

Indigenous Leaders From Panama Travel To Washington To Condemn Carbon Market Solutions (CDM)

by Huntingtonnews.net Staff
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with reporting by Rebecca Sommer

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• The Clean Development Mechanism will be used to finance the destruction of our homelands, say representatives of the Naso and Ngobe people in the Central American republic of Panama.

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A group of Naso and Ngobe Indigenous Peoples from Western Panama arrived in Washington, D. C. to take part in a hearing at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) on Tuesday Oct. 28, 2008. The indigenous representatives will give evidence of the discrimination, abuse, and displacement that they have been suffering from Empresas Publicas de Medellin (Colombia), AES Corporation (United States), and the Government of Panama, who are together constructing four hydroelectric dams on the land of the Indigenous Peoples in the La Amistad Biosphere Reserve.

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The representatives from the Naso and Ngobe people say that the construction of these dams will destroy their traditional livelihood and homelands, and that their land rights and informed consent have been denied to them by the Government of Panama.

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The projects have also been condemned for their impacts on the biological diversity of San San Wetlands Ramsar Site and the La Amistad International Park UNESCO World Heritage Site. In early January, a team of scientists discovered three new species of amphibians on the Costa Rican side of the Park, and months later, a UNESCO mission demanded the Government of Panama to present a complete report of the impacts that these hydroelectric projects will have on the aquatic fauna of the Teribe and Changuinola rivers.

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Under the Kyoto Protocol, certain projects in countries in the developing world are eligible to generate profits by selling carbon credits as part of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). In the last four years, the Government of Panama, with the active support of the European Union and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, has been promoting these hydroelectric projects as eligible for the CDM. Research has shown that many such projects included in the CDM have not represented additional emissions reductions as well as having disastrous consequences for local communities.

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Indigenous peoples around the world struggle with the fast pace in which countries, UN agencies and the World Bank move ahead with their plans, without any credible consultation or the free, prior informed consent of the affected communities.

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In May 2008 Indigenous Peoples protested against the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues endorsement for CDM and REDD as "good solutions," but nevertheless, the final report of the UN agency supported these mechanisms as "increasingly important."

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Tom Goldtooth, director of the global Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), told Huntington News Network that his organization will be present at the hearing -- in support of the Naso and Ngobe delegation. Watch the video "PROTEST- Indigenous Peoples '2nd MAY REVOLT' at the UNPFII" starring Tom Goldtooth (IEN)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtORVi7GybY>

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"It is all about money" said Tom Goldtooth. "Just in September the UN-REDD programme was launched, a collaboration of FAO, UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank, and they admit in carefully phrased UN language that it could lead to a massive land-grab, cause severe human rights violations and could be simply said -- disastrous."

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Read the Huntington News Network article on UN-REDD: <http://www.huntingtonnews.net/political/080929-staff-politicalclimatechange.html>

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Last week the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility approved the so-called R-PIN, the application for Readiness funding, of the Government of Paraguay. But Indigenous Peoples complain, that the only groups that were involved in the elaboration of the proposal were a small number of conservation organisations, including a few US-based conservation organizations."Considering the fact that many of the most important forests in Paraguay are found on Indigenous territories, the plan and the World Bank's go ahead would clearly violate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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The decision of the World Bank to approve this plan demonstrates that the promises of the FCPF to ensure Indigenous participation and respect Indigenous Rights in the development and implementation of REDD proposals are merely empty words." Said Simone Lovera, from the Global Forest Coalition's .

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Feliciano Santos of the Ngobe people said: "We are calling on the international community to respect the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and condemn the utilization of the Clean Development Mechanism to finance projects that will destroy the lives, properties, and environments of Indigenous Peoples in Panama and around the world."

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Felix Sanchez of the Naso people said that, "These dams threaten the very existence of our people. If governments in Europe and the US want to make emissions reductions, they should make them in their own countries rather than using the carbon market to impose destructive projects on communities in the developing world."

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As the indigenous representatives arrived in the United States, the CDM Executive Board opened for review one of the most discredited of these projects, the Barro Blanco hydroelectric project, that will affect the ancestral territories of the Ngobe along the Tabasara River. An earlier version of this project called Tabasara I, that was planned to be developed together with the neighboring Tabasara II, sparked violent clashes between the Ngobe people, local farmers, and the National Police, in which many men, women and children were beaten and arbitrarily incarcerated. After the Supreme Court suspended the approval of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) for Tabasara II, Tabasara I has now been modified, renamed as Barro Blanco, and concessioned to the Panamanian energy company Generadora del Istmo, S.A.

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"Our report shows that the great majority of hydros in the CDM would very likely be built regardless of receiving credits (in CDM-jargon they are "non-additional"), in contravention of the mechanism's basic principle. The CDM was designed to issue credits to projects that are "additional" -- projects which are only being built because they receive revenue from selling carbon credits. Each CDM credit sold from a "non-additional" project means one extra tonne of CO2 is released to the atmosphere. " said Barbara Haya. She's the author of the International Rivers report "Failed Mechanism: How the CDM is subsidizing hydro developers and harming the Kyoto Protocol": http://internationalrivers.org/files/Failed_Mechanism_3.pdf

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For further comment or to speak with the indigenous delegation from Western Panama, please contact Osvaldo Jordan (Alianza para la Conservacion y el Desarrollo) or Monti Aguirre (International Rivers) on (508) 450-9580, osvaldo.jordan@acdpanama.org, or monti@internationalrivers.org.

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