

Hidrovia:**Declaration of the Río Paraguay**

The following declaration states the conclusions of participants in the Floating Seminar of the Paraguay River, organized by Sobrevivencia - Friends of the Earth Paraguay and the Coalition Rios Vivos Paraguay-Paraná-Plata, who in three boats descended the Paraguay River between 17-27 July, 1996 as part of a permanent dialogue with the populations of the La Plata Basin. Along the way, they travelled through sections of the river programmed for large-scale engineering works as part of the Paraguay-Paraná Hidrovia industrial waterway, currently being planned by the governments of the region. Participants included citizens of the countries of the La Plata Basin, North America, and Europe.

We, Indigenous peoples of the Paraguay basin, traditional communities, scientists, environmental experts, and ecologists from various countries, concerned with the future of our rivers, have taken part in the Floating Seminar on the Paraguay River, and united in our message, propose strategies for the construction of sustainable societies in the region.

We are the Earth, the peoples, the plants, the animals, the waters, the sun's rays, the breath of the winds. We want to honor the Earth as the place of all living beings.

We have come to testify to the depredation we have witnessed along our entire descent of the Paraguay River, from Corumbá to Asunción. The model of occupation established in our region bears no relation to the needs of the peoples who live along the river bank, nor with the potential of its ecosystems. Indigenous peoples have been expelled from their territories and deprived of their sustainable means of wisdom, of happiness, and of life. Huge barge convoys have replaced the ancestral means of transport and navigation adapted to the natural conditions of the river; mining and mineral loading docks contaminate their surroundings; logs pile up in the lumber mills which consume the final remains of the lush ancient forests; enormous columns of

smoke and ashes darken the sky in midday announcing the imminent end of prosperity on the earth and the eclipse of its original cultures. Signs of the inevitable collapse of this heart of America in whose rhythm pulses and breathes the security of life in the La Plata Basin.

Facing this situation, and because we still have time, we want to propose paths which serve to improve the condition of life in the basin: paths which do not destroy, but which restore the balance today threatened.

The salvation of the planet and its peoples, present and future, demands the creation of a new civilization based on an ethic which respects its limits, diversity, solidarity, equality, justice, and liberty.

We are all a unit in our diversity. We assume the shared responsibility to protect and to restore the Earth so that its natural resources may be used wisely, preserving ecological balance and the social, economic, and spiritual values which assure sustainability.

The existing patterns of consumption, of production and distribution of resources, currently oriented toward extraction, concentration, and expropriation, bring human societies and the ecosystems which sustain them to an inevitable disaster. All initiatives must therefore be urgently directed to meet the needs of local and traditional popu-

lations, especially Indigenous peoples, assuring the sustainability, the equality, and the respect for diversity in our societies.

Sustainable societies are based on the self-determination of local communities and original peoples in full exercise of their right to decide on the management and administration of the ecosystems which they are part of.

Administration of resources should be directed and controlled by local communities throughout the process, based upon criteria of sustainability, defined by studies which determine their carrying capacity, and the forms of processing and commercialization, having as their basis self-sufficiency and inter-dependence.

The diversity of habitats and cultures who live in them determine different uses which in turn make interchange possible, and establish factors of inter-dependence which must be respected and made compatible.

We consider that our region must be thought of as an integrated whole for the design of policies for management and territorial use.

The La Plata Basin in its entirety must be the unit for all plans, projects, or activities.

The restoration of ecosystems which have been damaged by the current predatory development, is a need which can not be delayed. The balance

and integrity of ecosystems must be recuperated, especially in degraded areas of critical importance for the structural restoration of hydrological systems. Proposed actions such as permanent dredging and the construction of dams for water regulation or for sediment retention do not constitute solutions, but rather threats. They do not look at the true causes of problems of sedimentation of river beds and deterioration of hydrological systems, but rather the maintenance of the predatory system which only seeks economic benefits for large corporations, while financial and environmental costs are paid by populations and by nature.

The infrastructure to be implanted in the region must be in function of the

needs of local populations and not external interests. Respecting this criteria, all initiative must have as its origin and finality the needs and interests of local communities. Even so, its implementation must adapt itself to natural conditions, avoiding negative social and environmental impacts. The governmental project for the Paraguay-Paraná industrial waterway does not respond to either of these criteria. This project, designed behind the back of populations of the region, will not bring any benefits nor solutions for the needs of the peoples of the Basin, but rather will increase even more their problems, generating greater impacts and increasing social and environmental costs, many of them irreversible.

The existing resources destined for mega-projects promoted by international financial institutions and entities of cooperation must be re-directed toward the true needs of local populations, moving away from their current orientation to promote unsustainable projects which only benefit those small groups in whose hands power and resources are concentrated.

From the curves of the Paraguay River, July 27, 1996

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land. In 1994, they made their first trip outside their land to speak at the United Nations about their plight. In continuation, we reproduce the latest attempt by the Wichí to secure their territory.

For the Titting of Our Land: Takeover of the International Bridge Over the Pilcomayo River (La Paz)

Many years have passed since we requested the government of Salta province, Argentina, to officially grant us title to the land that we have always inhabited. We have sent letters. Meetings take place, new laws and decrees are passed, and yet more topographic studies... We are now in the fourth administration. Yet they have not responded to our demands. Years pass and our lands become impoverished, because the people who have come from the outside to occupy them know not how to manage them. Years pass and we become poorer.

Even though we have official papers making

us Argentineans, they don't respect us. They don't recognize this land as ours. They play around, saying "Wait just a little bit more." But while we wait, they move ahead with their projects: They settle our land, lay down their roads, their barb-wire fences, and their towns. And now they are building a bridge in La Paz and they that we have to pack up and give them space.

We are not animals running loose. We are not dogs to be driven away at the whims of their owner. We are the flowers of the Earth, planted by God Himself to live and thrive in these lands.

We have asked the authorities to secure the titles to these lands before undertaking these large projects in the places where we live. These are fiscal lands and the laws therefore recognize our right of ownership. Amidst all this talk of Mercosur, we see a more secure future simply in the ownership of our land.

Faced with no response and the upcoming inauguration of the bridge, the 35 communities belonging to our association have decid-

ed to peacefully takeover the lands around the bridge on the 25 of August. We will occupy the land until the government of Salta gives a concrete response in regards to our requests. This is an act of hope.

We ask that you collaborate, by sending people who believe in our cause to accompany us and assure that there be no acts of violence against our families.

Even after the takeover, you can support our cause by sending letters to:

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de Salta, Dr. Juan Carlos Pomero, Casa de Gobierno, Gran urg 4400, Salta, Argentina

Sr. Presidente de la República Argentina, Dr. Carlos S. Menem, Casa Rosada, Capital Federal, Argentina; Fax: 54 1 343 2249 or 54 1331 7976

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