



"It's Your Land, But..."

Ecuadorian Government Legalizes Huaorani Lands

Ayuma Tenko explaining the provisions of the land titles to the Huaorani community.

(Ecuador) For several years, the Huaorani people, aided by the Confederation of Indian Peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) have been working on delimiting and legalizing the lands which have historically belonged to them. On April 3, the President of Ecuador, Rodrigo Borja granted, in his words, "612,000 idle hectares" to the Huaorani. 18 Huaorani community leaders traveled to Quito to receive title to their lands in a ceremony held in the Presidential Palace. The ceremony was imbued with political propaganda: "Under my government, you are free men and no longer slaves of anybody or thing...including dogmas of agitators interested in using you as a political instrument..."

The small print on the land titles given by the Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization explains that the Huaorani "are not allowed to interfere with mineral and oil exploitation by the national government or authorized individuals." These conditions make it very clear that the Ecuadorian government intends to continue the exploitation of oil and other natural resources on Indian lands. This perpetrates the colonial

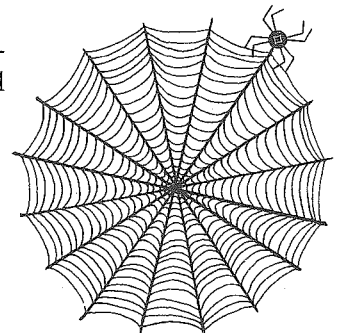
policies of disrespect for Indigenous peoples and their rights to decide their own destiny.

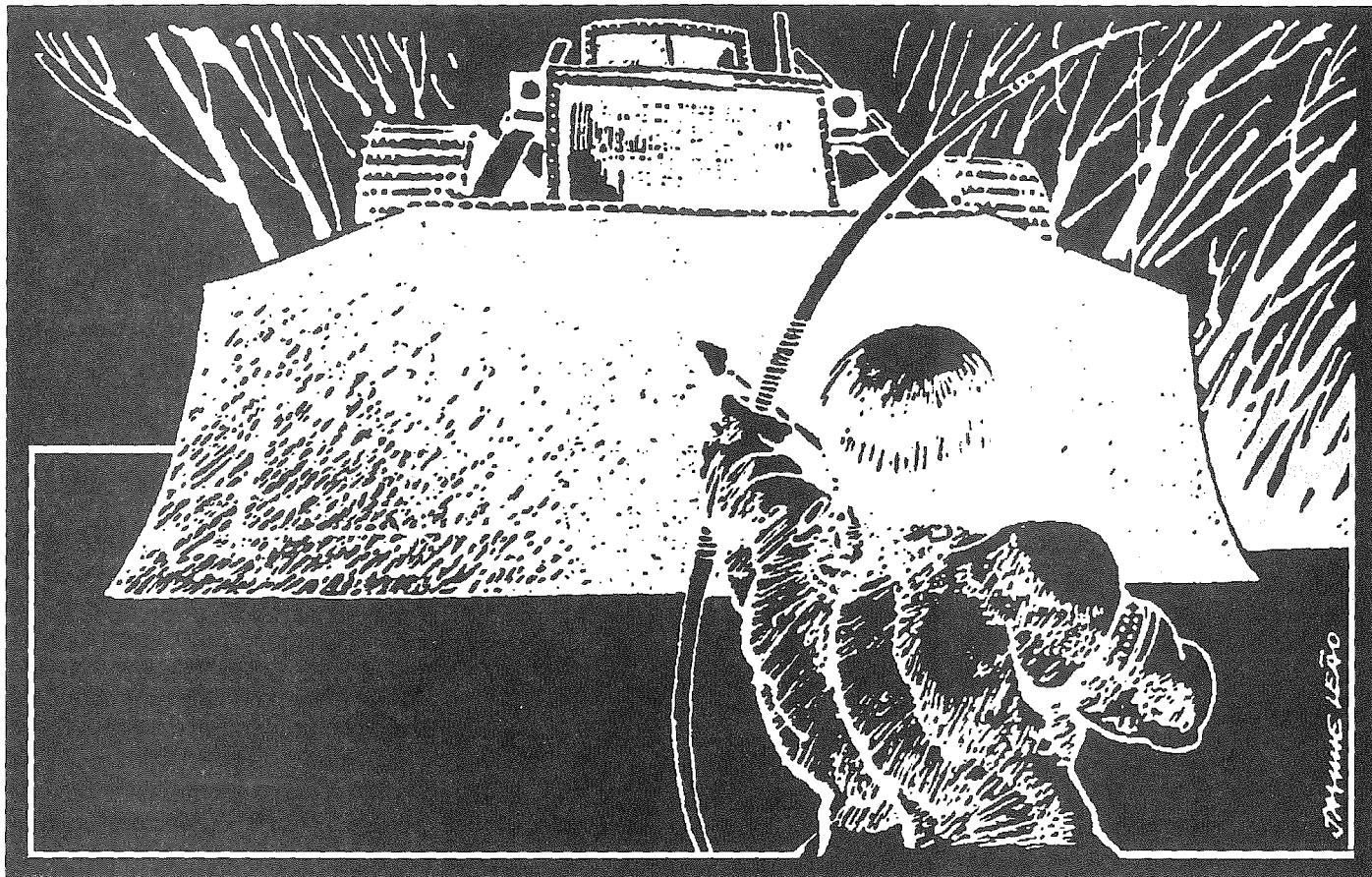
The grand political propaganda that accompanied the ratification of the land entitlement, shows how the government is trying to change its negative image in respect to the destruction of the natural environment and the negation of Indigenous rights. Neither CONAIE (*the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador*) nor CONFENIAE were invited to the ceremony. Ayuma Tenko, representative of the Huaorani people, upon receiving the ownership titles, commented: "This ratification of our territory is not completely your will. It is the product of years of struggle by our people, of national organizations and of national and international solidarity. Furthermore, Mr. President, we ask that you immediately stop the construction of roads in our territory, that you evict the colonizers that have invaded our lands and the oil companies that are destroying our forests. Someday we will have nothing. If you do not meet our demands, we will defend what belongs to us with our own spears."

Ecuadorian Government Being Sued by Indian - Environmental Alliance!!!

(Ecuador) On June 4th, 1990, the *Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon* (CONFENIAE) and lawyers of the *Sierra Club Legal Defence Fund* (SCLDF), together with the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, filed a petition in which they charge the Ecuadorian Government with "the endangerment of the lives and culture of Ecuador's Huaorani people through the encouragement of oil development on the Huaorani's traditional lands."

CONOCO Ecuador, Ltd, a "wholly owned subsidiary of Dupont, plans to build more than 100 miles of roads and pipelines, as well as dozens of oil rigs, pumping facilities and housing for several hundreds workers" with direct encroachment on Huaorani lands.





About 1,600 Huaorani people live by hunting and shifting cultivation, and are among the most isolated groups of the Amazon rainforest. CONFENIAE president, Luis Varga tragically sums up what the "developers" will bring to the Indian population:

Forced employment or unemployment, a loss of the natural resources which guarantee Indian subsistence, as well as general contamination of their environment, the introduction of prostitution, alcoholism and infectious diseases, the destruction of traditional healing methods and natural cures, and the assimilation into a destructive, consumerist society. Furthermore, the abuse of Indigenous people goes hand-in-hand with the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest.

Members of both CONFENIAE and SCLDF emphasize how the interests of Indigenous people and conservationists coincide. "By assuring the respect and protection of Indigenous rights, the environment will automatically be protected. On the other hand, efforts to protect the Amazon which do not actively include Indigenous people and elicit their sincere support are doomed to fail."

Members of CONFENIAE warn us not to fall prey to governmental demagogic discourse which buries ecologically destructive practices in ecological rhetoric. National parks, forest reserves and protected areas have

not meant the protection of the environment in Ecuador, but rather have become new areas for colonialist exploitation and environmental destruction.

The Yasuni Park is a good example of this. Oil exploration and drilling has been frequently conducted within it's borders by CONOCO. Recently 200,000 hectares of Yasuni Park land was granted to CONOCO. The Department of National Forestry has developed a plan in conjunction with CONOCO, by which more than 50% of the total area of the park will be opened to petroleum and mineral operations.

The World Bank has been financing oil development in Ecuador and a new loan of \$100 million is pending. Indigenous people have filed a petition with the Ecuadorian government and the World Bank in which the respect for Indigenous cultural and territorial integrity is demanded.

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