

September 21, 2011

**Dear President Evo Morales,
Plurinational State of Bolivia**

We, the undersigned members of social movements and international civil society, are writing to express our support for the right of indigenous people to freely decide on development projects within their territories and our deep concerns about the consequences of the proposed highway through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory. We also write to **express our solidarity with the Eighth Grand March of the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia**, currently taking place in defense of Isiboro Sécure and for the respect of indigenous peoples' rights to autonomy, territory, and free choice over their own destiny.

As supporters of justice, indigenous rights, and environmental sustainability on a global scale, we have closely watched events in Bolivia since the turn of the century. We have observed and supported Bolivian social movements' challenges to neoliberal economic policies and to the privatization of water and other natural resources. We value the proactive diplomacy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in supporting the rights of indigenous peoples, meaningful and effective responses to climate change, recognition of the right to water and sanitation, and formal acknowledgement by the State of the rights of ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole.

We have also watched with great interest and respect as Bolivians sought to incorporate these principles into their Constitution of 2009 and their national laws, including the Law on the Rights of Mother Earth. We are pleased that Bolivia has proactively asserted the place of international civil society in the global debate on climate change, particularly in Copenhagen and by hosting the World Peoples' Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba in April 2010 and we look forward to participating in the 2nd Summit next spring. However, the country's pioneering work on all these issues also comes with a great responsibility. Bolivia's continued ability to press forward this vital agenda will be affected by its consistency and moral credibility on matters of human rights and environmental protection.

The Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) stands as an expression of respect for the environment and indigenous peoples. As a protected area, it embodies a perpetual commitment to safeguard ecosystems of the Amazon forest, Yungas, and savannas, and the diverse flora and fauna that make up these natural communities. As an indigenous territory, it is the home of communities of the Yuracaré, Chimane, and Mojeño-Trinitario peoples, who continue their millennial culture within it and exercise the right to self-governance within the territory. Your government's protection of the national park, and titling and recognition of the indigenous territory represent a commitment to these ecosystems and communities.

Unfortunately, this commitment has been called into question by the prospect of a new highway—the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos road—that would divide the territory in two and accelerate already worrying trends of deforestation, uncontrolled agricultural colonization, and displacement of pre-existing indigenous communities. Statements and actions by you and your administration are also worrying signs of a failure to respect these commitments.

The highway will make Isiboro Sécure's deforestation problem worse. Despite its status as a protected area, Isiboro Sécure has seen a steady process of deforestation, affecting tens of thousands of

hectares already. The Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos highway would accelerate deforestation by increasing access to the territory for illegal loggers as well as agricultural colonizers. The proposed highway was recently projected to result in the deforestation of 64% of the park by 2030, a major increase from the already worrisome projection of 43% loss without the road. The survival of the diverse flora and fauna of the region, included endangered fresh-water dolphins and blue macaws, depends on policies that prevent rather than accelerate deforestation.

The highway is being built in violation of TIPNIS indigenous communities' rights. In 2009, the Bolivian government handed over final title for the Isiboro Sécure Native Community Land (Tierra Comunitaria de Origen, TCO) to the Sub-central TIPNIS, recognizing its legitimacy. Despite the absence of direct consultation by the government, a May 2010 meeting uniting community-level leaders from throughout the territory, as well as the various Sub-centrals and other organizations, issued a joint declaration stating, "*opening this highway would present a threat to our life as peoples who inhabit TIPNIS due to the loss of the natural resources and all the biodiversity upon the Moxeños, Yuracarés, and Chimanes sustain their culture and life: a life and culture we have lived in our territory since before the creation of the Bolivia and will continue to live in the future.*" Citing this and other reasons, the meeting voted to "*overwhelmingly and non-negotiably reject the construction of the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway and of any highway segment that would affect our territory.*" This position was recently reaffirmed by the Subcentral, and backed by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), who are joining in an ongoing cross-country march in defense of TIPNIS.

President Morales, we are saddened to hear you say "*Whether they want it or not, we are going to build this road,*" and "*We will consult, but they should know it will not be a binding consultation.*" Such statements are not consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), a global standard which the Plurinational State of Bolivia has supported. Article 32 of the Declaration states, "*States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.*"

We are also concerned to learn that, you and other Bolivian officials have attacked opponents of the highway as "enemies of integration [and] of the national economy," monitored their phone calls, and accused them of collaboration with "obscure interests," instead of engaging with them in good faith.] Further, indigenous communities in the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory I have declared that Segment 3 of the highway, which affects them, was approved without any process of consultation. The failure of Bolivia to respect the rights of indigenous peoples to "determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands," as stated in UNDRIP represents a major step backward for indigenous rights in Bolivia.

The current dispute threatens other indigenous territories. Other comments by your administration suggest that the current controversy is not an isolated incident, but a precedent that may be applied to other projects in national parks, indigenous territories, and other protected areas. For instance, you stated publicly on August 22 that two other highways (San Borja–Rurrenabaque and San Buenaventura—Ixiamas) and oil drilling in Aguaragüe National Park "will not be negotiated." Vice-Minister Félix Cárdenas indicated on August 4 that "this will not be the only road that will cross through protected areas, there will be many others besides." We are gravely concerned that the current conflict will set a precedent of disrespect of indigenous peoples' voices concerning the future of their own lands, enabling further environmentally destructive development projects. As Pilón Lajas community leader Mauricio Saravia explained, "This time it will be TIPNIS, the next could be Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve, and

other Native Community Lands could also be overrun by the government."

As participants in the struggle for justice for the planet and its people, we urge you and the Plurinational State of Bolivia [to peacefully resolve this urgent situation.] We support a free and binding consultation process for the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway and the right of the indigenous people of TIPNIS to say no to this development within the Territory and National Park. We urge you to put respect for the rights of Mother Earth and her constituent ecosystems into practice, preventing the deforestation of Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory. And, we urge the government to commit to open dialogue with the TIPNIS Sub-central and CIDOB who have been marching since August 15.

We commit ourselves to continue to monitor this issue and, equally, to support indigenous and environmental rights in our own countries. We do not propose adherence to respect for indigenous peoples and the environment as an additional burden on a few countries in the global South, but as a common worldwide vision, to be implemented in the context of achieving global justice.

In solidarity, and for the Earth and its peoples,

The undersigned:

Latin America

1. 350.org para América Latina

Asia

2. Focus on the Global South- India, Thailand and Philippines.

Australia

3. Rainforest Information Center

Austria

4. ECA Watch

Bolivia

5. Acción Internacional para la Salud - AIS

6. Centro Vicente Cañas

Canada

7. Council of Canadians

8. The Blue Planet Project

Chile

9. Fundación Chile Sustentable

Colombia

10. La Corporación La Ceiba

11. Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia

12. Red VIDA (Vigilancia Interamericana para la Defensa y Derecho al Agua)

13. Sindicato de Trabajadores de Acuavalle (SINTRACUAVALLE)

Spain

14. Ecologistas en Acción
15. La Plataforma “Por Otro 12 de Octubre”
16. l'Observatori del Deute en la Globalització (ODG)

United States

17. Accountability Counsel
18. Alliance for Democracy
19. Amazon Watch
20. Biofuelwatch
21. Cultural Survival
22. The Democracy Center
23. Global Greengrants Fund
24. Earth Rights International
25. Food and Water Watch
26. Government Accountability Project
27. Global Alliance for Immediate Alteration – GAIA
28. Global Exchange
29. Global Justice Ecology Project
30. International Accountability Project
31. International Forum on Globalization
32. International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP)
33. International Rivers
34. Land is Life
35. Massachusetts Global Action
36. North American Congress on Latin America
37. Rainforest Action Network
38. Rainforest Foundation US
39. The Oakland Institute
40. The Government Accountability Project
41. Village Earth

Europe

42. Food & Water Europe

Guatemala

43. Conferencia Nacional de Ministros de la Espiritualidad Maya

Indonesia

44. People's Coalition for the Right to Water - KRuHA

Mexico

45. Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua

Nepal

46. Himalayan and Peninsular Hydro-Ecological Network -HYPHEN
47. Water and Energy Users Federation-Nepal

Norway

48. Rainforest Foundation Norway

Netherlands

49. Both ENDS

Panama

50. Human Rights Everywhere (HREV)

United Kingdom

51. Biofuelwatch

52. FERN

53. Rainforest Foundation UK

54. Survival International

55. The Corner House

South Africa

56. Centre for Civil Society Climate Justice project, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban

Turkey

57. Birdlife Turkey

Uruguay

58. Comisión Multisectorial

59. Comisión Nacional de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida

60. Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado