
Bolivia: Indigenous peoples concerned by oil prospection

The tropical rainforests of the departament of Beni in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia are suffering deforestation caused by the unscrupulous awarding of concessions to private companies by the government. While large landowners occupy more and more lands, indigenous property rights are not recognized. Now a new threat is pending on them: oil exploitation.

In case the oil prospection at the Eva Eva Sur X1 well gives positive results, the whole territory of Beni departament is at risk of becoming an oil producer region. Indigenous people are concerned since they foresee that oil can leave them poorer and destroy their natural resources, as has already happened with mining in other regions of the country, and with oil exploitation itself in several countries of South America, Africa and Asia.

"I don't know whether to live in a rich territory means a fortune or a misfortune" expressed a spokesperson of the indigenous communities living at the Secure block area, granted to the consortium Repsol-YPF-Maxus. The area is included in the communal territories belonging to the chimanes, yuraceres, mojeno, ignacianos and movimas indigenous peoples. The Eva Eva Sur X1 oil well has been drilled at the sources of the Apere River, which provides indigenous communities with water.

The activities of the company are regulated by the Hydrocarbon Law, which allows oil prospection under the condition that it does not damage the environment. However, the indigenous peoples' concern is easy to understand, considering previous calamities occurring in Bolivia involving oil spills, such as those of the Desaguadero River in Oruro, the Pirque River in Parotani, and the Parapeti River in Camiri. Additionally this kind of problems, presented as "accidents", constitute really an inherent risk to oil exploitation which not only is a direct responsible of global climate change but also responsible for environmental destruction and local communities disintegration throughout the world.

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