



PRESS INFORMATION FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 5 December 2013

Peru's Culture Ministry blocks expansion of country's biggest gas project – but for how long?

Peru's Ministry of Culture (MINCU) has issued a [report](#) that blocks, at least temporarily, the expansion of the country's biggest gas project in the Amazon rainforest in a Reserve set aside for the protection of isolated indigenous peoples.

One of the reasons given by MINCU is that the company leading the expansion of the Camisea gas project, Pluspetrol, wants to conduct 3D seismic tests in a region which it 'assumes' – on the basis of its own fieldwork and previous studies – is inhabited by indigenous Machiguenga people who live in 'isolation' from outsiders and are at 'high risk' from introduced diseases to which they have little or no immunity.

As a result, MINCU requests the modification of the area scheduled for 3D seismic testing 'in such a way that the probable populations in isolation will have adequate protection'.

However, the block is only temporary as MINCU's report, dated 27 November 2013, follows a much more detailed [MINCU evaluation](#), dated 11 July 2013, which 'disappeared' within hours of being made public and was later officially [downgraded](#). The July report warned that Pluspetrol's expansion plans could make Nanti and Kirineri indigenous people living in 'isolation' 'extinct', and could 'devastate' Nahua indigenous people living in 'initial contact.'

Instead, much of the latest report is concerned with the fact that, in its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Pluspetrol underestimates the impacts its operations will have and must explain how it intends to mitigate such impacts.

Indeed, the November report makes no mention of 'isolated' people in the south of Lot 88 where the 2D seismic tests are planned thereby implying that no such people exist, nor does it recommend exclusion of other areas of the Reserve from seismic testing and drilling which are known to be inhabited by other isolated peoples.

As a result, the report has faced severe criticism including a [briefing](#) issued by the MINCU official who authorized the July report and resigned in the wake of its downgrade.

The briefing highlights a series of methodological and technical shortcomings with the latest assessment including its failure to consider the impact on all the peoples within the Reserve and even for bringing into question the existence of some of its isolated inhabitants.

It concludes that the November report 'sets a precedent to remove the untouchability of the Reserve, therefore proceeding to authorize the company's activities'.

“Modifying the location of the 3D seismic tests is important”, says Joji Cariño, director of the international human rights NGO Forest Peoples Programme (FPP). ‘However, if Peru is to meet its national and international legal obligations to respect indigenous peoples’ rights the assessment must insist that Pluspetrol abandon its expansion plans altogether.’

74% of Pluspetrol’s concession, Lot 88, overlaps a supposedly ‘untouchable’ reserve for indigenous peoples in ‘voluntary isolation’ and ‘initial contact’, as Peruvian law refers to them. In addition to the 3D seismic tests, which will involve detonating 1000s of explosives underground, Pluspetrol wants to conduct 2D seismic tests, drill 18 exploratory wells at six different locations, and build a 10.5 km flowline.

In order for Pluspetrol to go ahead with its expansion plans, its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be approved by MINCU. MINCU’s July report stated that the planned wells and 2D seismic tests, as well as the 3D seismic tests, posed serious, ‘critical’ threats to the indigenous people in ‘voluntary isolation’ and ‘initial contact’, including ‘extinction’ and ‘devastation.’

In March this year, the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [urged the Peruvian government](#) to ‘immediately suspend’ the expansion of the proposed gas development. Operations in Lot 88 are run by a consortium led by Pluspetrol and include Hunt Oil and Repsol.

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