
Indigenous communities against logging company in Bolivia

Bolivian forests are among the richest in the world in terms of biodiversity, with more than 2500 species of trees. Protected areas include some 9,5 million hectares and Indigenous areas about 1 million hectares, while more than 21 million hectares have been granted in forestry concessions, in line with the Bolivian forestry law passed in 1996.

The Chimane, Mosekene and Tacana indigenous communities of Pilon Lajas Indigenous Territories and Biosphere Reserve in northern Bolivia have joined forces with the Rurrenabake municipal government and the French NGO Veterinarians Without Borders (Veterinaires Sans Frontieres - VSF), to ban the Berna logging company from the reserve. The company has a logging contract that enables it to remain in the area until the year 2011.

Berna, together with independent loggers, is deforesting the area at a high rate, even if it is supposed to be a protected one. "For every mahogany trunk they take out, they cut down seventy more trees getting to it" states Mosekene representative Macario Canare. Hunting grounds on which indigenous peoples depend are also under threat.

Previous action of indigenous peoples and environmentalists in the region proved successful. In 1996, VSF sued the Bella Vista and El Pino logging companies for working without contracts and forced them to suspend operations. A third one, Selva Negra Co., left the region voluntarily.

Even though they recognize that the struggle will be difficult, since Berna is a powerful company and that the logging industry is important to the local economy, the indigenous communities of Pilon Laja are determined to protect their livelihood and environment.

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