
Peru: logging and cocaine destroy Amazon forest and threaten forest peoples

During the past months, Peru has occupied the international news headlines because of the political and institutional deterioration that is affecting the country. In line with such situation, the Peruvian Amazon forest continues to deteriorate. Oil prospection and extraction (see WRM Bulletins 1 and 8) and logging by powerful Malaysian companies (see WRM Bulletin 34) are two main causes of such degradation. The depredatory activities of local loggers, as well as illegal coca cultivation aimed at supplying the international cocaine market, further add to the problem.

A small but influential number of logging contractors that operate in the area of Alto Yavari, Galvez and Yaquerana is plundering the forest in search for precious timber such as mahogany and cedar. The entire area has been considered by the Natural Areas National Master Plan as priority for conservation. Additionally, the region is inhabited by several indigenous nations. Most of the population belongs to the Mayoruna or Matsés, and there are evidences of the existence of other non-contacted groups, as the Mayos and the Remo-Aukas. Also a group of Capanahuas indigenous people live at the headwaters of the Trapiche River. Since all of them depend mostly upon hunting of wildlife and fruit gathering to obtain food, the opening of roads in the forest, followed by the entry of external actors, means the loss of their livelihoods and a menace to their material and cultural survival.

Most of exploitation contracts have been obtained through bribes. Additionally, many of the loggers are cutting at rates up to 20 times higher than the ones permitted of 100 to 200 cubic metres for each contract. Indigenous people employed to cut the trees receive miserable compensations and are conned in relation to the real volumes of extracted timber. The products leave the country illegally through the Brazilian border and are finally commercialised in the European, Japanese and US markets.

It has also been informed that the area of Alto Yavari and Alto Trapiche is under the control of Colombian drug dealers, which are using roundwood trade to cover up the river transportation of fuel needed for the production of cocaine chloridrate in laboratories hidden in the heart of the forest. According to these reports, there are also several coca plantations in cleared areas.

Concerned Peruvian environmental organizations have begun to organise themselves to urge the creation of a vast Indigenous Reserve, which would cover the present territory occupied by the Mayoruna and the indigenous non contacted groups, as well as the Communal Reserve Tamshiyacu Tahuayo. However, even if the creation of such a reserve would constitute an important step forward, it would not be sufficient to ensure the conservation of Peru's Amazon forest and the survival of forest peoples, due to the current situation of political chaos and corruption reigning in the country.

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