



A VICTORY FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

(Peru) On September 19th, the Peruvian Minister of Energy and Mines publicly announced that Texas Crude had decided not to sign a contract to explore for oil in Lot 61, home to some 180 Amazonian indigenous and non-indigenous river communities for whom the park and its resources constitute their sole means of survival.

One year ago, newly-elected President Alberto Fujimori signed a landmark environmental code prohibiting the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources and banning oil drilling in the nation's parks and reserves. In April of 1991, under pressure from powerful economic interests, Fujimori reversed his position and granted the Houston-based Texas Crude Incorporated a vast tract of rainforest, known as Lot 61. Opposition to the Corporation's plans to begin oil exploration developed immediately as national environmental and indigenous groups discovered that over three-quarters of Lot 61 lay within the Pacaya Samiria reserve in Peru's northern Amazon jungle. It is the oldest and largest protected area in Peru's national park system.

The prospect that Pacaya Samiria - already contaminated by the activities of petroleum companies allowed to operate in the reserve prior to the passing of the environmental code - could be further jeopardized galvanized local, national and international opposition. In June, a local priest, along with AIDSESEP (Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Peruvian Amazon) organized a general strike in the jungle town of Iquitos, and succeeded in briefly paralyzing the community. Two months later, AIDSESEP issued a declaration denouncing the Peruvian government's manipulation of environmental codes and its willingness to grant transnational corporations a degree of security never

accorded to Peru's own citizens. A document prepared at AIDSESEP's 15th General Assembly stated that "neither the people nor the environment bear the responsibility for the extreme poverty our country faces. While this poverty may indeed require urgent remedies, actions which threaten to irreversibly destroy food and natural resources cannot be justified, particularly since the presumed wealth which will be generated will never be seen by the people." Internationally, San Francisco's Rainforest Action Network launched a joint campaign with Global Response to bombard Texas Crude headquarters with letters protesting the proposed project.

The President of Texas Crude cited numerous reasons for the corporation's decision, including: the threat of legal action by the Peruvian Environmental Law Society (SPDA); the "substantial number of letters endeavoring to discourage exploration for environmental reasons" (over 1000 letters were sent!); and the recent letter sent to President Fujimori by 54 Peruvian house representatives and senators showing their disapproval of the contract.

In early October the Peruvian Ministry of Energy and Mines began negotiations with the US-based Santa Fe Energy Resources Company for two other oil exploration lots, both outside of Pacaya Samiria. Although the contract has yet to be signed, and must be approved by the full Peruvian cabinet, it is considered likely that the project will be given the go-ahead given the extreme economic situation Peru is confronting. It is important to note, however, that Santa Fe Energy and Resources specifically opposed any contract involving areas within national reserves or parks, stating that the environmental concerns were too great.