
Bolivia: Shell and Enron Gas pipeline in the Chiquitano Forest

The construction of the gas pipeline between Bolivia and Brazil by the Shell and Enron petroleum companies has affected an area of 6 million hectares of Chiquitano Forest, inhabited by 178 indigenous and peasant communities. This forest has been in the hands of Chiquitano and Ayoreo indigenous peoples for hundreds of years.

In order to grant the loan of 200 million dollars for the construction of the gas pipeline, the US export credit agency OPIC (Overseas Private Investment Corporation) demanded that Enron implement a plan for the conservation of the Chiquitano dry forest.

To fulfil this requisite, Enron, Shell and its subsidiary in Bolivia, TRANSREDES set up the "Programme for the Conservation of the Chiquitano Forest," later to become "Foundation for the Conservation of the Chiquitano Forest" (FCBC) in association with 4 NGOs. By mid-1999, one of the organizations, originally part of the Programme, resigned alleging that there was "lack of transparency, conflicts of interests among the executing bodies and lack of representation and participation of the sectors affected by decision-making."

The agreement signed between the petroleum companies Enron and Shell and the conservationist NGOs, establishes funding for an amount of 30 million dollars over 15 years (from voluntary contributions made by said companies), to be used for conservation activities set out in a previously established plan prepared by the Foundation (FCBC).

But as was to be expected with Shell and Enron in the background, things were not progressing well. Mid-1999, the CPESC (Coordination for the Ethnic Peoples of Santa Cruz), lodged the first complaint against the Foundation for violation of the laws and rights of the indigenous peoples. From then on, a chain of legal actions has taken place. The complaints of irregularities and anomalies on the part of the FCBC are many. They refer to the fact that FCBC is creating a division among the organizations working in the zone, overrunning indigenous and peasant territories and communities without their agreement or consensus, establishing illegitimate agreements that do not consider the opinions of local communities, carrying out scientific research going against the communities' intellectual rights, negotiating with natural resources that do not belong to them, among others.

The Chiquitano, Guarayo, Ayoreo and Guarani peoples who are affected by these actions, demand:

That on-going constitutional and administrative guarantees be enforced to prevent the operation of FCBC in the Chiquitano dry forest until there is a consensus by the affected organizations and communities; that the national Government applies the law guaranteeing respect for peasant and indigenous rights and demands that Enron and Shell fulfil the resolutions taken by the competent authorities; that the relevant governmental bodies do not approve the request for legal capacity requested by the FCBC; that direct participation be given to the peasant and indigenous associations in decision-making and administration for the conservation of the Chiquitano forest; to reorient mechanisms for the conservation of the Chiquitano forest in the framework of laws presently in force, and in particular restoring and guaranteeing the rights set out in ILO Convention 169 and ratified by

the 1991 Law 1257.

Once more, it is the indigenous peoples that are endeavouring to protect the forest they have managed sustainably for years from destruction caused by “development” and concealed by so-called conservation projects

that are just another attack against their rights.