
Paraguay: Action to protect Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation cannot be delayed

The Ayoreo Indigenous People are one of an estimated 100 uncontacted tribes around the world and the only uncontacted people in South America outside the Amazon basin. The Totobiegosode ('people from the place of the wild pigs') are the most isolated sub-group of the Ayoreo and live in the Chaco, a vast expanse of dense, scrubby forest stretching from Paraguay to Bolivia and Argentina. They are extremely vulnerable to any form of contact with outsiders because of their lack of immunity to diseases, warns an emergency submission sent in November 2008 by Survival International to the United Nations. (1)

Though some have still managed to avoid all contact with outsiders, since 1969 many of them have been forced out of the forest harassed by deforestation carried out by land speculators and ranchers. Two Brazilian companies -Yaguarete Pora SA and River Plate SA- are currently devastating the Totobiegosode's ancestral territory and livelihood to make way mainly for grazing cattle for beef.

Widespread condemnation and pressure from the public in Paraguay has come as a result of satellite photos that revealed the destruction of the Indigenous Peoples' land, as well as increasing media coverage of the issue around the world and a letter campaign from Survival International. (2) Paraguay's National Environment Council (CONAM) announced the decision to withdraw Yaguarete's licence to work in the area. Still, when a government team went to investigate the activities of the Brazilian Yaguarete Pora SA in the area, it was barred from doing so by the company's employees.

The Global Forest Coalition (3) reports that "This tragedy is occurring in Paraguay's largest reservoir of carbon and is happening in a department where deforestation is banned by the Department's Law."

The amount of Totobiegosode's land bulldozed in the northern Chaco has almost tripled since May last year. The push for agrofuels has added to the traditional land grab to graze cattle for beef. The Minister of Agriculture of Paraguay was in the Chaco Region promoting crops for agrofuels as a profitable scheme. The Argentinean firms **Carlos Casado and Patagonia Bioenergía joined to create a company to produce in Paraguay Jatropha curcas for agrofuel.** (<http://www.biodiesel.com.ar/?p=1001#more-1001>).

According to GFC, "The Ayoreo's land is being deforested at a tremendous rate. More than 200 hectares have been clear-cut and another 1,000 hectares are slated to be cut by the end of the year. The deforesters vow that they will meet this deadline 'come what may.' The lands will be designated for growing 5 species of oleaginous plants for 'bio-diesel' production including Jatropha curcas." The GFC informs that "The company Carlos Casado already has a 'field trial' of 15,000 hectares in the western part of the Chaco".

Projects and policies that devastate the cultural diversity of the society, the environment and the

climate run counter to the discourse of President Fernando Lugo, who has promised to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights and the environment. As Survival International warns: "Lugo must take action to protect the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode now. Wait any longer and it may be too late."

(1) "Emergency report to UN about uncontacted tribe",
Survival International, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3938>

(2) "Glimmer of hope for uncontacted tribe", Survival
International, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3929>

(3) "Agrofuel Production Threatens the Life of last remaining Indigenous Peoples Living in Voluntary Isolation South from the Amazonian Basin," 11 December 2008, Global Forest Coalition, sent by Rachel Smolker, Global Justice Ecology Project/Global Forest Coalition,
e-mail: rsmolker@globaljusticeecology.org