

INTRODUCTION



he violation of basic universal rights related to the environment has a common link in Paraguay: it is related to forestry matters and agribusiness. Peasant communities, and indigenous communities, mainly, suffer constant violations of their rights in addition to supporting unsatisfied basic needs such as drinking water, access to land, and food security.

This dossier is a selection of 20 cases considered representative through which the visibility of the various situations that communities must face every day is intended. The reports were prepared by a journalistic team carefully selected for their commitment to human rights, and the environment.

This dossier was prepared within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is preceded by the report on the situation of human rights, and their relationship with the environment presented by 15 CSOs. It is divided into three main columns: forest issues, where the problems of deforestation and forest fires are developed; agribusiness, which encompasses soybean fumigation and its social and environmental impact, businesses, and human rights, as well as land titling and issues. Finally, it talks about basic universal rights, focusing on access to water and its link to health.

In the initial phase, a process of workshops was carried out with the objective of letting different organizations and associations of the local civil society express, in the first row, the different situations and problems they face regarding their human rights and how this affects the environment. This process demonstrated once again how deforestation has become a recurring element in terms of human rights violations throughout the last decades. The common factor is that the main victims are rural, indigenous, and peasant communities in the eastern and western regions of the country, with different nuances.

Although they are from different regions in terms of biodiversity, they are similar in the problems that clearing brings to the communities; such as the loss of their ecosystem services, and the forced migration to urban areas. Native forests also serve as a home for the socio-cultural survival, and economic subsistence of various indigenous communities.

The economic activities linked to agriculture, and livestock require many hectares for their growth, and are expanding so strongly in the Eastern region so that in 2004, with just 20% of the BAAPA, Bosque Atlántico del Alto Paraná [Alto Paraná Atlantic Forest], still standing, the Paraguayan State was forced to pass a legislation to prevent the total destruction of the forests. Thus, the well-known “Zero Deforestation Law” was born, enacted in the same year, and whose last renewal was fulfilled at the end of 2020, ensuring its validity until 2030.

The Alto Paraná Atlantic Forest is part of the 200 most important eco-regions in the world, thus identified by the United Nations (UN) itself. The BAAPA covers 10 of the 14 departments in this region, and despite regulations, it continues to be the victim of deforestation, fragmentation, and degradation of forest remnants each year.

Despite the sad experience of BAAPA, the Paraguayan government did not learn its lesson, and this region had to reach a point of extreme degradation for them to act in its defense. Ignoring this precedent, the State continues submitting other sensitive regions to the same risk. In all these years, no public environmental policies, efficient control, nor oversight systems were foreseen, not even the updating of environmental regulations that are effective enough to ensure the connectivity of ecosystems, nor the restoration of degraded ecosystems at country level. The Chaco-Pantanal is among these, the one in greatest danger.

8 In the Western Region, the expansion of livestock production has become the main cause of deforestation, although agribusiness is also expanding its dominions in Chaco territories in recent years. This region is part of the Gran Chaco Americano and the Pantanal, a vast territory shared with Brazil, Bolivia, and Argentina.

In 2019, several fire outbreaks were registered throughout the Chaco which affected human communities historically settled in these lands that have become a hot spring today due to the flames and the smoke that permeates the entire environment. The great Pantanal, with territory shared by Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay, was also a victim of the fires. The loss of 768 thousand hectares is estimated in this great environmental complex.

Forest fires that occurred on a large scale in 2019 and 2020 have destroyed entire communities, both in rural and urban areas throughout the country, affecting local flora and fauna with an obvious impact. Despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment itself says that 99% of fires are caused by human intervention, this crime goes absolutely unpunished in the country. One of the customs within the agricultural practice, for example, is the burning of pastures within the soil use change.

Although the main problem in the loss of forests in the country is due to the current agribusiness model, since the mid-1990s, a new and violent actor entered the scene: drug trafficking. Thousands of hectares of forests were lost in the last 10 years in the full BAAPA protected areas due to the cultivation of marijuana, a business run by frontier drug traffickers that, until now, has not left a single person arrested for the destruction of the forests, but has a lot of money for financiers.

This report also focuses on the right to land ownership, the struggle of indigenous communities, such as the Yshir Ybytoso, an indigenous people who have inhabited the Bahía Negra area from Alto Paraguay for 500 years, but today find a fence with a “private property” sign to a large part of their skies, their lands, rivers, and forests, a situation that is difficult to understand for those who believe that the environment does not belong to anyone, but belongs to everyone, and therefore, they take care of it as their home. Despite this, the Yshir conform to the documents and papers that modern times dictate, so they are fighting through them to get their ancestral lands recognized, and respected.

These problems are not limited to rural areas. A community located in the heart of Luque, 14 kilometers from Asunción, has for a long time suffered what it is like to live in an open-air sewer due to the pollution generated by the tanneries in the area.

Communities resist despite everything. They fight every day for something as basic as access to drinking water, a universal human right violated in many parts of the country such as in the Chaco, and even in the Pantanal, the largest freshwater wetland in the world.

Access to drinking water, pollution, the fight for land, the cultural loss suffered by indigenous communities, and the trampling of their lands with deforestation, with the advance of agribusiness, or the slow death of protected areas, and in general, the neglect of the State, are some of the situations that arise and that this material shows with a detailed account.

In several of the cases, these are stories of resistance to an inefficient judicial system which seems to deny these abuses. A legislative branch that ignores them, and an executive branch that has made nothing but false promises. Many of the cases that you will be able to read in this document could have been solved many years ago, but in each case, you will be able to find the common pattern: the disinterest of a State that keeps the cases forgotten, to their fate.

Exposing the problems, and trying to find solutions for these peoples is intended by narrating each of the cases, to give relief to those brave leaders who do not rest in their struggle, but also to those who can only fight day after day for breathing, drinking, and having a plate of food on their tables.