
Venezuela: Alert on Imataca Reserve

The controversy over Presidential Decree Nr. 1850 that opened Imataca Reserve to mining and logging companies continues. As informed in the second issue of our Bulletin (10.01.97), the Venezuelan Government approved in record time a management plan for Imataca, beneficial to the powerful international mining and logging lobby. Since then, signs of disagreement have increased all over the country at the academic, political and social levels. Prof. Centeno -from the Universidad de los Andes, Merida- has stated that such decree not only violates several previous norms at the national level -e.g. the organic law on Territorial Ordinance, the organic law on the Environment, the Forestry Law and presidential Decree Nr 2214- but also several international commitments as the Washington Convention of 1941 on the protection of flora, fauna and scenic beauties and the Convention on Biological Diversity subscribed in 1992. On June 14th, the Faculty of Forestry and Environmental Sciences of the Universidad de los Andes requested the President to revoke the Decree. Two days before, a Congressional Commission on the Environment severely questioned the Decree and warned that the case could be brought to the Supreme Court. Chiefs and delegates from several indigenous communities of Bolivar State presented on July 1st a document to Congress rejecting the President's decision. Other social organizations expressed their aim to take legal procedures against the Decree and finally on August 2nd the Supreme Court admitted a request for annulment of the Decree presented by FORJA (Federation of Environmental Organizations) and the College of Sociologists and Anthropologists of Venezuela. A second recourse with the same objective, presented by the Commission on the Environment of the Chamber of Deputies was accepted some days later. AMIGRANSA -a member of FORJA and WRM affiliate- warns about the danger that the opening of Imataca to private interests could be followed by similar measures applied to other areas of the rich tropical Venezuelan ecosystems.

Sources: Julio Cesar Centeno (10.08.97) and AMIGRANSA (21.08.97)