

Mining Threat to Iracambi.
Up-dated 11th July 2010

In November 2003 we discovered by chance that a mining company, Rio Pomba Empresa de Mineração, was seeking a licence to mine bauxite in the Serra das Aranhas, on Iracambi's western boundary.

While researching Rio Pomba's request, we discovered that the Companhia Brasileira de Alumínio that forms part of the Votorantim group, one of Brazil's largest and most powerful companies, already has the second of the three initial licences required to start working mining claims throughout an area covering 75,000 hectares with numerous deposits which are expected to yield overall around 100 million tons of bauxite, with a gross value, in terms of the aluminum it will produce, of almost \$2 billion. We discovered that Rio Pomba has already sold their claims (including in Serra das Aranhas) to CBA. The area includes Iracambi itself and all the Environmental Protection Areas on the East side of the Serra do Brigadeiro Park, right up to the boundaries of the Park itself. This entire licensing process was carried out in complete secrecy, with no public hearing, and all the required notices published in newspapers several hundred kilometers away from the area. The State Forestry Agency, that has the legal responsibility for the management of the State Park, has not authorized any mining operations within the buffer zone of the Park. developments.

Apart from the environmental issues, there is another major social issue that has not been addressed at all: the fate of the 5,000 or so subsistence farm families in the area whose lands will be mined. While they do get some financial compensation, it does not in any way substitute an entire way of life which most likely they will ultimately have to give up. Nobody thought of consulting them, nor, apparently, has any thought been given as to where they will go and what they will do. Whilst Iracambi's mission is primarily focussed on the environment, we would be shirking our social responsibility if we did not focus on this issue, too.

We were able to call for a public hearing on the Serra das Aranhas licence: this was held in Rosário da Limeira in September 2004. The State Licensing Authority instructed Rio Pomba to seek authorization from the State Forestry Institute for authorization to operate within the buffer zone of the Serra do Brigadeiro State Park: they have not done this, so far, and the license request is on hold until that is resolved.

A Commission of those Affected by Mining, has been formed that includes Amigos de Iracambi to study the issue. We accept the need to exploit this potential valuable resource, both in the interests of both the local and national economy (and of course we would not wish the poor Chinese to have to spend the rest of their lives drinking their beer out of bottles), but we want to ensure that the protected areas of our environment and its uncatalogued biodiversity is not destroyed in the process. We also want to ensure that the profound changes in the social economy of the region that a large industrial project of this type will bring about are properly evaluated and planned for. CBA has an International Standards ISO 14000 rating which means it is committed to observing

international environmental standards which, in the case of the mining industry, include a Code of Good conduct towards the community where it works, and we expect it to observe these standards.

We requested the State Government for a public hearing on the larger mining proposal. The Government was reluctant to do that as it does not want to be seen by investors as going back on licences already issued. We therefore turned to the State Legislature, which has the power to call for hearings, and the Permanent Commission for Environment and Natural Resources, together with the Commission for Popular Participation met in a joint session in Rosário da Limeira in August 2005, heard local opinions and that of the CBA (Rio Pomba was present but preferred not to speak). As a result, the Government agreed to:

- (i) summon public hearings in all the five affected *municípios* of the buffer zone of the Park; these were held in early November 2006
- (ii) ensure full access to all public documents – this we have now achieved
- (iii) suspend the issue of all mining licenses in the area until the State Forestry Institute officially defined the buffer zone of the Park (this process was finally completed in 2007).

The public meetings in November 2006 were the first public occasion at which CBA explained its plan. It was stated at the meeting by the State Licensing Authority that:

- (1) they had made a mistake in issuing the licenses without the approval of the State Forestry Institute;
- (2) the CBA will be required to seek that permission from the Forestry Institute before any other license will be given.

For its part, the Forestry Institute declared that it will not give that authorisation without the approval of the Park Advisory Council, on which representatives of the communities affected sit (including Iracambi).

In 2007, a sister organization, Amigos de Meio Ambiente, brought a court action requesting the suspension of all mining activities in the buffer zone of the Park until the proper authorization from the State Park authority, required by law, had been granted. This resulted in a court order banning all mining activities in the buffer zone until such time as the case has been heard.

What you can do to help:

Give us names of anyone who might be useful if it becomes necessary to appeal to the international community of People Concerned about the Atlantic Rainforest;

Give us your ideas as to what else we might do;

Watch this Space.