

# The soya route in North West Argentina

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The provinces of Salta, Jujuy Tucuman and Catamarca are the most northerly regions of Argentina, bordering with Chile to the west, Bolivia to the north, and a short segment of Paraguay to the north-east. The Salta Province has an approximate area of 15.400.000 hectares and until 2002, maintained just under half of its natural vegetation cover (6.931.705 hectares of forest)<sup>1</sup>.

The greatest expanse of forest (around 5.000.000 hectares) corresponds to the habitat type known as "bosque Chaqueño"(Chaco forest). It forms part of the world's most extensive area of dry subtropical forest, with over 100.000.000 hectares distributed between Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina. After the Amazon jungle, it forms the second largest forest mass. The remaining 2.000.000 hectares of Salta forest territory are made up of the Selva de Yungas, a mountainous sub-tropical forest located between the sub-Andean mountains and the areas below the Andean cordillera chain which extend a little over 700 kilometres from North to South within the Provinces of Jujuy, Salta and Tucuman. The Yungas is an ecologically-diverse region where the forest vegetation connects the plains of the Chaco with the mountain valleys, creating the right conditions of humidity for the transitional forests which exist between the dry forests and the mountainous jungles of the interior. Within the forest belt created by the Yungas are the foothill forests. Because of their position at the entrance to the Chaco, these are characterised by a high level of diversity. The north-west region of Argentina has one of the greatest levels of biodiversity in the country. In the Yungas ecoregion there are 203 species of birds, such as the Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*), the Red-faced Guan (*Penelope Dabbenei*) and the Military Macaw (*Ara militaris*). There are also 89 mammal species, such as the Jaguar (*Pantera onca*), the Tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*), and the Ocelot (*Leopardus pardilis*)<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the flat and gently undulating relief, mild climate and fertile soils, the forests of the foothills have been a favourite area for the expansion of agriculture, and in particular, mechanised agriculture, which has been increasing since the end of the 1960s - with a particularly sharp rise since the 1990s to the present time. This area is also a dense populated region, with numerous indigenous and rural communities settled specially in the north close to Bolivia. These communities maintain their forest knowledge and skills, as well as cultivation techniques for the abundance of native food species found in the area.

Salta is one of the areas of Argentina where soya is expanding at highest rate. The cultivated land area during the 2006/2007 crop cycle was 569.810 hectares<sup>III</sup>. Within the province 414.934 hectares of forest have disappeared in the past four years. The deforestation that took place in the period of 1998- 2002 increased 113.45% - with 194,389 hectares were cleared<sup>IV,V</sup>.

Salta and Santiago del Estero are the main provinces of the north that are being deforested on a massive scale to make way for soya. The area in question encompasses the transition to the Chaco and the sub-humid Chaco area where deforestation projects expand in focus points where thousands of hectares are cleared at a time, flattening forests and indigenous and rural settlements in their paths.

## **The bitter history of the region**

Current demographic and socio-economic organisation is rooted in the time of the Spanish conquest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The leading family clans, and those creole descendants who managed to acquire independence, created the country's structure and integrated this to the global capitalist system at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was why the indigenous populations were violently wiped out, and their labour and produce were demanded according to the wishes of the dominant families. The major part of the pre-Colombian social system was broken down, although some elements survived in areas where long-standing traditions are maintained, and within indigenous races mixed with creoles who have maintained local traditions to the present day.

One of the cruellest examples of the concentration of land, which also shows the level of of coercive domination over human activity of the time, is that of the sugar mills. These include the mills at San Martin de Tabacal in Salta, and the Ledesma SAAI mill in Jujuy, which owns 280.000 hectares (an area 14 times the size of the Province of Buenos Aires) in the Province of Jujuy. Ledesma is the largest industrial sugar-refining complex in Latin America. It also produces paper (dominating 40% of the national market), and alcohol (ethanol from sugar cane). It has approximately 37.000 hectares of crops within the region of Jujuy and has a wealth of 500 million dollars<sup>VI</sup>.

The Ledesma mill was the property of the Leach family (of English origin) from the end of the 1800s. Ownership was transferred to the Blaquier family in the 1950s, and they continue to be one of the most powerful

and influential families in Argentina. The Costas family were the original owners of the sugar mill at San Martin de Tabacal. They sold the property to the 'Seaboard Corporation' from the USA in the 1990s.

## The coup of 1976 and its consequences

With the coup d'état on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1976, the bloodiest military dictatorship that Argentina has ever witnessed came to power. Powerful groups of businessmen supported the military and provided them with lists of names for the purpose of annihilating social activists from guilds, universities, journalists, etc. who wanted a fairer distribution of wealth or demanded justice and a democratic society. One of the most transparent cases of complicity and of direct collaboration with the deadly repression of the Armed Forces is that of the Blaquier family - the owners of Ledesma SAAI.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1976 there began a series of tragic events, which were supported and driven by the interests of Ledesma SAAI. During the night there was a power cut which plunged the town of Libertador Gral San Martin and surrounding villages, such as Caliligua and El Talar, into darkness. Taking advantage of the darkness, squads from the military, gendarmerie, the police and foremen from the Ledesma sugar mill burst into the homes of workers, guild members, students and teachers. They ransacked their homes and arrested over 400 people, tied them up, and blindfolded and bundled them into trucks owned by Ledesma SAAI. This same chain of events was repeated a number of times during the end of July 1976, with programmed power cuts that terrorised the population<sup>1</sup>. During this time, Dr Luis Aredez, an ex-Mayor and the doctor of the Ledesma Union, was jailed for a year. On his return to the region he was kidnapped and was not seen again<sup>2</sup>.

Miguel Ragone was Salta's Governor during this time. He was close to the people and was aware of their problems. He was deposed before the military coup took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1976, having been unofficially accused by the reactionary forces of supporting guerrilla groups, and because of bad institutional management. Eventually, on the 11<sup>th</sup> March

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<sup>1</sup> These events have come to be known as 'la noche del apogon' – the night when the lights went out.

<sup>2</sup> Olga Márquez de Arédez, the Doctor's widow, led the campaign by the families of the disappeared detainees. She joined the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and set up every year demonstrations in the memory of 'la noche del apogon' in Ledesma. C.A.P.O.M.A. was founded in her memory. It is a group dedicated to the defence of human and environmental rights, and of which the author of this chapter is a member.

1976, he was kidnapped and injured by Police agents, it is suspected that they were aided by the Federal Police and the Argentine Military. He remains disappeared to this day.

The de-facto military government of 1976-83 annulled the documents legitimising ancestral property rights to indigenous lands in the Department of San Martin. The military kidnapped, tortured and murdered militants, and representatives and leaders of grass-roots social organisations. They gave power to the large landowners and to the new powerful investors involved in land appropriations. According to an account given by an indigenous Wichi from Embarcacion, Department of San Martin: *'During the time of the military, the papers and the land which Governor Ragone had ready to hand over to us were annulled. The Gendarmerie settled in Embarcacion and took a number of rural people as prisoners. They tortured them badly. The military would come in helicopters shooting at us. Because of this we lost all sense of security on our land'*. Another Wichi from General. Mosconi recounts: *'In 1978 the businessmen from Leon y Chiban S.A. came. They told us they had ownership documents, and came to throw us off the 3.000 hectares that we have always inhabited. Our cemetery for the "old ones" (ancestors) is here. We did not allow them to throw us out. They destroyed our wooden houses with bulldozers, and during the night we put them back up again. We would not answer them in Castillian when they came with the Judge and the Police, and we would not sign anything. We are still fighting because they will not recognise us as owners of this land. But our history and culture is on this land, and that is the truth'*.

Currently, political power in Salta has a distinctive character inherited from the time of the dictatorship. The current provincial government took power in 1995 and is still in power today. The current Governor is Juan Carlos Romero. The Romero family has closed ranks with the military usurpers, and its newspaper 'El Tribuno' (on which Romero was sub-editor during the dictatorship) has become the official voice of the repression and persecution unleashed by the Armed Forces on the popular movements without any hint of conscience. During the dictatorship, the Romero family increased their wealth. With the arrival of democracy, they have acquired regional political power, through their richness and through powerful business and their allies in the circles of big landowners.

The collaboration and support given to the exterminating function of the Armed Forces can be traced directly to some of the agricultural businessmen who are currently promoting the soya model. One of the

most evident cases is that of the Olmedo family clan. They originate from the southern Salta region and are closely linked to the Romero clan. They are currently the owners of two soya businesses: Olmedo Agropecuario S.A. and Ecodesarrollo S.A. In 1976, at one of their country estates, a military group kidnapped and 'disappeared' a worker. This case is officially registered with the Human Rights Network of Salta; surviving witnesses of these events are still afraid of reprisals. Those detained were held under inhuman conditions with others who had been victims of secret kidnappings. They were kept in an agricultural warehouse belonging to the Olmedo family and used by the military for their persecution.

The local inhabitants even talk of the disappearance of workers under the military dictatorship as if it were a 'legend'. They link the disappearances to the Olmeda and Salinas families and a pact with the devil, as a way of justifying these disappearances.

At the end of the 1970s the State was dominated by the military and they had a favourable attitude towards big business. The public lands of the northern and eastern Salta, the plains below the foothills, and the approaches to the Chaco were all witnessing the appearance of new landowners, thanks to land agreements awarded to high-ranking members of the local military and from Buenos Aires. Beneficiaries like Alfredo Martínez de Hoz transferred thousands of hectares of land to Franco Macri in the 1990s. Macri is a businessman who accumulated his wealth during the dictatorship of 1976. He set up a company with one of Emilio Massera's sons and called it 'Desde el Sur' (From the South). The company is undertaking massive forest clearances and evicting indigenous people from their ancestral homelands. There is also the case of Salvador Muñoz, a local producer from the town of Embarcación, Department of San Martín. He was Mayor during the dictatorship, the Muñoz family transformed themselves into large-scale fruit and vegetable producers during the 1980s and 1990s on the ancestral homelands of the Wichí. They are also major suppliers for the supermarkets of Buenos Aires. Having amassed a great deal of financial power, during the second half of the 1990s, they turned their attention to GM soya monocultures and are responsible for large-scale deforestation.

## **The soya route**

Route 34 is a national route in Salta that crosses the wide valleys between the mountain blocks. It runs from the south to the north of the Andean foothills on its way to the Chaco and links with Route 5,



which connects the southern Salta with the borders of the Chaco. The lines of communication link up the urban areas that sprang up with the arrival of the railway and the commencement of timber extraction at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first pioneer farmers who grazed their cattle in the forests established themselves in the area since 1800. The production and population structure of the province began to take shape with medium-sized farms producing fruit and vegetables. Mechanisation with intensively farmed monocultures began with leguminous crops, such as different varieties of beans, in the 1960s, and grew dramatically in the 1990s with the introduction of soya.

Since 1996, the areas connecting the Chaco Plain, the Andean foothills and all their intersected valleys have been dramatically transformed by GM soya cultivation. Production of soya has expanded towards the plains of the Chaco and destroyed both forests and centuries-old settlements in its path, and has displaced or put an end to other ways of life in the area associated with forests, such as livestock farming. After the last agricultural cycle of 2006/2007, soya extended into another 527.650 hectares within the transition area to Chaco<sup>VII</sup>.



Map of the Salta Province showing Route 34 and the three areas of soya expansion.

During this brief period of time, the urban centres connected by the road routes became occupied territories and providers of agricultural services in the wake of the ferocious advances of GM soya which were destroying natural environments and regional economies. Even though these regions were under-exploited, and suffered from economic highs and lows, they provided a diversity of foods and sources of employment.

1996 brought changes to the expansion of the soya industry throughout the whole of northern Argentina, including the region of Santiago del Estero. In this region soya expansion has been exponential. During the 1993/1994 cycle the area covered was 210.500 hectares. This later diminished to 120.000 hectares during the 1995/1996 cycle, and increased again to 240.600 hectares during the cycle of 1998/1999<sup>VIII</sup>. From that time onwards, crop areas have increased to reach 437.000 hectares in 2003/2004<sup>IX</sup>, and finally 569.810 hectares in 2006/2007<sup>X</sup>.

### **Soya's nuclei of expansion within the Salta Province**

Currently, three urban areas within the Salta region can be identified as places from which the advances of agricultural frontiers are being planned. Rosario de la Frontera, in the south; Las Lajitas, to the east and the entrance to the Chaco; and Tartagal, to the north. In northern Salta, agricultural plots are large in size and arranged on a north-south axis on the eastern side of Route 34. The plots in south-east Salta are densely concentrated.

Agricultural exploitation has advanced through Rosario de la Frontera using the same methods as the mining industry – intensive extraction of all resources. This area was the first place to practice large-scale mechanised agriculture in the 1960s. It began in Rosario de la Frontera and Metan, among families who were descendants of the leaders and immigrants who emigrated from Spain in 1940. The exploitation began as mechanised monocultures of bean crops (these had a value on the international market) and destroyed large tracts of forest. Some areas remained covered with forest and pasture where traditional forest grazing continued. The land use imposed was similar to that of the pampas of Santa Fe and Buenos Aires (where the climate is warm and soil and humidity levels are different to those in the Salta). Over time, yields were reduced, the soils became poor and the process of erosion quickly took over.



As a consequence, in the 1970s the bean farmers of Rosario de la Frontera and Metan searched for other other locations and made their way towards the Salta in the north of the country. At this point, that area still had an abundance of public land, inhabited by creole farmers and indigenous communities practising extensive ranching in the forest, that had never obtain legitimacy over their ancestral lands. The first deforestations took place aiming to create the new agricultural lands of the eastern foothills of the sierras of Maiz Gordo and the Cresta del Gallo, both located in the centre of Salta. The profitability of the bean and the conventional soya began to attract speculators from Buenos Aires, Santa Fe and even from abroad.

Las Lejitas is located towards the centre of the Province, and Tartagal, the provincial capital of the Department of San Martin in the north, has a climate that borders on tropical. These are the centres for agricultural services and focal points for the expansion and have been growing exponentially since the 1990s. The Department of San Martin is composed of wide, humid plains at the base of the jungle highlands to the north of the River Bermejo. This was an area of pristine forest scattered with gaucho family farms practicing extensive ranching and transhumance. Also found within this area were medium-sized plantations (this was the first region in the country to grow peppers, tomatoes, etc, for national consumption from July to September) and was able to provide significant levels of employment.

From the 1970s new entrepreneurs began to arrive in the region bringing with them large corporate identities. They bought or were given land by the Provincial government through suspicious deals. The traditional size of farms saw a tenfold increase from a little over 100 hectares to 1000 hectares. This was due to deforestation carried out by the new landowners. As early as 1989 more than 70% of the cultivated land surface in the region belonged to companies and people from outside the region.

In the 1990s, the use of mechanised agriculture grew exponentially, with soya as the key crop. The environmental management of forests, cultural history and any surviving traditional produce was trampled underfoot as massive-scale deforestation cleared the land for monoculture using the tactics of physical and legalised violence following the interest of the political and economical bussines circle of soya.

During the second half of the 1990s, Las Lajitas, Metan and Tartagal witnessed the building of offices, warehouses and agricultural silos by corporations who were responsible for the sharp rise of soya cultivation.

Among these were Monsanto, Bunge<sup>3</sup> and Dreyfus. They are allied to the large producers and promote the benefits of agricultural biotechnology through intensive campaigns of events and workshops. 1996 saw the commencement of large-scale violent evictions of indigenous and creole communities that inhabit the communal forests, and of the small agricultural areas made up of plots of smallholdings growing food for local and national markets. These stood in the way of the new large-scale monocultures that were being established throughout the area. Deforestation continued at an alarming rate with teams of bulldozers 'shaving clean all vegetation' throughout hundreds of thousands of hectares, only to plant vast seas of uniform soya.

In the Department of San Martín mechanised deforestation accelerated in the 1990s. It has almost completely destroyed the continuous forest which spread from the Chaco plains in the east towards the transitional jungle foothills in the west. Franco Macri is the owner of the 'El Yuto' ranch in Embarcación. The estate was acquired by Macri in 1997 when he won the concession from the Argentine postal service paying less than 100 dollars per hectare for the land. Between 1997 and 2002, the government of Salta gave Macri six forest clearance permits, which have already been used to clear an area of 4,506 hectares. Macri has also acquired the concession to use the public water supply, to set up an irrigation supply from underground waters, and to extract water from the Bermejo River. Macri is also attempting to acquire Belgrano Cargas, the railway company that plans to reactivate soya transportation to the port of Rosafé<sup>XI</sup>.

The Departments of Anta, San Martín and Orán are the areas most affected by the onslaught of deforestation. Between 2002 and 2004 the deforested area was 66,838 hectares in Anta, 11,358 hectares in Orán, and 14,747 hectares in San Martín. Data from the Department of Forestry reveals that between 1984 and 2001, 94,087 hectares of the Yungas in the Salta region had been deforested (that is 10,84% of the total area) as well as 56,664 hectares of the Chaco within the Salta region. Deforestation to make way for agriculture within the forest regions of the Chaco reached 396,943 hectares between 1984 and 2004 in the Departments of San Martín, Orán and Anta<sup>XII</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Bunge has a national capacity for grain processing of 25,000 tonnes per day. This was the first soya processor in the country, as well as the first to export seeds, of which 95% are destined for Spain and Holland. Bunge installed a biodiesel plant in Rosario-Santa Fe and at other sites in Salta at Delfín, Gallo, Tucumán, Piquete Cabado, Las Lajitas, Coronel Mollinedo, and Macapillo. The total capacity of these is 250,000 tonnes. [www.bungeargentina.com](http://www.bungeargentina.com)

Because of the above, in the north-east of the Salta province 51% of area planted with soya crops (157.000 hectares) in 2002/03 corresponded to what would still have been natural areas in 1988/89<sup>xiii</sup>. Throughout this area, 89% of soya's advance on the natural vegetation has taken place in the dry Chaco (such as the forests of Quebracho, Kaki, Peach and other tree species), 5% in the Yungas jungles, and 5,7% in the mountain Chaco<sup>xiv</sup>.

## **Government policies**

Current government policies on deforestation within the Salta region have a powerful ally within the Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo de Salta (SEMADES, the Department for the Environment and Sustainable Development in Salta). This government body issued deforestation permits to agricultural companies. It also set up the public hearings before permits were issued, where theoretically, the community is consulted about plans and projects for changes to the natural environment. However, irregularities are a constant issue and the process is flouted regularly, as is national and provincial environmental legislation; serious environmental impact studies are ignored; and deforestation projects are begun without consultation. Trees are ripped out by their roots and hundreds of them are piled up into piles hundreds of metres across and set on fire. In some cases, consultations also take place in far away districts, so that those affected by the deforestation will not be able to express their concerns.

In a race to pre-empt proposed legislation for 'Minimum Budgets for Natural Forests' which was being proposed by the National Senate, SEMADES authorised the deforestation of 195.500 hectares of forest from December 2006 to June 2007. This legislation would put a stop to deforestation for years by decreeing land use. Government representatives from Salta are seriously opposed to the legislation. The size of the land area in question is the same as the whole area of the City of Buenos Aires and represents 70% of the average national area deforested each year. During the period in question, 26 requests for forest clearance were approved. These included individual clearances of a minimum of 600 hectares and a maximum of 44.000 hectares<sup>xv</sup>. Among the approvals granted was one for ARCOR, a company recently arrived from the Santa Fe area, which deforested an area of 40.000 hectares; Quebracho Colorado S.A., a company belonging to Sergio Usandivaras deforested 30.000 hectares; Rumbo Norte S.A. from Santa Fe deforested 13.260 hectares, resulting in serious conflicts with rural communities which had been settled in the area for centuries. In April 2007 members of these communities were arrested by Police. In June 2007, there were violent confrontations between communities and groups of thugs employed by the landowners.

The events described above are the reasons for the rapid advance of Genetically Modified-GM crops over unique forest habitats, without any concern for the environment or human life. It is worth noting that Amnesty International's World Report for 2007 identifies the Governor of Salta for his part in 'irregular sales of State and public lands, ancestral territories and indigenous community lands and the destruction of natural resources of traditional value to local communities contributing to a reduced chance of their survival'<sup>XVI</sup>.

Since the emergence of legislation promoting biofuels (proposed and approved by the National Government in November 2006), an intense media campaign has taken place in north-west Argentina by the corporations in alliance with large agricultural producers, provincial governments and the Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA, the National Institute for Agricultural Technology) through events and seminars to set up and manage biofuel production, identical to those imposing GM biotechnology.

To date, the only concrete action that has taken place is the agreement signed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 2007 between Walter Wayar, the Vice-Governor of Salta, and INTA for the creation of an experimental biodiesel plant using *Jatropha*. FUNDESNOA, an NGO created in 2005 with the aim of integrate large companies that have a presence in north west Argentina to the Coporate Social Responsibility criteria. The Executive Director, Liliana Pontussi, is an environmental expert with strong links to official powers and to the companies. The highest ranking members of FUNDESNOA are: the BANCO MACRO BANSUD based in Salta (this is the central point for financial managers from the soya industry credits, contracts for deforestation, sowing and harvesting machinery, etc.); Ledesma SAAI; DESDE EL SUR S.A.; the sugar mill at San Martin del Tabacal; CRESUD SACIF Y.A. the owners of the largest expanse of land in the region and a centre for agribusiness. This fusion of corporate interests can be seen in the initial interest in the expansion of sugar cane for bio-ethanol production, although it also has interests in soya and other grains<sup>4</sup>. This foundation has opposed the legislation to stop deforestation and has organised events to encourage Congress to oppose it<sup>XVII</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> LEDESMA SAAI intends to buy 51% of the shares for the San Martin del Tabacal sugar mill in Salta and put financial pressure on the La Esperanza sugar mill, who is experiencing financial problems, to expand its sugar cane monoculture. La Esperanza is a rural farmers' cooperative producing sugar cane in 10% of its 90,000 hectares. The remainder of the land is used for a variety of food products and forest. LEDESMA SAAI is modernising and expanding its current sugar cane bio-ethanol plant. It is planning to become the largest national producer of this biofuel and its project plans include the deforestation of an additional 50,000 hectares and the construction of a bio-ethanol pipeline. On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2007 they organised a public meeting for the planned deforestation. Proposals included the deforestation of a 5,000 hectare section of the transitional zone, and the further expansion of the sugar cane crop, and to declare its desire to increase bio-ethanol production. This implies the destruction of the last remnant of transition forest connecting the jungles of the foothills and the plain.

The above links the soya traders in Salta to the soya biodiesel plants outside the region. Louis Dreyfus, one of the major grain companies in the region, with installations in the Department of San Martin (an area where Desde el Sur S.A. has a strong presence); REPSOL YPF also has the largest working oil wells in Salta, as well as storage tanks in Gral. Masconi, which display banners stating 'ecodiesel'. Along with REPSOL YPF, Louis Dreyfus has installed a soya biodiesel plant with a 100.000 tons capacity, and is planning another plant at Timbues, Santa Fe, with a 300.00 tons capacity. This grain company exports soya derivatives and seeds mainly to Europe, and oil to India and China. There is talk within the business world that Rosario de la Frontera and Las Lajitas, are locations with the required infrastructure (owned by BUNGE) and are being considered for the installation of the next biodiesel plants.

### **The green washing of the Government and some NGOs**

The most flagrant case of the sale of State of public lands was that of Gral Pizarro Nature Reserve. This 25.000 hectare Reserve was composed of plains of Chaco forest to the east, and transitional mountain jungle in the foothills to the west. In 1995, it was declared a protected area in perpetuity and protected through legislation. Rural farmers had lived there for over 80 years, and the Wichi indigenous community had settled there after fleeing from deforestation in their original homelands (Tartagal, Department of San Martin). This area acted as an ecotone, a transitional corridor optimising the connection between the Yungas and the Chaco and protecting their high biodiversity. There is an extensive list of species recorded in the area, including anteaters, tapirs, red eagles, rheas, jaguars, crowned eagles and red-fronted macaws.

In April 2004, the Salta government annulled the legislation protecting the Reserve (establishing a serious precedent which threatens national parks and reserves) and then proceeded to sell off the land in June of the same year. Plots sold were a minimum of 3.000 hectares per buyer. The lands were acquired by businessmen from Tucuman and Santa Fe and were destined for the cultivation of soya. With this action, the government failed to acknowledge the 20 year old rights that had been granted to families inhabiting this area in farms and smallholdings of 10 to 300 hectares and used for livestock farming and agriculture.

Carlos Ordóñez, one of small farmers of the area who made a living from livestock farming and bee-keeping, was one of the first to resist the abuse and eviction threats. He alerted Greenpeace, who initiated an intense media campaign denouncing the next planned deforestation. Along

with the Fundacion Vida Silvestre (WWF Argentina), and the Fundacion Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN, the Environmental and Natural Resources Foundation), Greenpeace started legal proceedings against the Salta Government for the environmental protection of the whole population of the Pizarro Natural Reserve. The National University of Salta (UNSA) also started legal proceedings in support of the legal rights of the inhabitants of the Reserve. This resulted in death threats, physical attacks and deforestation orders, but the Wichi community and the other inhabitants resisted the combined attacks from the Provincial Government and the companies. There was an outcry of public opinion as news of the abuses began to spread through all communication channels.

Following a massive press campaign, which included appearances from actors and other celebrities talking about the deforestation in Salta, in October 2005 the National Government of President Kirchner intervened, and through the Administracion de Parques Nacionales (APN, the Ministry for National Parks), it was decided to protect an area as a Multiple Use National Park in collaboration with the inhabitants, and to provide land titles for the Wichi community. This reduced the land claimed by businesses from 19.000 to 8.000 hectares. The new proposal defined an reserve of 800 hectares for the Wichi.

The new proposals include a relocation programme for the small farmers, this program shows clear disadvantages and it is difficult to establish who should be assigned a particular plot. The majority of people in this situation were given less land than they originally had. The small farmers have been lied to and have been made to sign agreements to being settled in new plots, with the risk that if they dont pay for the land within the following years, they run the risk of eviction. There are also promises of loans for the relocations, for the setting up of infrastructure and of land titles, but in April 2007 none of these promises had yet materialised. In mid-2007 the handing over of plots had still not been completed and there was much confusion about their location and the definition of boundaries.

Two local producers, Mr Ordonez and Mr Tiburcio are the only two inhabitants who continue to seek court judgements against the Province. The remainder of their neighbours have signed agreements that remove their right to reclaim their land. Many of the inhabitants are not even making use of their new plots because they have other jobs or that they now unemployed and are receiving state aid. Many can not relocate as during the previous years and with the whole debate, invertainty and threats, they have lost their livestock and have no stock to farm<sup>XVIII</sup>.



Finally, having been promised the recovery of part of the Reserve, and because of pressure from the Salta Government, Greenpeace and Vida Silvestre stopped the legal proceedings that were taking place at a national level. The process for planning the restoration of the Nature Reserve is taking place behind closed doors. UNSA disagreed with the plans presented by the Fundacion Pro Yungas (a subsidiary of the Fundacion Vida Silvestre WWF- Argentina) in a report detailing management plans for the reserve, which was presented to the APN. These plans were made without any participative contact with the Reserve inhabitants, with only two fleeting visits made to the area. Comments from Alejandro Brown (Director of the Fundacion Pro Yungas) show his real feelings on the issue: 'the sale by the Salta Government was legitimate...why do they want to preserve the forest if it is degraded?' His comments do not even take account the ability of the Chaco vegetation for regeneration (it is widely known to have one of the best abilities for regeneration of any habitat in the world), nor do they acknowledge that the forest resources provide a living for the rural farmers and indigenous communities. There is a real opportunity to optimise their use and to restore their natural cycles.

The new plans leave the village surrounded by monocultures. An additional buffer zone, consisting of a forest belt 500 – 1,000 metres wide, has been proposed. This forest strip is meant as protection for the communities from the downpours that descend from the mountains each summer, and to absorb the drift from toxic crop sprays. This buffer zone has not been respected and this solution has left the populations exposed to soya from all directions. The design of the buffer zone proposed by Pro Yungas and APN is extremely vague and full of contradictions. Although proposed as a buffer zone, it includes an area of 6.000 hectares for the cultivation of citrus and soya. These monocultures will be interspersed with 80 metre wide strips of natural vegetation acting as screens every 700 metres. These strips are classified as ideal green corridors. Because the report mentions problems with water and wind erosion, with the possibility of rain gullies, landslides and torrential water, it proposes that the companies should construct drainage systems<sup>XIX</sup>.

In December 2006, the deforestation began again, on supposed protected areas. To date, 3.000 hectares of forest have been destroyed, even though there have been protests from the APN and some of the local inhabitants. The deforestation is opening up areas 1.000 metres wide and is bordered by screens of vegetation made up of 60 – 70 metre-wide forest remnants. Greenpeace did not stand by its commitment to observe the development of the environmental impact assessments, and they restricted access to

the planning process for the communities that campaigned with them for almost two years. According to the modified agreements for the reserve, this area was part of the buffer zone. The local population do not believe that citrus fruits will be planted, as the deforestation has been identical to that which prepared the way for soya. No works have taken place to control the drainage of summer rains. With the deforestation, relocated families will find themselves right next to the monocultures and they will be exposed to agrochemical sprays.

The new park is shaped like a bottleneck, with the narrowest part near the entrance to the Chaco. This significantly diminishes its ecological potential as a connection across these two areas. The latest expansion of the neighbouring estate of 'La Moraleja' means the community has become completely surrounded by large areas of deforestation, and there have already been cases of poisoning from agrochemical sprays coming from La Moraleja. Also, in the summer of 2006/07 the river burst its banks and cut another course. La Moraleja has not left any kind of flood plain. Neighbours say that during the last deforestation La Moraleja cut down 27.000 hectares when they only had a permit to cut 20.000. In the short-term, the large group of local producers still settled on the mountain slopes to the west of town, will be at serious risk due to the deforestation taking place on both sides of their lands. They will end up sandwiched between two areas of monocultures. These local farms consist of a corridor of small plantations that supply the markets of Buenos Aires, particularly during the winter months. There are also concerns regarding access to water. A group of about 40 producers share the same drain. If this should be blocked or re-directed further upstream, then nobody would be able to provide any produce. There has already been an incident during the cycle of 2006/07 where some producers have had problems when water was diverted from crops in La Moraleja to an area 2 kilometres away. The market gardens lost a significant amount of produce and were never compensated for their losses.

The UNSA maintains the juridical case at the national justice, stressing the environmental risks this situation signifies for the communities and the damage to small, non-GM agricultural enterprises in Pizarro. These will not survive the toxic impact of soya cultivation. The inhabitants of Pizarro have no information about how the proceedings are progressing with the New Reserve. According to the town officials, the National Government has paid 3 times the price of the land, but it is still not clear if all the land has been transferred. Despite everything, the conservation NGOs continue to celebrate their victory over this environmental campaign. This case has

been promoted in Argentina as the most exemplary in responsible soya cultivation led by Greenpeace, Pro Yungas and the WWF. The Responsible Soy proposes land use planning estimating soy expansion and leaving islands of hotspots of biodiversity and primary forest.

During 2007, through environmental impact studies requested by LEDESMA SAAI, Pro Yungas determined, the viability of cutting down 5.000 hectares of the forest corridor that make up the last zone connecting the jungles of the foothills in 'Yuto-Sauzalito' Jujuy<sup>5</sup>.

In Pizarro, the opportunities for local grass-roots organisations to take part in decision making relating to the land use planning have been deliberately obstructed by Greenpeace Argentina and the Pro Yungas Foundation. They omitted any mention of the continuous abuse, and of the abusive attitude that was evident towards human rights and the environment by the promoters of the soya and sugar cane industries. Greenpeace Argentina is also promoting the idea of responsible soya production in Salta. This idea has been derived from international talks on the Round Table of Sustainable/ Responsible Soya. The regional objective of the meetings between Greenpeace and PROGRANO, is the creation of an association for large soya producers in Salta. To label as 'responsible' a desire to accelerate and establish the predominance of business monopolies, is a complete illusion. It is the eco-green corporate greenwashing to cover their true operations and profits that take place at the expense of human beings and ecosystems.

## **Environmental and social impacts: violent evictions, assassinations and contamination**

The impacts of such a violent process of destruction as that experienced in the Province of Salta are many and they encompass many different areas. From an environmental viewpoint, beyond the accelerated extinction of flora and fauna, the process of deforestation and fragmentation

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<sup>5</sup> The Agency for National Parks distributed notices in May 2006, which refuted the study of the Pro Yungas Foundation and declared the zone as an area of special interest. In June 2007, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (ATE-CTA, the Association of Public Servants ( FUNCIONARIOS PUBLICOS) initiated an appeal to give the area legal protection in an attempt to counter the irregularities of the public hearing, and because the local indigenous guarani communities living close to the area had been affected by the deforestation and their ancestral cemetery in El Talar had been destroyed. They had also had livestock killed and had their ancestral paths closed by LEDESMA SAAI. Due to the public enquiry and the constant complaints during the last three years from neighbours, human rights organisations such as CAPOMA, which denounced illegal operations taking place without consulting local communities, the hearing was suspended.

has put at risk the diverse ecosystems of the region. The massive floods that took place from January to April 2006 are a phenomenon that demonstrates the consequences of massive deforestation. This disaster was caused by the lack of forest cover and the disappearance of the riparian forests which regulated peak river flows coming down from the mountains, and which reduced the impact of droughts by filtering water from underground aquifers. During this particular summer, the North of Salta became cut off when a bridge collapsed on Route 34 (the main communication link with the rest of the country and Bolivia) due to the rising waters, also destroying poorly-built homes in the town of Tartagal. Agricultural land became unusable as it was covered with sand washed down from the hills and this affected a large part of the region. According to Pablo Canziani, a researcher from CONICET, who is also the Director of the Catholic University in Argentina (UCA) Programme for the Study of Atmospheric Processes in Global Change: *'There has been a brutal increase in deforestation in northern Salta, Paraguay and Bolivia. Deforestation causes the bare soil to warm up in the sunlight and this generates an increase in violent storms. What is taking place in the river basin of the Tartagal River and neighbouring areas could affect the water cycle. On a regional scale, climate change is also caused by change of land use'*. A report by the UNSA departments in Tartagal during the floods of the summer of 2006 determined: *'The irrational management of national resources by the provincial state...the small producers are ruined, the indigenous communities have been devastated, and access to land has been violated'*<sup>xx</sup>.

The eco-epidemiologist Daniel Salomon, who is the Director of the Institutes CENDIE, ANLIS Malbran from the Ministry for Health and Environment comments that the deforestation has had a profound impact on the health of the population. Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease caused by a parasitic protozoa transmitted by the mosquito vector. During an interview with Salomon he explained that uncontrolled deforestation generates outbreaks of cutaneous and mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis. If this disease is left untreated, or if it is treated incorrectly, there is a possibility that over several years it will develop into a serious form of mucocutaneous disease producing facial lesions, and ultimately death<sup>xxi</sup>.

When deforestation takes place and remnants of forest remain as screens, many of the wild animals, which are reservoirs of parasites and mosquitoes, concentrate in these. This creates conditions where human beings come into contact with them on a regular basis, a situation that was infrequent before deforestation. Zoonotic diseases are beginning

to be more common in people who live near to crops. At the end of 2005 there were 1.400 cases, and these continue to rise. A person's nutritional status also influences disease and the population is becoming increasingly nutritionally deficient. Another disease is the hanta virus which is transmitted through rodent urine. Rodents accumulate in the remaining belts of forest. There are also 'ratadas' (outbreaks of rodents) within directly sown crops. When machinery comes into these areas the rodents leave in masse and invade the homes of those who live nearby. People have to abandon their homes to the invading rats who destroy all their goods and food. These ratadas pose an enormous risk to human health. They are the cause of many diseases of unknown consequences, such as the fevers associated with Rickettsia. This disease is associated with ticks, which in turn are associated with rodents. It can have fatal outcomes, and cases have been recorded in Jujuy<sup>XXII</sup>.

The final issue within the environmental impacts is the permanent spraying of toxic chemicals (such as glyphosate, endosulphan and atrazine) on the soya plantations. Spraying is carried out by planes and land-based vehicles. Statistics collected by the San Bernardo Hospital in Salta Capital, which is the largest hospital in Salta and the medical centre for cases from all over the Province, has observed a 300% rise in the last decade in carcinogenic disease, with the majority of patients coming from Salta Departments where soya is grown. A symbolic case is that of a girl who died of poisoning in November 2006 in the Department of Rosario de la Frontera. The symptoms of poisoning began during the days that aerial crop spraying was taking place. She lived 50 metres from a soya plantation. The case was played down by the official press, headed by 'El Tribuno'. There was no serious autopsy performed and there was a permanent boycott on the case by political powers. They also put pressure on the medical staff to conceal data.

Grain silos are usually erected in, or close to, towns and there is a constant transit of trucks and vehicles used for crop spraying, which are often washed within the town boundaries. The grain is transported and loaded at the silos with the consequent drift of toxic particles. In Piquete Cabado, a town near Las Lajitas, where BUNGE owns enormous silos surrounded by extensive areas of soya crops, there is an alarming proportion of infant deformities, and children with leukaemia, cancer and other diseases, which were unknown in the area before. In Mollinedo, another BUNGE base, the situation is the same. The silo here is located 20 metres from the town's school, which is surrounded by soya monocultures. The crop spraying trucks are washed in the middle of the town and in order to reach the







school, the 340 schoolchildren have to cross through a passageway where sacks of soya are stored. The sacks are protected by electric fencing, and the trucks wait there to unload. Both the children and the teachers present symptoms of chronic poisoning, such as allergies, respiratory problems, etc. Two of the classrooms are particularly exposed, as they are closer to the area where the trucks unload, and because of this they suffer intense contamination. There are also records of 5 pregnant women who have miscarried at the same time on days when aerial crop spraying was taking place. An 8 year old girl was blinded by leukaemia. She lives at the edge of the town at a distance of less than 5 metres from the monoculture.

Social impacts can be seen in the increasing rate of social inequality. Levels of poverty are among the highest in the country. Rural migration to urban areas has increased from agricultural towns, which are dying because they are being besieged by soya. Regional produce is being lost either because lands are occupied by soya growers, or because the crops cannot survive the chemical spraying and end up 'burned' by agrochemicals. Animals also become ill or deformed. Salta Capital and its suburbs have grown into enormous areas of misery, partly due to people arriving from dying villages. Today Salta Capital has a population close to 1 million. In 1999 the population was a little over 600,000<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Soya expansion has increased migration to the towns and unemployment. In Salta Capital unemployment has risen to 11.7% and is the second highest in north west Argentina. Santiago del Estero is another soya province in northern Argentina with 15.6% of its population classified as destitute. According to data from INDEC (2006) this is above the national average of 8.7%.

Data provided by the System for the Monitoring and Evaluation of National Social Programmes (SIEMPRO, Sistema de Monitoreo y Evaluacion de Programas Sociales de la Nacion) confirmed that in October 2002, 55% of the total population of Salta were unable to provide for their basic needs<sup>xxiv</sup>. A bulletin dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2006, compiled jointly by the UNDP and other national institutions, defined the north east and north west regions of Argentina as areas with the highest rates of poverty in the country. This contrasts with figures from media sources such as 'El Tribuno' showing an economic growth of 182% in Salta during the last few years.

The numerous indigenous communities in the region are suffering the most. The forest culture is the basic foundation of their livelihood. The dry Chaco forests in which thousands of indigenous peoples live have a

high percentage of species used for food. It also has a greater number of animals per hectare than the Amazon jungle. The indigenous people have used these forests for almost 5 thousand years and their specialised use of its resources has developed over time, in parallel with the forest's natural cycles. The destruction of forests and the resulting concentration of food sources into small multi-produce farms where indigenous people sell their manual labour according to seasonal needs have resulted in the highest levels of malnutrition and infant mortality in the country. This dismal statistic is shared with the regions of Tucuman and Chaco, where over 65% of the population are lacking basic needs. *'Soya is like a big whirlwind that consumes the mountain, the land and our history. It leaves us chewing on nothing but air and bitterness.'* These are the words of a Wichi woman from Embarcacion.

### **Cases of evictions**

From the beginning, current Governor Juan Carlos Romero has been a collaborator with the devastating soya industry. When the cultivation of GM soyaRR was permitted in 1996, the government promoted this as a great new business opportunity, led by demand and focussed towards the global consumption markets. But only large agricultural businesses had the financial power to take advantage of this opportunity.

The following cases are examples of some of the major soya producers in Salta. Their production models adhere to the modus operandi which was generalised and programmed as the dominant production strategy by the regional political power base. This power base inherited its repressive methods from the dictatorial impunity of the past and is still evident in today's government of Salta.

There is not enough space to provide details of all the cases which have come to light from distant corners of Chaco, where numerous indigenous and rural communities are resisting the political-legal machinery used by the Salta government to control the judiciary and the police and place them at the service of the biotechnological soya industry. These powers have reached the extreme with the assassination of people who campaign against the ownership of great tracts of land by a few landowners.

### **The Olmedo case**

The following situation provides an insight into the attitude and advance of the soya model and has become an emblematic case: Olmedo Agropecuaria in the 'Salta Forestal, 1<sup>st</sup> section'. According to the press, the

true 'king' of soya is Alfredo Olmedo. He controls between 50.000 and 100.000 hectares in various northern provinces and has his headquarters in Salta<sup>xxv</sup>. The heads of the Olmade clan are Jose Enrique and Alfredo, and they have strong links to the Romero family. They were awarded 60.000 hectares of public land in 1996 by the provincial government with a low-priced soft loan.

These lands are located approximately 100 kilometres from Las Lajitas in the forested plains of the Chaco. The area was used for timber extraction and has been populated by loggers since the beginning of the 1900s when they settled. These families are traditional rural Gauchos and are known as 'puesteros' because of their methods extensive ranching in the forest. They were never given land titles for the land that they worked and lived in, even though they were legally entitled to them. The Provincial State declared they were 'trespassers occupying State lands' and harassed them to force them to leave, as, they stated: 'the land already has an owner with title deeds'.

In that same year, 1996, the inhabitants refused to leave. Troops from the Infantry Police were brought in using trucks provided by the Olmedo family with endorsement from the courts to provide protection to the bulldozers sent in to demolish the farmsteads and corrals. The police held back anyone who resisted with blows and teargas. Finally, the government agreed to give the terrorised rural families cheap housing in the urban town of Joaquin V. Gonzalez. Today, these families live there in misery, without stable employment. Many elders died of sadness on seeing the loss of their history and rural traditions, and the young have emigrated because of lack of opportunities. Of the almost 600.000 hectares appropriated by the Olmedo family, more than half were totally deforested and planted with soya. This is how the destructive presence of GM soya<sup>RR</sup> began in this region.

In 2005, with the help of the government of Juan Carlos Romero, the Olmedo family negotiated another 'special' contract of 365.000 hectares on 'loan' for 50 years for a rent of 56 centavos of a Peso (equivalent to US 15 cents) per hectare in 'Salta Forestal, 2<sup>nd</sup> Section'(to the east of the 1<sup>st</sup> Section). This area is inhabited by 110 gaucho families of the same background as the ones mentioned previously.

On this occasion, the company had acquired the same level of government support, and intended to proceed by using the same tactics as in 1996. But this time the inhabitants had organised themselves and resisted the eviction attempts of October 2005 by closing off roads and standing

in front of bulldozers which managed to raze 1.000 hectares of forest to the ground, killing any livestock in their path. News of the conflict reached the national public and the Argentine Agrarian Federation intervened and provided legal support for the local farmers. Even the Provincial Government got involved and asked the Ministry of Production and Employment for a written report on the legal position of the farmers and original occupants of the public lands in the Salta Forestal which had been granted to the companies Alfredo Olmedo and Inmobiliaria Cervera. According to the government's own data, '2000 people inhabit these lands and farm livestock'<sup>xxvi</sup>. To date, the deforestation has stopped and the ownership of the land is in dispute.

From a cynical point of view, the agro-industrial sector first evicts the rural populations, and then tries to be supportive of the poor in towns by providing practical assistance. In La Rioja in 2002, companies supported the launch of the 'Soya Plan'. With the slogan 'Creating new eating habits', it intended to combat child malnutrition. The Olmedo company donated 8.000 kilograms of soya to help feed around 600 malnourished children in the province<sup>xxvii</sup>.

### **The case of the Marquiegui family**

Since 1903, this family of gaucho ranchers has lived in a place within the Chaco called Hickman, about 90 kilometres from the town of Embarcacion. They possess papers which document the initiation of the process to gain title deeds for their land. In January 2005, with the knowledge of the court judge, the ISSA group attempted to force the Marquiegui family to sign documents that recognised ISSA as the landowners. They told the family that they had already hired the bulldozers to open up paths for deforestation. The farmers refused to accept this abuse and refused to sign the papers. This led to acts of repression.

On the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2005, a group of around 15 police and gendarmes entered the Marquiegui family home and violently started firing their guns. They beat up all the men and one of the women, and took away two of the men. This incident was widely broadcast and again the Argentine Agrarian Federation supported the farmers. The lands are currently under dispute.

### **The case of Liliana Ledesma**

Liliana Ledesma was a member of a rural family living in Salvador Mazza, a frontier town near Bolivia in the Department of San Martin. In August

2006 Liliana spoke out publicly in Salta's independent media against the Deputy of the Provincial Peronist Party, Ernesto Aparicio. He had been closing off traditional paths used by the local inhabitants and illegally deforesting and appropriating extensive areas of land. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September of that same year, Liliana Ledesma was stabbed to death by hired thugs linked to Aparicio. Her mouth had been cut with knives to provide a clear warning that 'this will happen to you if you talk'. It is believed that Aparicio had contacts with cocaine traffickers using the frontier and with mafia clans.

Because of this, the Partido Obrero (the Worker's Party) demanded the trial and dismissal of Aparicio. But the Provincial Government did not acknowledge this demand and protected Aparicio until the case reached the National Congress. This was due to reports by Daniel Tort and Marta Cesar, members of the Radio FM Noticias. They now receive anonymous threats and unknown persons have fired shots at the radio station.

Free speech continues at Radio FM Noticias. This is one of the few truly independent media, as the majority of media sources have been co-opted by the Romero family or their associates. Due to the national scandal caused by this murder, Aparicio was dismissed, but he still free to walk in the streets of the town.

### **The case of Apolinario Saravia**

In the town of Apolinario Saravia, situated within the expansion zone of Las Lajitas, the eviction of a Wichí community and a number of peasant families has taken place. These shared a territory of 3.700 hectares of forest. The indigenous community and the Cisneros family now live on the outskirts of the town in plots donated by the Mayor.

Mrs Cisneros testified that her family had lived on that land since 1913, since her grandparents and their children had settled in scattered farmsteads, as is the custom of the area, and they had since become a population of 70 people. They practised extensive ranching in the forest and had cattle and goats. They also farmed the land and sold their produce in the village of Saravia. In December 2003, a man called Virizzoni from the Doble Zeta company appeared with the title deeds to the land. Following a series of threats, this businessman entered the land with bulldozers and began to uproot the trees. He only left the farmers' homes standing. He destroyed all the animal pens. The bulldozers literally cleared the way by flattening the whole hillside and leaving in its wake rows of biomass, which they later set alight. The farmers' homes were left unprotected and a new

cycle of intimidation was set in progress by Virizzone's employees. They would fire guns at the houses at night and steal the livestock. In 2006, they even set fire to one of the homes, an action which was supported by a judge in Metán.

The indigenous communities were evicted repeatedly with each advance of the deforestation. Finally, in 2006 they were pushed into an area without access to the river and they need now to be supplied with water by the Mayor. They also had the road to the school blocked, and the guards have threaten their children if they tried to use a neighbouring fenced path. The children has to walk 20 kilometres to attend school without going on to the estate property. This finally meant that the majority of the community have abandoned the area and have settled around the outskirts of the village of Soravia.

On a visit to the estate in 2006, there remained only the elders and a few families with young children living extremely precariously on the edge of the estate, and subsisting from occasional work harvesting peanuts and tomatoes. They have lost their livestock and rely on assistance in the form of food parcels and water provision.

## **Conclusion**

Taking account of the serious chain of events described in this chapter, the wave of violence suffered for little over a decade because of the GM soya model can now be added to the century of abuse metered out on the population by the sugar cane mills. This new form of agriculture ostracises and sentences the populations in Salta to absolute misery and increased overcrowding around the large towns of Argentina. The ecological devastation affects peoples' health and causes the appearance of new diseases and the increasing incidence of chronic poisonings. In conclusion, the future looks bleak, with even greater devastation and a vulnerable population. The companies will be greatly strengthened by the lack of legal or human ethics or environmental awareness. Their only aim is to set up biofuel production, regardless of its ecological viability or social justice.

It is necessary to create options for an ethical and environmentally sustainable development based on our cultural heritage, and not manipulated by the technical-scientific criteria which appear to be embedded within some NGOs. These NGOs subvert the grass-roots organisations. CAPOMA rejects attempts to mitigate the soya model and



to cover up its serious impacts. It also rejects the suggestion that habitat islands of forests can accommodate a significant level of biodiversity; and those who take advantage of the misery suffered by indigenous and rural populations, as described in the Pizarro Reserve. The lies told of the victory achieved in the struggle for the conservation of the Reserve touched the highest ranks of Government and demonstrated the absolute impunity of the agroexport model. The preferred choice is to pay up and cover up any provincial government corruption, rather than supporting justice and respecting the legal framework of the State. Within the media, the faces of indigenous children are portrayed. The press play games with images of bulldozers being stopped in their tracks by people disguised as outdressed motorcycle men. Meanwhile, solutions are negotiated for private reserves financed by the World Bank, and private policies according to the needs of the agribusinesses are designed by the NGOs.

CAPOMA unites with all the Latin American and international organisations in the true struggle for a safe and healthy earth, in which we all have the right to live a more meaningful life, respecting the rights of local indigenous and rural populations to live in their original territories and in possession of their natural resources.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> [http://www.larioja.gov.ar/vocero/2002/05/20020516\\_pso01.htm](http://www.larioja.gov.ar/vocero/2002/05/20020516_pso01.htm)