# Ecuador: Pronouncement in Defence of Pachamama and Life

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo (Third World Institute for Ecological Studies) and to pay tribute to Ricardo Carrere (who was the WRM coordinator up until December 2010), the Ricardo Carrere Conference on Ecological Thinking was held in Quito, Ecuador. (*).

Representatives of indigenous peoples of the region and national and international environmental networks and organizations gathered together to share the concepts and analysis developed through their work in different areas of environmental struggle. They reflected on the way ecological thinking makes it possible to integrate concepts, link different currents and issues, and identify the relationships between different activities, and between these activities and centres of power, as well as the links between the environment, society, culture and the economy, beginning with the recognition of the existence of the ancestral values of indigenous peoples and their relationship with Pachamama, or Mother Earth. At the same time, the information generated through this analysis makes a valuable contribution to empowering communities and organizations in their struggles.

The tribute to Ricardo Carrere was present throughout the conference, due to his fundamental contribution to international ecological thinking. Ricardo not only contributed with his own thoughts, but also stressed the need for an ongoing space for expression that would lead us to listen, think, reflect and act.

The “Pronouncement in Defence of Pachamama and Life”, the final reflection issued by the gathering, reaffirms the determination to “keep up our resistance to defend our life as peoples and our territorial rights. Only on this basis is it possible to achieve Sumak Kawsay, understood as a full life, in harmony with nature.”

The pronouncement notes: “We come from a historical process of confronting capitalism, the modernization that dehumanizes and commodifies life, and in current times, the ‘citizens' revolution' that uses different strategies, discourses and banners to continue to rob us of our sources of livelihood. We do not consider ourselves to be poor, because if we were poor, the companies and the state would not set their sights upon us to strip us of our water, biodiversity and other natural riches that have become the new bases of capitalist accumulation under the criteria of the perverse ‘green economy' that they seek to impose as the new means for companies to increase their profits.

“Among many of our peoples, the word ‘poor' does not exist. In the Kichwa language, for example, the concept has been adapted to the word ‘wakcha', which literally means ‘orphan'. For these people, to be poor means to have no family or community, and therefore no way to practice complementarity, solidarity and reciprocity, which leads to individualism.”

“With regard to ‘environmental services',” the statement stresses, “we reject the attempt to reduce nature and its functions to ‘resources' and ‘services'. We know that language is another instrument of domination and imposition. Once again, based on our own cultures, in which these notions do not exist, we do not accept these words: Pachamama is not a resource, and she does not provide

services. As Taita Lorenzo Muelas of the Guambiano-Misak people of Colombia says, ‘The indigenous Higher Law is a legacy passed down by our ancestors; it is imprescriptible, inalienable and non-transferable, and is not for sale anywhere on the continent.'"

With regard to the situation in Ecuador specifically, the participants declared their categorical opposition to “any attempt to expand the oil frontier in the country, and in particular in Yasuní National Park, the ITT block, Block 31 and the Armadillo oilfield, as well as in indigenous territories and the territories of peoples living in voluntary isolation. We believe in the initiative to keep the crude oil underground as a first step towards a post-oil country and world. It is not for money that we defend Yasuní and other threatened areas, but because we are aware of all of the damage caused by oil exploitation in all of its stages. In the areas already affected we demand a process of comprehensive reparations, and the cancellation of the Pacific Refinery Petrochemical Complex project.

“We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who have been criminalized, evicted and repressed for defending the water, their lands and their territories, through the use of illegal mechanisms and public force. These are used as a means of intimidation to silence voices of opposition to this model. We do not understand how those who defend their own home, how those of us who defend our Mother, can be branded as terrorists.

“We condemn the acts of violence and evictions that have taken place in Río Grande (Manabí), for the construction of a dam, and the Topo community (Tungurahua), repressed to facilitate the construction of a hydroelectric plant for the benefit of a powerful economic group. We likewise condemn the blackmail exercised over the Secoya people because of a history marked by oil drilling, oil palm plantations, environmental services and even militarization in the name of conservation.

“We reject all extractive and industrial monoculture projects that threaten the rights of nature. We demand the withdrawal of these companies.

“We stand in solidarity with all of our comrades affected, because we share the same spirit of struggle and resistance. Despite any agreement or contract that has been imposed on the peoples, we must continue on the path of resistance to defend our territories, exercising the rights enshrined in the Constitution and in international instruments like ILO Convention 169 and those that protect human rights and the rights of nature.”

The pronouncement concludes: “Our struggle is in defence of life, which is why it is sacred and non-violent. We continue, after many centuries, to be the custodians of Pachamama and her forests, plains, rivers, mangroves… For this they call us ignorant savages, to justify their ‘civilizing' and ‘modernizing' interventions. As [Eduardo] Galeano would say, ‘In this world, words and deeds very rarely meet, and when they do, they don't greet each other.' As our peoples have always done, we want to continue fighting against this fragmentation, by truly living and practicing Sumak Kawsay, not only as nice words, but through complementarity, solidarity and reciprocity, both between our peoples and with the sacred earth, keeping up our resistance. Our political proposal is to build the power of all the peoples to defend life to its fullest.”

(*) The conference, organized by the Red de Ecologistas Populares and the Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo, was held in Quito, Ecuador on November 17 and 18, 2011. The full text of the statement is available in Spanish at[http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Ecuador/Pronunciamiento_en_defensa_de_la_Pachamama.html](http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Ecuador/Pronunciamiento_en_defensa_de_la_Pachamama.html)