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Family-based Agriculture repudiates proposed Forest Law changes

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Bruno Taitson, from Brasília

"Efforts to destroy the Forest Law are part of a wider Agribusiness strategy to do away with Brazil's environmental and social legislation altogether". With that vigorous statement the leader of the Via Campesina movement in Brazil, Luiz Zarref, summed up the feelings of the family-based Agriculture sector in regard to the proposals to alter environmental legislation in Brazil. He took part in a debate with students and representatives of the socio-environmental movement this Tuesday (Oct. 18) at the University of Brasilia-UnB.

The Via Campesina leader pointed out that in addition to the draft bill to alter the current Forest Law, the ruralista faction in the Congress [representing agribusiness and large landholding interests] is also pressing for greater 'flexibility' to be introduced into: the National Protected Areas System, the criteria adopted for the demarcation of indigenous lands, and the Statute of lands; and calling for the removal of all restrictions on the use of chemical pesticides. "Contrary to the lies spread around by the ruralistas, the present Forest Law is not a hindrance to those producing food crops, it is a problem for those that want to get rich quick at the expense of the country's natural resources and the rest of society", insisted Zarref.

UnB social science student Lara Vicente declared that it was essential to mobilise Brazilian society to ensure that the Senate bars the retrograde provisions set out in the text of the draft bill presented by representative for São Paulo Aldo Rebelo (Pc do B) and approved by the House of Representatives. "We cannot stand aside and leave it to the ruralistas to construct a national project for us. We need to make our contribution to the construction of a model for Brazil that firmly supports family-based agriculture, protection of the forests, the rational use of natural resources, and sustainable forms of development", she declared.

In Lara Vicente's view, the draft version that is now before the Senate is a real stab in the back, not only for the family-based agriculture sector but for Brazilian society as a whole. "Nobody eats Eucalyptus, very few people consume soybean. What people really eat comes from family-based agriculture and the sector has already come out strongly against the ruralistas' proposals", concluded the student.

Federal Government omission

Lawyer André Lima, from the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (Ipam), demanded much greater involvement of the Presidency in the issue. "The Federal Government has stated that it is against the proposed changes to the law on several occasions but in fact it was guilty of omission and complicity in failing to mobilise its political support base to defeat the draft bill when it was being voted in the House", argued the legal expert.

André Lima added that there is an urgent need to alter some highly critical points of the text such as the possibility it foresees of compensating for deforestation in other areas of the same biome, and the designation of certain illegally deforested areas as 'consolidated areas'. "If we carry on like that we will have landowners clearing off the natural vegetation here in the Cerrado savannahs of the Federal District, where land costs as much as 10 thousand Brazilian reais a hectare, and compensating for it in the state of Maranhão where it only costs 5 hundred reais a hectare", explained the Ipam representative.

Another aspect that came under criticism from Via Campesina's Luiz Zarref was the removal of Mangrove Swamps from the category of 'Permanent Protection Areas' thereby seriously threatening the continued existence of vegetation formations that play an essential role in the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems. "They want to boost the production of farmed shrimp by putting the mangrove



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swamps of the entire country at risk," he said.

"This very same Agribusiness that wants to destroy the Forest Law as it stands is also responsible for the fact that, even though it is not the world's largest food producer, Brazil is the country with the highest per capita consumption of chemical pesticides on the planet. It is the same Agribusiness that wants a free pardon for all the environmental crimes it has committed so that it can carry on planting transgenic varieties of soybean on the floodplains of our rivers", concluded Luiz Zarref.

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