



## TAWAHKA BIOSPHERE RESERVE HONDURAN GROUP PROPOSES DECREE

A proposal has been drawn up to create the Tawahka Biosphere Reserve in La Mosquitia, Eastern Honduras, by Mosquitia Pawisa (MOPAWI), a Honduran group which advocates the demarcation of Indian territories. The proposal was made, recognizing that protecting forests and the Indigenous People who inhabit them is both important and a legal obligation of the Honduran government, and includes the following points:

The goals of creating the Tawahka Biosphere Reserve include guaranteeing the Tawahka people the space they need to live in their traditional manner; protecting biodiversity in the central Patuca River area; stopping encroaching deforestation; protecting natural resources to promote ecotourism, scientific research, and sustainable development; and completing a continuous ecological corridor that would also include the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve.

The Reserve will be for the collective use of the Tawahka community and the people who now live in the area, with the goal of maintaining the traditional economy and sustainable development. The Tawahka communities will promote, plan, and execute the

management of the reserve, through the Tawahka Indian Federation of Honduras (FITH), subject to supervision by the Executive Branch.

The Reserve will be divided into three areas — a central natural zone, a buffer zone, and a settled cultural zone — which will be determined by the Tawahka community. Land and natural resources in the region will be used as they have been traditionally, and in the manner indicated by the Regulations for Land Use approved by the Tawahka Congress. Current land ownership will be respected, and sales will be allowed, with the condition that the Tawahka community be given preference over other prospective buyers.

The following activities will not be permitted in the Reserve: industrial exploitation of the lumber, pasture-intensive cattle raising, illicit removal of fauna, and other activities that work against the biological conservation of the Reserve. The Tawahka community, with the support of various governmental entities, will be responsible for protecting the resources within the Reserve. If the Tawahka community so requests, the Honduran Armed Forces will take necessary measures to eject

colonists who settle in the areas after this decree takes effect.

The exploitation of subsoil resources by inhabitants of the Reserve will be subject to federal laws and must be authorized by the government and include benefits for the Tawahka community. If people must move in order for this exploitation to be carried out, they will be compensated.

Archaeological sites and objects, historical documents, and other testimonies of the past that are found in the Reserve will be placed in the custody of Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History, in accordance with current laws about the defense of cultural heritage. The Institute will work in coordination with the Tawahka community.

“All inhabitants of the Tawahka Biosphere Reserve will have the same rights and obligations as all other Hondurans.”

The government will try to gain admittance for the Tawahka Biosphere Reserve to the international network of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere program.