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## **Perú: Critical comments regarding the establishment of the Sierra del Divisor nature reserve, by Beatriz Huertas**

April 18th 2006.- The recently established Sierra del Divisor nature reserve is superimposed on territory inhabited by the indigenous Pano-speaking peoples in isolation, who refuse the establishment of contact with agents who are foreign to their environment. Furthermore, they are highly vulnerable to diseases from outside, particularly infectious diseases.

In general terms, the fact that indigenous peoples in isolation live in Amazonian forests characterized by a rich biodiversity is not mere coincidence, but reflects the relationship these peoples have developed and still maintain with their natural environment. Nevertheless, these characteristics have also led the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA), as well as national and international environmental NGOs to identify these same areas as top priority preservation zones which are then mainly turned into national parks.

The establishment of these national parks is being carried out through processes that are remarkable because of their speed and the economic resources available; but above all, because they usually involve the final rejection of applications for the establishment of territorial reserves for indigenous peoples in isolation who live there, and which were presented by indigenous organizations and are protected by national and international legislation.

The creation of protected nature reserves in these areas implies their categorization, zoning, management and administration according to mainly ecological, scientific and tourism criteria that, as may in fact be demonstrated, are affecting the well-being and fundamental rights of the inhabitants.

There are reports and in-depth studies that relate the high incidence of epidemics that affect the Matsigenka population in isolation and initial contact in the Manu National Park to the presence of scientists, tourists and adventurers who enter the protected nature reserve with INRENAs authorization. Apparently, the frequency of these epidemics, which has resulted in numerous deaths among the Matsigenka, has not been enough for INRENA to adopt measures to protect the most important population that has lived within this rich bastion of national biodiversity for centuries: its human population.

Another highly risky case for indigenous peoples in isolation is the nomination of the Alto Purús National Park, which is also an indigenous territory, for the creation of an ecological reserve that would allow the presence of strangers in exactly the same place where in the last couple of years there have been violent clashes between illegal lumbermen, land invaders, and isolated indigenous peoples who are defending their lives and living space. Is it INRENAs aim that scientists should now become party to these clashes, like the lumbermen?

A bit further north, also in the Purús National Park, Brazilian officials have reported the presence of illegal lumbermen, the imminent danger of assaults against the indigenous peoples in isolation in the area, and the possibility of territorial disintegration or changes that in the end will affect a large number of populations in the border zone. All this occurs in a protected nature reserve.

There is a long list of situations that evidence the vulnerability of indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact, whose territories are being treated as protected nature reserves. For the time being, I would like to enumerate a few questions:



1. With what purpose and criteria are the protected nature reserves (really) being established?
2. Can it be confirmed, as INRENA officials and conservationists insist, that the establishment of protected nature reserves is the most appropriate form of truly, and legally, guaranteeing the recognition of the territory and fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact living in those same areas?
3. Why are there so many epidemics and numerous deaths among the indigenous Matsigenka in isolation and initial contact in the Manu National Park?
4. Why are there constant confrontations, with subsequent deaths, between lumbermen and indigenous peoples in isolation in the Alto Purú National Park?
5. Why are there free access areas in the main plan of the Purús National Park, in exactly the same areas inhabited by indigenous peoples in isolation, therefore contributing to the likeliness of confrontations and epidemics?
6. If national legislation contemplates the establishment of territorial reserves in favor of indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact, why are protected nature reserves established on top of these territories?
7. Why is the figure of territorial reserves not truly and legally strengthened through the adoption of effective mechanisms for the surveillance, control and protection of the areas and, consequently, of the population?
8. During the process for the establishment of the Sierra del Divisor nature reserve, were the rights of the indigenous organizations that represent the affected peoples, and their prior consent, respected in an informed, appropriate and transparent way, as Convention 169 provides?

The need to ensure and encourage that ecosystems and biodiversity are looked after and managed in a responsible way is undeniable; I do not think anybody rejects this principle. However, placing conservation interests above rights as essential as the lives and territory of indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact, who are affected by the establishment of protected nature reserves; conservationists lack of understanding of the importance and relationship of interdependence that exists between indigenous people and their natural environment; and the Governments verified open support for conservationists inattention and arbitrariness regarding the rights and well-being of the affected indigenous peoples, only reflects the serious fundamental problems that exist in relation to the treatment of this issue.

In general terms, the situation suffered by indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact in relation to conservationist policies has spread to the majority of indigenous peoples organized in native communities. But while the former are mainly affected in terms of the violation of their rights to life, health and territory, the second group is regaining recognition of its leading role in the administration of protected nature reserves.

**Valoración: 0**



Sin votos (todavía)

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