
Ecuador: The Huaorani people of Yasuni Park are attacked by timber and oil groups

To the south of the Yasuni National Park (see WRM Bulletin No. 96), an unequal battle is being fought. Spears against shotguns.

The Yasuni National Park covers an area of 982,000 hectares. It is located in Huaorani territory and is part of the Intangible Zone where peoples of the Tagaeri and Taromenane ethnic groups live in voluntary isolation.

Although extractive activities such as oil exploitation and logging are prohibited in the Intangible Zone, in fact an intensive and violent forestry exploitation has been taking place in full view and with the complicity of the police, environmental officers and the military. Trucks loaded with timber travel across river-ways and overland with impunity and even cross the military camp.

Five oil blocks have been imposed on Huaorani territory and the Petrobras Company has received a license for forestry exploitation. Oil activities require routes of access whereby logging companies enter the territories of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation. The prolonged pressure they are undergoing as a result of logging, oil and tourism, have caused genocide and the disappearance of several of these groups in repeatedly violent episodes such as the murder in May 2003 of some 20 women and children of the Tagaeri people in Tigüino. Those responsible for these murders were never identified.

The logging companies organized in the Association of Timber Industrialists (Asociación de Industriales de la Madera - AIMA), Corporation of Sustainable Forestry Management (Corporación de Manejo Forestal Sustentable - COMAFORS) and the Corporation of Forestry and Logging Development (Corporación de Desarrollo Forestal y Maderero - CORMADERA) gave out a public communiqué at the beginning of this month whereby they attempted to delimit the connection between logging exploitation and violation of the human rights of the Tagaeri and Taromenane groups. At the same time they demand greater sinecures for their activities from the State, such as two million hectares for plantations, economic resources and foreign debt swapping for their forestry exploitation activities and monoculture tree plantations, deregulation of their activities and unlinking from the Ministry of the Environment control, the handing over of forestry monitoring to private bodies related with their interests and the promotion of systems of anticipated sale of timber – all this supposedly related with “sustainable forest development.”

For their part, the Huaorani have decided to take over control of their ancestral territory. In an assembly held in the Nemopari community at the end of last year, they resolved to prevent exploitation of natural resources. The Huaorani conclave was held in the presence of 60 wise elders. According to Vicente Enomenga, president of the Huaorani organization, they recommended to the Government Council, the Organization of Huaorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Onhae), that it should take care of their environment and their life.

The Huaorani defined that entry of foreigners to their territory is forbidden, including loggers from

Ecuador and Colombia. The Vice-President of the Government Council warned that the indigenous inhabitants were not responsible for foreigners' security.

It is in this context that on 12 April, two loggers from the Cononaco sector in the Province of Orellana were speared and on 27 April, to the south of this Province, on the border with Pastaza, sources of the Vicariate of Orellana and a Huaorani leader reported the murder of various members of the Taromenane community – denouncing a figure of 30 victims.

However now, according to complaints by the Ecuadorian organization Acción Ecológica, a complicit silence has taken over the intangible zone. The spears that were found reveal that something very serious happened although an attempt is being made to ignore the presence of armed people in the area. Those who sounded the alarm and those who have information are gagged by fear. No one dares to speak against the logging companies: their violence and the economic power they wield seem stronger than justice and rights.

Acción Ecológica is demanding that a serious and impartial investigation be made of the facts and that protective measures are taken. Such measures must start by establishing a clear policy of respect for protected areas and the indigenous peoples that inhabit them and the halting of any type of large scale extractive activities in these locations.

The indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in the Amazon basin represent true cultural treasures, showing their will to maintain their ethnic identity and protecting –through their culture– wide regions of tropical rainforest. To respect them also implies the protection of forests.

Article based on information from: “ Ecuador: Denuncian genocidio de indígenas Taromenane, en aislamiento, por madereros ”, 12 May 2006, Ivonne Ramos, Acción Ecológica , cbosques@accionecologica.org, foresta@accionecologica.org ; “Conflicto en selva deja dos muertos de los Taromenane”, El Universo, and “ La violencia crece en el Yasuní” El Comercio , both news articles dated 29 April 2006, at <http://www.llaacta.org/notic/2006/not0429a.htm> ; “ Los sabios huao, a favor de la selva”, El Comercio, 1/11/2006, <http://www.saveamericasforests.org/Yasuni/News/Articles/2006/1-11-06%20El%20Comercio%20The%20Wise%20Huaorani,%20In%20Favor%20Of%20The%20Forest.htm>