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DECLARATION OF 13 MAY

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AGAINST THE “SUSTAINABLE” DESTRUCTION OF THE RAINFOREST AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN IT!

MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra

May 13 is a revolutionary day. On 13 May 1888, slavery was officially abolished in Brazil. On May 13 1968, from the barricades in Paris, the general strike against big business was declared. And on 13 May 1989, students in Beijing occupied Tiananmen Square. Yet, the hopes for democracy and a just distribution of goods fell victim to a global system of neoliberal exploitation. Still the land of Latin America is in the hands of the former conquerors. The destruction of people and nature not only continues unabated, but is even accelerated with the help of fake certificates and greenwashing. Today, on 13 May 2023, we therefore stand in solidarity with the MST, the largest landless movement in Latin America, and demand: No to land grabbing and exploitation! Yes to democracy, fair land distribution and an ecology of radical care!

During the colonisation of Latin America, indigenous people were robbed not only of their freedom and culture, but also of their land and millions of lives. More than half of Latin America's agricultural land is still owned by 1 per cent of the population. Soy, palm oil and beef are produced on huge monocultures by large corporations that control the agricultural industry from sowing to sale. The area used for maize and soya cultivation in Brazil alone is twice the size of Portugal. Deforestation and displacement go hand in hand with industrial mass production. As at the time of colonisation, indigenous populations, quilombola communities (communities founded by the descendants of enslaved people) and small farmers are being exploited, displaced and even murdered.

Since the 1980s, the Landless Workers' Movement MST — the largest social movement of landless workers in Latin America working for popular land reform and ecological agriculture - has managed to secure land access for more than 400,000 families in Brazil. Consequently, since its inception, the MST has been criminalised and fought by the powerful Brazilian agribusinesses. Every year, dozens of activists die or disappear without a trace. Pará, a Brazilian state largely covered by the Amazon forest, has the highest number of political murders in the world, according to statistics. In no other region on the planet do so many activists and climate warriors disappear, murdered by the militias of monoculture owners and supporters of ex-president Bolsonaro.

These activists are fighting for all of us, as the future of our planet is decided in the Amazon: for or against the definitive deforestation of the world's largest jungle. For or against ecological and humane agriculture. For or against the eviction of people for soya, palm oil and beef production. For or against a revision of colonial land grabbing, which has been centuries in the making. Numerous civil society campaigns in recent years have raised awareness about the origin of our consumer goods. Non compulsory certificates, so-called “sustainability labels”, are supposed to guarantee the non-violent and environmentally friendly production of palm oil, soy, beef and many other products.

Thanks to this certification system, Ferrero (Nutella) in particular is considered the primus of the class in terms of sustainability. They cooperate with WWF and self-confidently commit to environmental protection. The only problem is that all these initiatives and labels are simply examples of neoliberal greenwashing! Agropalma, Brazil's largest palm oil company, operating in the Amazon state of Pará and supplier to 20 international food manufacturers, including Ferrero (Nutella), Nestlé, Pepsico, Kellogg's, Mars, Langnese and Danone, is the most cynical example. Agropalma is certified with a total of 10 international labels for organic, fair and sustainable cultivation, including the EU organic label (EU Organic Production Regulation) and the RSPO (Roundtable for Sustainable Palmoil).

The only problem is that these labels are handed out by the agribusiness, to the agribusiness. Agropalma's monocultures are not only the result of colonial grabbing, but also of the illegal appropriation of state land and the expulsion of indigenous smallholders. Tens of thousands of hectares of the palm oil producer's land have already been annulled by Brazilian courts, Brazilian media reported. While the European Commission has just launched its latest campaign against greenwashing and Nutella continues to flaunt its invalidated labels, Brazilian lawyers and international NGOs are reporting on complaints of violence, human rights violations and poor working conditions on the certified plantations. More than 500 years after the invasion of Latin America, economy and politics continue to do what they have always done: unite maximum profit with minimal concessions to the health of the planet and its inhabitants, masked by a cynical rhetoric of “sustainability”.

Together with the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement MST, we therefore demand:

Immediate vetting of certificates! We call on the Brazilian government and government agencies to guarantee respect for human rights on Agropalma's plantations and clarify the legal situation of the territories in Pará. Moreover, the entire certification system must be revised. Labels devised, controlled and awarded by stakeholder associations — it doesn't get more absurd than that! We call on the EU to end its hollow rhetoric and finally take the necessary political and legal steps to support global civil society.

Boycott against Ferrero and all other companies involved! In recent years, Ferrero, Nestlé, Danone, Unilever and co. have portrayed themselves as the best in class when it comes to sustainable and fair agriculture. In reality, however, they are only the best when it comes to greenwashing. Our chocolates and chocolate bunnies, our Kinder chocolate and the Nutella on our morning sandwich are linked to human rights violations, land grabbing and environmental degradation, be it in Latin America, Asia or Africa. We call for an immediate boycott of all products from the clients of Agropalma and other large agribusinesses.

Together for independent agriculture! Agropalma and its customers are just two particularly inhumane examples of a global system of label scams: the neoliberal fiction of sustainable industrial production! We need radical change: Let's stop buying products from transnational companies! We do not need an economic system that does not implement the absolutely necessary stop to deforestation but instead enriches itself by delaying it with false labels, CO2 deals and private protected forests, is not the system we need! Let's demand food that is truly cooperative, ethical and organically grown!

For a radical system change! We cannot change the past, but we can determine how history goes on: Together, let's end the crimes of colonialism against people and nature! Let us join forces to fight the billion-dollar greenwashing industry! Social justice and climate protection go hand in hand. Let's support the Landless Workers' Movement MST in their struggle for real land reform! Let us strive for radical system change — it is not too late!

STOP THE CERTIFIED SELL-OUT OF OUR PLANET! LAND REFORM NOW! AGAINST NEOLIBERAL GREENWASHING! FOR AN ECONOMY OF RADICAL CARE! LET'S SIGN THE "DECLARATION OF 13 MAY" FOR AN ECOLOGICAL, HUMANE AND FAIR GLOBAL ECONOMY!

MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra

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