
[Peru and Ecuador: The last Free Peoples besieged by oil and logging companies](#)

At the end of 2007, the Peruvian government opened the way to the exploitation of new oil plots in the Province of Loreto, on the frontier with Ecuador: plots 67 and 121 to the US Barrett Resources Corporation and plot 39 to the Spanish company Repsol YPF.

These plots, according to evidence submitted by the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Forest (AIDSEF) in 2003 and 2005, are the territory of the Tagaeri and Taromenane "Free People [\[1\]](#)" who live in voluntary isolation. The evidence gathered includes information on various ocular encounters by soldiers and inhabitants of the region, as well as trails, sounds and physical evidence including crossed lances and ceramics.

The Barrett oil company plans to open up 8,000 Km. of seismic lines over a relatively small space, which implies an incredibly intense level, so far unprecedented in the whole Peruvian Amazon. It also plans to establish 5 logistic bases, 61 encampments, 61 heliports and to bring in over 1,000 workers, all this in the heart of the proposed Napo Tigre Territorial Reserve. All this movement, noise, deforestation and destruction will doubtlessly threaten the existence of the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, as it implies the possibility of the indigenous people being frightened off by the oil workers from their traditional hunting areas. This forced displacement of the indigenous people in isolation would constitute a violation of their territorial rights, according to articles 16 and 18 of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization.

It is very obvious that the seismic programme was not designed to take these people into account. The oil exploration phase implies covering the forest with paths to detonate seismic charges over small stretches. "These explorations convert the forest into squared paper, at each of the vertexes they bore a hole and fill it with dynamite. The explosion serves to draw a sort of subsurface scan"... "for the inhabitants of the forest this becomes a sort of cobweb, impossible to avoid." [\[2\]](#)

Furthermore, Barrett plans to hire interpreters to communicate with the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and for this purpose intends "using" members of the Ecuadorian Waorani people in this plan as interpreters. The proposal is to take them to Peru, "train" them and through them, establish contact with the Taromenane. This action would evidently violate article 3 of ILO Convention 169.

The Environmental Impact Assessment shows that no precautions have been taken to avoid encounters with the indigenous people. On the contrary, there is only a plan of action following a "non-forced" encounter. These encounters expose these peoples to a very serious situation due to their extreme vulnerability, as they lack any biological defence against common diseases that could be introduced by the oil workers, such as measles or flue. Epidemics of such diseases could quickly decimate entire populations, as has happened on previous occasions.

The 1955 story in Ecuador is being repeated, when a group of US evangelists from the Summer Linguistic Centre sent presents from a basket suspended from an aeroplane in flight to the Waorani

indigenous groups. With this method they made friends with them and finally relegated them to a space of approximately 10 percent of their original territory, so that Texaco could come in and exploit their land with impunity, while the population was decimated by the diseases that had been introduced. Now Barrett's plan is to make presents of necklaces, blankets, matches, combs, etc., while Repsol plans communication using megaphones, in the event of attacks, using sentences such as "Is something bothering you?", "We have not come for your women, we have our own women in our own villages."

The Spanish oil company has a dire track record in Peru: violation of worker's rights and mass dismissals, contamination at the La Pampila refinery. Under the name of Pluspetrol, it spilt 5,500 barrels of oil from a launch into the River Marañón, in the North Peruvian forest, affecting the Pacaya Samiria Reserve and the Cocamas-Cocamillas people. During the development of the Camisea project complaints were made about aggression towards the Machiguenga community, also affecting indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, in addition to the Nahua and Kugapakori Reserve, sacred sites such as the Pongo de Mainique canyon and the Community reserve "Pavilk Nikitine" in Vilcabamba (Oilwatch 2002).

Furthermore, there are considerable numbers of Tagaeri and Taromenane people in voluntary isolation on the other side of the frontier. The Ecuadorian State has established an intangible zone covering 650,000 hectares between the rivers Curaray and Nashiño for their survival. Despite the creation of this area, where any type of activity is banned, the members of this clan continue to suffer from pressure generated by the extraction of natural resources from within their territories. The reports of sightings, tracks and utensils and other objects of anthropological value along the length of the Nashiño River and the middle and upper Curaray (on the Peruvian side, lead us to suppose that members of this group are fleeing from the harassment they are suffering due to hunting and illegal logging within their territory on the Ecuadorian side.

The Inter-American Human Rights Commission has ordered preventive measures that Ecuador must implement for the protection of the *Free Peoples*. So far these have resulted in action plans that are still on paper, while the threats are very real in the forest. However this scenario has been further complicated by the presence of these two oil companies at the frontier and more so with the declarations of the Peruvian government stating that there is no reliable proof of the presence of isolated peoples in this region of the country. Allowing the granting of plots 67 and 121 to the Barrett Company and plot 39 to Repsol is placing at risk the already fragile Intangible Zone established in Ecuador to protect the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples.

Finally it should be noted that no mechanism has managed to avoid outsiders from contacting peoples such as these and leading to their extinction because of the propagation of diseases or violent contacts that have been well-documented. Therefore the only efficient measure to ensure the survival of these cultures is to avoid contact, to respect their territory and the use these peoples make of their resources and their right to their self-determination to remain in voluntary isolation.

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[1] Name whereby the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador recognize their brethren.

[2] Cabo de Villa Miguel Ángel 1997 LA SELVA DE LOS FANTASMAS ERRANTES. Cicame, Pompeya, Ecuador (pages 33-34)

