



DENI DEMARCATION 2003

GREENPEACE



BRIEFING

Greenpeace and the Deni

The Greenpeace and Deni story began in 1999 when Greenpeace discovered that WTK, the Malaysian logging giant, had purchased lands that overlapped with the Deni territory in the Brazilian Amazon. Due to its record as a global forest destroyer and because of its purchase of lands and a sawmill in Amazonas State, WTK had been on the Greenpeace radar since the Amazon campaign was in its initial research period.

An investigation by the Brazilian Congress revealed that a local Amazon patron, Mario Moraes, who claims ownership of over 1,000,000 hectares of forest, had been trading off lands in that area. In 1995, WTK had purchased 313,000 hectares from Moraes, of which about 150,000 ha overlapped with the Deni lands. However, the Deni people were not informed of this transaction until a Greenpeace team reached their remote villages on the Cuniuá River, in the Purus River Basin of the Southern Amazon. In May 1999, Paulo Adario, Greenpeace campaigner, met Deni leaders and, struggling to overcome communication barriers, told the Deni that a portion of their lands had been sold to a company that would come to cut down trees.

The Deni were shocked. They have been suffering death and disease due to contacts with the colonization fronts over the past 60 years, and they could not understand how this latest problem could occur. After all, they first heard about the demarcation of their lands back in 1985, when the first FUNAI (National Indigenous Foundation, the Federal Government agency in charge of indigenous issues in Brazil) representatives came to their villages to raise the issue with them.

During our tour with the ship *MV Amazon Guardian* in 2000, we again returned to the Deni lands, one of many trips made during the past few years. But this time was different: we were accompanied by FUNAI officials. Greenpeace activists and Deni men, women and children joined together to send a clear message to the Brazilian government and to the rest of the world: WTK out of Deni lands.

The Deni requested the help of Greenpeace to fight for their demarcation. They understood that the demarcation, i.e., the constitutional recognition of their rights over their territory, was the only way to guarantee the integrity of the environment they depend upon; it was the only legal way to keep WTK, and other invaders, outside of the borders of their homeland. Greenpeace then contacted CIMI (the Indigenous Missionary Council) and OPAN (the "Native Amazon Operation"), both experienced Amazon organizations, and asked them to become partners on a project to support the Deni's self-demarcation of their lands. Both organizations have been working with indigenous populations in the Amazon for decades. The Project for the Demarcation of Deni Lands was then communicated to PPTAL (the branch of PPG7 in charge of Indigenous issues in the Brazilian Amazon) and FUNAI, who were invited to participate in the initial planning.

Since then, during lengthy meetings, debates, discussions and working sessions, things that we all, Deni and outsiders, took for granted were challenged, inspected, turned inside out, and put into workable, communicable form in order to move the demarcation forward.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace carried out a strong campaign against WTK markets overseas, exposing the company for its involvement in illegal logging in the Amazon and educating consumers on ecologically sustainable options available to them. The UK market, the main consumer of WTK's Amazon plywood, was virtually closed down as a result of our actions.





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By April 2001, more than two years after the first Greenpeace visit to the Deni and 16 years after the Deni were first told about demarcation, some things had changed. For six months, a multi skilled team that included anthropologists, indigenous issues experts, sociologists and agriculture engineers worked directly with Deni leaders from all eight villages preparing them to take charge of their demarcation.

This so-called "self-demarcation" is not common. Usually the federal government sends in anthropologists, geographers, and inspectors who determine the range of an Indian community's lands, write reports and draw a map, submit their findings to FUNAI, and await the approval of the physical demarcation. Once approved, FUNAI contracts a company to go to the land and cut a visible border through the jungle, marking the outer limits of the property. The Indians themselves are usually involved only on the periferal.

The Project included workshops on maps and mapping, lessons on angles and degrees and theoretical and practical classes on demarcation. The Deni learned how to handle survey equipment such as theodolites, GPS's and compasses, and, combining these new skills with their traditional knowledge of the borders of their lands, they were able to take charge of, step by step, the physical demarcation process.

"The Deni feeling for their territory is much stronger now. They understand all the steps to achieve demarcation, both physical and legal, and why it is so important. Moreover, they also understand the threats posed by an industrial project such as WTK's", said Greenpeace campaigner Nilo D'Avila.

On September 11th 2001, while the world was astonished by the terrorist attacks in the U.S., the Deni finally took matters into their own hands and started the demarcation of their lands themselves. Although ignored by the media and silenced by the tragic international events, the Deni people kept fighting for the protection of their traditional territory with the support of Greenpeace, CIMI and OPAN. A team of Brazilian experts plus an international team of 13 Greenpeace volunteers – from Brazil, Chile, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Greece, Germany, Austria, the US and China – provide logistical support to the Deni people for over two months in 2001 while they demarcated the most vulnerable frontiers of their lands.

A month after the beginning of this self-demarcation project, the Brazilian Government published the Demarcation Decree, granting formal recognition of the Deni's rights to their traditional lands.

The year 2002 were consumed in bureacratic processes, including the bid opened by the Brazilian government to choose the company in charge of completing the physical demarcation – the clearing of a pathway hundreds of kilometers long to create a visible border in the forest.

Today, almost five years and a lot of work later, the completion of the demarcation of the Deni's land is finally getting out of the cartographic filing cabinets in Brasilia and becoming reality in the pristine forests in the heart of the Amazon. SETAG Company won the bidding process and initiated the completion of the official demarcation in mid May 2003. They expect to finish the demarcation by the end of July/early August 2003.

The happy ending to this story – marked by long waits, bureacratic processes and political and economic battles – shows that it is possible to reverse the trend of destruction of the natural inheritance of the Amazon by working in partnership with traditional communities, supported by implementation and enforcement of the laws of the nation.

Although the war in remaining ancient forests throughout the world continues, the Deni people have won a great battle that will help to save one of the last, and the greatest, tropical forests in the world: the Amazon.

