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Gas Firm 'Assumes' It Will Bring 'Fear' to the Peruvian Amazon

By David Hill*

January 22, 2014.- Gas company Pluspetrol admits it will cause 'fear' and possibly 'stress' and a 'sensation of invasion' among indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon who have little or no contact with outsiders.

Pluspetrol makes these admissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of its plans to expand the Camisea gas project, which are currently pending approval by Peru's Culture and Energy Ministries.

The expansion would include drilling 18 wells and conducting seismic tests deeper into a reserve for indigenous peoples in 'voluntary isolation' and 'initial contact' (IPVIIC), as Peruvian law calls them. According to the EIA's chapter 5:

'Given the impossibility of establishing direct contact with the populations in isolation in the Kugapakori-Nahua-Nanti Reserve it is difficult to understand the magnitude of the effects that the project could have on them. In terms of evaluating the impacts [of the project], it is assumed that any activity different to that in their daily lives will generate fear, concern and changes in the ways they see and conceive of the world.'

The EIA states on at least 16 occasions that the planned operations will or could cause 'fear' - 'temor' or 'temores' in Spanish - among the reserve's inhabitants. The reasons given include: the presence and permanent movement of gas project workers and the possibility of contact with them; the use of helicopters; the arrival of 'unknown machinery'; the transport of materials and equipment; the clearing and cutting down of the forest; the movement and leveling of soils; the building of camps, well platforms and a flow-line; and the noise generated by drilling.

The EIA also states on at least seven occasions that the planned operations could cause 'stress' among the reserve's inhabitants, and on at least one occasion states that they 'could generate mistrust, apprehension and a sensation of invasion among the families in isolation.'

The reserve was established in 1990 and given greater legal protection in 2003 by a law stating that, among other things, 'existing rights to exploit natural resources [in the reserve, which was superimposed by Pluspetrol's concession in 2000] must be exercised with the maximum considerations in order to guarantee that the rights of the indigenous populations in the reserve are not affected.'

Despite this, Pluspetrol is pushing ahead with its plans to expand its operations and admits numerous times in its EIA how the reserve's inhabitants will or may be impacted. In addition to feeling scared, stressed, apprehensive or that they are being invaded, these impacts include: frightening away game and forcing the IPVIIC to spend longer hunting or having less to eat, limiting their use of paths and tracks, and having serious negative impacts on their health.

In July last year Peru's Vice-Ministry of Inter-Culturality (VMI), the state institution responsible for indigenous peoples, issued a report stating that Pluspetrol's planned expansion could 'devastate' the Nahua living in the reserve and make the Kirineri and Nanti 'extinct.' However, this report was quickly rescinded and another, much less critical report was written by a special team contracted from outside the ministry and made public last November.

The November report highlighted the fact that Pluspetrol states its operations will generate, among



other things, 'fear, concern and different levels of stress' and requested that the company explain how it would avoid such impacts. Pluspetrol responded by stating it would do a number of things including vaccinating its workers and capacitating them in its Code of Conduct, supporting the Health Ministry, promising that its helicopters would keep to their planned flight paths, and 'distributing a timetable especially designed for the population in isolation and/or initial contact' - measures considered satisfactory by the VMI.

The seismic tests will involve detonating 1000s of explosives approximately 15 metres underground. Pluspetrol has agreed to exclude 8,198 hectares from the tests after the VMI raised concerns about the 'possible presence of people in isolation' in one specific area, but this is comparatively small and the company continues to plan to conduct tests - as well as drill wells and build a 10.5 km pipeline extension - in other regions used by IPVIIC.

Almost three-quarters of Pluspetrol's concession, called Lot 88, overlaps the Kugapakori-Nahua-Nanti Reserve, but all 18 of the new wells would be in the reserve and most of the seismic tests too.

Pluspetrol is the leader of a consortium that includes Hunt Oil, Repsol and SK Corporation. Neither Pluspetrol nor Peru's Vice-Minister for Inter-Culturality, Patricia Balbuena Palacios, could be reached for comment.

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