

Latin America/Chile**Supporting the struggle**

Many groups are providing support to the struggle being waged by the community of Mehuín in southern Chile

by Brian O' Riordan, of ICSF's Brussels office, based on information provided by ECOCEANOS, Chile

There is now a nationwide campaign to halt the latest move by CELCO (see story above). A group calling itself the "Communities in Conflict with Celco Nueva Aldea", which brings together producer organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations from the Itata Valley and the coastal fringe opposed to CELCO, have organized mass protests. They have accused the authorities, whom they consider to be the most "compliant and irresponsible that the region has known", of approving a project that will pollute the last remaining basin of clean waters in the Eighth Region, on which 45,000 people depend for drinking water and irrigation for fields and vineyards of international quality.

They are demanding that CELCO be ordered not to start discharging its liquid waste into the river Itata, and describe the environmental regulations applied to CELCO as being "irresponsible, polluting and not giving any guarantees to the communities, while violating their constitutional rights to live in an environment free from pollution".

At a meeting in the city of Temuco on 28 July, more than 100 representatives of civil society organizations associated with human rights, environmental issues, social movements and NGOs gave their total support to the community of Mehuín. They issued the following statement:

1. We demonstrate our solidarity with the community of Mehuín and its organizations who have decided once more to reject the intervention of the CELCO-ARAUCO company in its territory.
2. We reject the position of the government in providing support to CELCO-ARAUCO

through ordering the intervention of police and navy personnel in this area so as to assist the work of this company. Through this action, which took place last Tuesday (25 July), the government showed its total lack of interest in the views of its people, and endorsed the activities of a company whose irresponsible social and environmental behaviour has been brought into question.

3. We demand that the government finish all collaboration with CELCO-ARAUCO, which is accused in this province of destroying a nature reserve and polluting the rivers of Valdivia, causing serious damage to many agricultural and indigenous communities and local economic activities, and also putting the health of the people at risk. We also demand that the surveillance of the community representatives be stopped, and that the alleged agreements between CELCO and the Chilean Navy for operations at sea be clarified.

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