within the WFC conference are unlikely to include burning issues being raised by indigenous peoples, community groups and progressive civil society organisations. What “sustainable development” really means also needs to be unpacked and analysed, and “new partnerships” being built between governments, corporations and UN agencies put under scrutiny.

The FAO – WFC webpage also stated:

*“Forests are essential to life on our planet, to mitigating and adapting to climate change, ensuring adequate supply of fresh water, enhancing biodiversity and providing sustainable incomes and livelihoods, including food security. But they face unprecedented and unrelenting pressures.”*

Clearly this should only refer to real forests, which have evolved over time in parts of our planet to become ecologically complex and richly biodiverse tree-dominated natural habitats, and which sustain many millions of forest-dependent peoples that live directly within forest areas and billions of others living elsewhere that rely on the products and services generated by real, not fake, forests for their survival.

On the other hand, the rapid expansion of large-scale industrial tree monocultures is increasingly leading to the destruction of, and systematic replacement of such original forests, with vast, intensely cultivated even-aged, single-species industrial plantations that obliterate indigenous biodiversity and displace forest-dependent communities.

*“The 14<sup>th</sup> World Forestry Congress, hosted by the Republic of South Africa, will bring together the global forestry community to review and analyse the key issues and to share ways of addressing them.”*

However the “global forestry community” includes many multinational timber, paper, energy and food corporations, whose goal is to exploit real forests as well as to convert forests and other habitat-types such as farmland, grasslands or shrublands into vast monoculture plantations for the production of pulpwood (e.g. Eucalyptus), lumber (e.g. Teak), wood-pellets (e.g. Pine), confectionery (e.g. Cacao), cosmetics (e.g. Oil Palm), luxury foods (e.g. Macadamia) and biofuels (e.g. Jatropha), to supply world markets. Another looming threat is the possible release of genetically engineered (GE) trees.

CDM and REDD projects could also result in community land being taken away from its legitimate owners or occupants for ‘carbon offset’ climate mitigation projects, that will in reality allow ongoing emissions of greenhouse gases by dirty industry and transport, to the detriment of local communities and indigenous peoples in the Global South.

When it comes to “the key issues” and “ways of addressing them”, issues that concern the “global forestry community” will not likely reflect on how their logging and plantation activities damage the ecology and biodiversity of affected areas. They are also unlikely to consider the adverse impacts of their operations on air and water quality. Nor are they likely to attend to problematic issues that affect forest- or grassland-dependent local communities and indigenous peoples; such as displacement from their traditional territories and farmland; loss of access to places to hunt or gather medicinal plants, and to religious and cultural sites. Furthermore, loss of the ability to subsist without relying on menial ‘jobs’ offered by the corporations that have taken over their land, means that all too often they are forced to relocate as ‘squatters’ into over-crowded and unhealthy informal settlements far away from their families and cultural groups.

Important “key issues” such as disrespect for basic human rights; the appropriation of indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ land; a lack of free prior informed consent (FPIC), and inadequate compensation for the loss of land and livelihoods, are not likely to be high on the WFC agenda. Therefore it will be critically important that open and honest discussions about these and related matters should be given ample opportunity and space in an accessible venue near to where the WFC will be held.