

3-6-1992

Costa Rica: International Water Tribunal Renders Verdict On Environmental Damage By Standard Fruit

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Costa Rica: International Water Tribunal Renders Verdict On Environmental Damage By Standard Fruit." (1992). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/7180>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Costa Rica: International Water Tribunal Renders Verdict On Environmental Damage By Standard Fruit

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, March 6, 1992

On Feb. 19 in Amsterdam (Holland), Anabelle Montoya and Silike Comanni, representatives of the Costa Rican Association for Defense of Hydrographic Basins and Clean Water (Asociacion Costarricense para la Defensa de las Cuencas Hidrograficas y el Agua Limpia-ADCH) testified before the International Water Tribunal on environmental destruction caused by the US subsidiary Standard Fruit in Limon department. The informal eight-member tribunal operates on the principle that all people have a right to the availability of sufficient, clean water. Although the tribunal's recommendations and verdicts have no legal significance, organizers believe the publicity has more than just symbolic effect. The first tribunal was organized nine years ago. The IWT Foundation, a Dutch non-governmental organization supported by a network of European NGOs, decided to focus on 12 cases this year, most in developing nations. Members of the jury include Indonesian writer and journalist Moctar Lubis, Chilean Ambassador to Kenya Vicente Sanchez, German professor of public law Gerd Winter, and Devaki Jain, director of the Indian Institute of Social Studies. ADCH said that Standard was responsible for extensive deforestation along the banks of the Rio Estrella causing serious erosion. According to the Association, thousands of tons of sediment dumped into the ocean via the river are destroying one of the world's most important coral reefs. In addition, erosion and deforestation are responsible for flooding along river banks. Next, Montoya and Comanni said Standard has used large quantities of pesticides banned elsewhere in the world throughout the Estrella Valley, resulting in contamination of the Rio Estrella and its tributaries. River pollution in turn has considerably reduced the fish population. Moreover, the river is littered with plastic bags used to protect the bananas from birds and insects. Montoya and Comanni that while ADCH does not oppose banana production, measures must be adopted to reduce negative environmental effects resulting from the company's current practices. They said low-cost measures which could easily be adopted by banana producers include recycling organic and inorganic waste products, soil erosion prevention, and controls on aerial fumigation. The Association said the key to avoiding problems associated with pesticides is persuading consumers in banana importing countries to accept fruit produced with fewer pesticides, even if it has a less "perfect" appearance as a result. ADCH observed that such fruit "is more healthy and flavorful." On Feb. 21, the tribunal condemned the Standard Fruit subsidiary for serious environmental damage. The tribunal found that the evidence submitted by ADCH "corroborates the presence of chemical residues in Rio Estrella tributaries, the water table, and in wells used by area residents." The tribunal recommended that Standard adopt reforestation measures to correct problems caused by erosion, terminate the use of dangerous pesticides, and gradually reduce use of less dangerous ones. On Feb. 25, Costa Rican Natural Resource Minister Hernan Bravo said, "I believe judgment of institutions or enterprises by tribunals whose impartiality has not been proven is dangerous." He added that the government, companies and the environmental movement in Costa Rica have arrived at "certain agreements" to control pollution caused by banana producers. Bananas are Costa Rica's top export. Bravo said avoiding all forms of pollution in the context of economic development is "impossible." (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 02/18/92; Agence France-Presse, 02/21/92;

Spanish news service EFE, 02/19/92, 02/22/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/25/92)

-- End --