

## Amazon Forum II

The future of the Amazon depends on its Indigenous peoples and the state of their environment. The Coalition in Support of Amazonian Peoples and Their Environment held its second international forum in Washington, DC, at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History on May 10-12.

The meeting brought together North American non-governmental organizations with representatives from the Amazon Basin to coordinate long-term efforts on behalf of Indigenous and forest-dependent peoples. Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria, and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior, Ada Deer, gave keynote addresses at a reception welcoming participants on the evening of May 9th.

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## State Frontiers and Indian Nations

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bar (page 7) for extracts from the declaration) to guarantee the integrity and respect for Indigenous peoples.

With all of these declarations, Indigenous leaders reiterate the importance that Indigenous participation should have in peace talks. They rightly point out that a meaningful and lasting peace will not be reached as long as the Indigenous peoples who live in the disputed territories continue to be ignored. Still, the governments of Ecuador and Peru are not listening. The government of Peru, for example, has proposed a plan to strengthen

its borders by giving away Indigenous land to colonizers from different areas of the country.

But peace will not come through the further colonization of Indigenous people. On the contrary, peace will only be achieved when Indigenous land is rightly and justly protected, and the Indigenous way of life secured. A joint declaration from AIDSESEP and CONFENIAE states:

"Nowadays, it is in vogue to speak of integration. However, we have lived for thousands of years in peaceful communion with our Indigenous neighbors on both sides of the border. Furthermore, borders that the white people created have divided communities like the Shuar, Quichua and Cofán. But we continue to feel as though we were part of one Indian continental nation: the ancient Abya Yala." ☺

*Additional declarations and information from Indigenous organizations on this border conflict are in SAIIC's PeaceNet conference [saic.indio](http://saic.indio) as well as on the Internet at: [http://ukanaix.cc.ukans.edu/~marc/geography/latinam/ecuador/border\\_main.html](http://ukanaix.cc.ukans.edu/~marc/geography/latinam/ecuador/border_main.html).*

## Chile, Upper Biobío

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However, because of a lack of resources and interest, this law is not always enforced and large companies such as ENDESA can circumvent the law by, for example, buying land and building houses in other areas, trying to persuade native communities to "sell."

The purpose of the Environmental Bases Law (No. 19,300) is "to regulate all activities that in one way or another affect the environment." However, because the law still lacks specific and definitive legislative language, it is easy for large corporations to act in defiance of the spirit such laws.

As of now, it is apparent that the CNE will recommend the construction of the Ralco power plant without objectively re-evaluating its inevitable effects. In December 1994, the CNE recommended the construction of the plant's gas pipelines. Ralco already has utilization rights on the Biobío River's non-drinkable water, the provisional electrical concession, and engineering studies in their final stages of completion.

Even though the CNE did not include the Ralco power plant in its latest plan of works, the government is about to consent to its construction. If the government does give ENDESA the permission to build Ralco, it will close the possibility for a real environmental evaluation to be conducted. Ralco, like Pangué, will become an example of how the Chilean government allows big corporations to undertake socially and environmentally risky ventures despite the existence of laws that prohibit such projects. A similar multi-dam project during the 1970s, Antuco County on the Laja River, did not make good on its promise. Antuco is today one of poorest counties of Chile.

Public outcry has been massive. Different environmental organizations like GABB (Action Group in Defense of the Biobío), Indigenous rights groups, student activists and other outraged citizens have joined forces to stop the construction of Ralco. In a public declaration, GABB called for a complete halt to any other project along the Biobío River, the enforcement of the Environmental and Indigenous Laws, respect for the Pehuenche communities, their land and culture, and the creation of an effective energy policy that would prioritize the social and ecological sustainability of the country. ☺