

International call of action:

Sign a protest and Support the MST and the WSF in Brazil on March 9 and April 17 2009 !

On the 3rd of March 2009 the authorities in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil closed all the schools for the landless in encampments set up by the Movimento Sem Terra (MST), and landless workers' movement.

Since early 2009, the local authorities in Rio Grande do Sul have also opened an attack against the WSF.

Join the international protests! Sign the petition and take action!

Stop closing schools for the landless and the official attacks in Brazil against the World Social Forum:

We, the undersigned,

1. Strongly protest the closure of schools for the landless and the attack on World Social Forum alliances by politicians and authorities in Rio Grande do Sul, the birth place of both the landless movement MST's schools and the World Social Forum (WSF), which are bringing hope to rural education and to the democratisation of the world.

2. Demand that the schools in MST encampments and settlements on the countryside be enabled to continue with public funds and support.

3. Demand that the authorities in Rio Grande del Sul withdraw the description made by its superior public ministry council member Thums of the World Social Forum as a gathering place for "terrorists and marginals". Thums is also among the responsible for the closing of the schools and attempts to make MST illegal. To use a public office for making such an offence against WSF is not in the interests of the state of Rio Grande do Sul or the integrity of any public service.

4. Protest against the interference by transnational corporations such as Stora Enso in domestic politics, since this gives those who are rich means to undemocratically influence politics.

We also support the MST's statement as follows :

Ever since the start of the struggle for the land, the care for good education for children and teenagers in MST/RS has been very important for the movement. There has been a lot of fight to make the right for a formal education in the encampments reality. Because of that we express our total support to the schools of the encampments of MST, which are under attack of the government of Rio Grande do Sul and sectors of the Ministério Público, which in the beginning of 2009 declared them closed.

MST is a social and legitimate movement and therefore has the right to an education of quality that takes in consideration the conditions of the struggle and education at the countryside, where the children and teenagers live together with their families and their community

We demand that the schools of the encampments of MST shall have the rights to continue

Signatures (name of individual, name of organisation if any, country) :

Send your protests to the following Public Authorities:

Yeda Crusius
Governadora do Estado do RS
E.mail agenda@gg.rs.gov.br

Ivar Pavan
Presidente da Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do RS
E.mail ivar.pavan@al.rs.gov.br

Mariza Abreu
Secretaria de Estado da Educação
E.mail gabinetese@educ.rs.gov.br

Mauro Renner
Procurador Geral de Justiça do Estado do RS (via website only)
<http://www.mp.rs.gov.br/diversos/correio.pt>

Also send copies to MST and support groups :

MST General Secretariat: sgeral@mst.org.br

MST Rio Grande do Sul; Elizabete Witcel: betieduc@yahoo.com.br

Friends of the Earth Sweden: MSTsupport@mjv.se

Sign the petition and contact others :

We call upon educational, environmental, human rights, peace, peasant, rural, social welfare, trade unions, UN associations, women's and any other organisation concerned about social justice, social forums, environmental and rural concerns to sign the statement and send your protests to the email addresses above.

We also urge you to contact other organisations and inform them about the signature campaign. When possible we also hope you can translate the protest and spread it among other organisations in your countries. In Sweden a national petition will be set up on a website which can be done also in other countries.

Go to the Brazilian embassy March 9 and April 17 !

We also appeal for joint action in two steps. First to react quickly in countries where it is possible on such a short notice. We propose you to hand over in as creative way as possible your protest already on Monday 9th of March to the Brazilian embassy and take photos or video and share with others via Flickr and You tube. We also call for a joint day of protest on the International Peasant Struggles Day established in memory of 19 murdered MST activists 17th of April at Brazilian embassies.

Attac Hungary
CACIM India
Friends of the Earth Brazil
Friends of the Earth Finland
Friends of the Earth Sweden
Friends of MST Sweden

You can follow updates on the action to support MST at
www.aktivism.info/socialforumjourney

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Stop closing schools for the landless and the official attacks in Brazil against World Social Forum:

Authorities controlled by politicians in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil that have received support from the Finnish-Swedish transnational company Stora Enso are now closing schools for landless claiming they must do this according to federal law. The sudden decision to close the schools that have been started in encampments by the MST has come after a growing conflict between Stora Enso and the MST, a movement that defends biological diversity against the monoculture plantations promoted by the transnational cellulose corporation.

A representative of the same authorities that are now closing the schools have simultaneously attacked the World Social Forum (WSF) that started in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, and for many years have been held there. The WSF is widely respected in Brazil and globally as a strong inspiration for global democracy, including showing how the South can democratise the world. But it is now accused by officials in Rio Grande do Sul of being a gathering place for terrorists and forces of no interest to the majority.

In early 2009, Gilberto Thums, a member of the Superior Council at the ministry in the state of Rio Grande do Sul responsible for education simultaneously attacked both the WSF and the landless movement MST. In a statement in the journal *Expansão*, he described the WSF as a meeting place for "terrorists and marginals". A year or so earlier, in December 2007, Thums was behind a plan where a group of prosecutors would put MST on trial with the aim to "dissolve MST and declare it as illegal". That plan was unveiled but the authorities are now making new attempts to attack the movement. In February 2009, Thums and the governor of the state Yeda Crusius were behind the closure of seven schools in MST encampments. A five-year-old article in the magazine *Veja* is cited in a report that has now been used as argument for the closure. The article accused schools in MST encampments and settlements for "defending socialism", "developing a revolutionary ideology", and "supporting intolerance". The "aggressive ideology" of the MST is now being used as an official argument for closing the schools.

The MST in Rio Grande do Sul was a pioneer twelve years ago in implementing a Brazilian law that supported schools in the countryside, and has become a model for the rest of the country. UNICEF Brazil has awarded the educational work that has developed due to MST as a model for education among children in vulnerable socio-economic conditions. The teacher's union in Rio Grande do Sul has also awarded a prize to these schools. Almost 200,000 pupils attend the schools in the MST encampments and settlements. Slightly more than half of the schools are run on public money, and the rest voluntarily by MST.

MST is not only struggling for implementing agrarian reform and education in the countryside but is also engaged in work of importance to the survival of the planet. The 1.5 million participants in the movement are aiming at ecological agriculture. This work of theirs is a direct threat to transnational companies who wish to make profit from gene-manipulated plants and monoculture plantations for the cellulose and agrofuel industries. One of the main opponents of MST is Stora Enso. To strengthen its political influence, Stora Enso has given financial support in the election to those political forces that are now trying to stop the landless movement and to make it impossible for MST to continue its struggle for agrarian reform. Governor Yeda, who has been directly supported by Stora Enso, has now declared - immediately after closing the schools of the landless - that everything should be done to help Stora Enso forest industry to get established in the state - "that is the road to development and we will not abdicate from that".

We oppose this politics in the interest of Northern transnational corporations and the accusation that the WSF is an illegitimate, undemocratic force.

The undersigned organisations thus request that all who want to defend both the

WSF and schools for landless in Brazil support -

The four demands above

The statement issued by the MST in Rio Grande do Sul against the closure of schools in MST encampments in the state

Sources, for further reference:

Expansão: <http://www.revistaexpansao.com.br> (only latest issue)

Expansão, quotes from January 2009 issue: <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6312>

Material on the attempts at criminalising MST:

In English: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10938>

In French: <http://www.cgas.ch/SPIP/spip.php?article923>

In Portuguese: <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/especiais.php?ed=71>

Information about the documents on the attempt at dissolving MST:

<http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=5588>

Official ministerial Rio Grande do Sul web page with a clipping from a newspaper stating the role of Thums in attempting at dissolving MST:

<http://www.mp.rs.gov.br/imprensa/clipping/id68513.htm>

Manifestations against criminalisation of MST 20 minutes video:

<http://br.truveo.com/Criminaliza%C3%A7%C3%A3o-do-MST-no-RS-junho-de-2008/id/1739375251>

Material on closing schools at all MST encampments in Rio Grande do Sul:

Fundamentalismo d direita fecha escolas inierantes do MST e deixa 310 crianas sem educacao, Leandro Scalabrin, membro da comissão de direitos humanos OAB - Passo Fundo - RS, Longer text with quotes from official documents and reference to Veja article: <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6308>

Madraçais do MST: http://veja.abril.com.br/080904/p_046.html

Comissão Pastoral da Terra; Terrorismo cultural no Rio Grande do Sul: fechamento de escolas em Acampamentos

<http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6309>

Escolas itinerantes do MST. Um crime é fechá-las. Entrevista especial com Altair Morback e Isabela Braga, Do Instituto Humanitas Unisinos: <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=6311>

Opinion: Por que Yeda acabou com a Escola Itinerante?

<http://www.correiodobrasil.com.br/noticia.asp?c=149947>

Câmara dos Deputados manifesta repúdio ao fechamento de escolas no RS; Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Minorias Brasília, 19 de fevereiro de 2009,

<http://www.agenciabrasil.gov.br/noticias/2009/02/19/materia.2009-02-19.1741729769/view>

Material on Stora Enso support of Yeda:

Official report on contributions in elections at: <http://www.tse.gov.br>

Material on corruption accusations against Yeda:

Ex-assessor de Yeda Crusius é encontrado morto no lago Paranoá, em Brasília, Folha de S. Paulo, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/brasil/ult96u505227.shtml>

General on MST:

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landless_Workers%27_Movement

Branford, Sue and Rocha, Jan. Cutting the Wire: The story of the landless movement in Brazil. 2002. Latin American Bureau, London.

Harnecker, Marta; Landless people: building a social movement, Editora Expressão Popular

Kjörling, Lennart, Så länge det finns hunger, Ordfront, review of book:

http://dagensbok.com/index.php?s=+&mf_key=dbc_legacy_id&mf_value=1037

Linton, Magnus, Americanos, Atlas, review of book:

<http://dagensbok.com/2006/01/09/magnus-linton-americanos/>

Review of video: "Cutting the Wire"

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2005/12/brazil_cutting.html#

Review of Video in spanish/portuguese with english subtitles: Landless Workers' Movement: History did not end. <http://www.visualab.org/index.php/history>
MST: Los Sin Tierra por los caminos de America, video by AbyaYalaUnida: <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=AbyaYalaUnida&view=videos&start=340>
Landreform i Brasilien och Movimento dos Sem Terra - MST, Sveriges ambassad Brasilien, PM, 2007-07-03, 1(10) Brasilia, Karin Wallensteen (Report on MST by Swedish embassy in Brasilia)
Friends of MST, US with English material: <http://www.mstbrazil.org/>

Official MST web site: <http://www.mst.org.br>

Official UDR web site, opponent to MST: <http://www.udr.org.br>

Information on Stora Enso and plantations (in Spanish):
"Dossier Stora Enso" en REDES - Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay: www.redes.org.uy

Information on MST mobilisation against Stora Enso (in Portuguese):
Agencia de Noticias Chasque: www.agenciachasque.com.br
Jornal Brasil de Fato: www.brasildefato.com.br
Radio Mundo Real (RMR): www.radiomundoreal.fm