



# Forest Peoples Programme

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## **Pluspetrol negotiates expansion of Camisea gas Project with boxes of paracetamol and pens and paper.**

*Nahua testimony reveals the expansion plans of the Camisea Project within a Reserve for isolated indigenous peoples and the efforts of the consortium to distort the facts.*

In April 2011 a group of Nahua hunters, indigenous inhabitants of the 'Kugapakori, Nahua and Nanti reserve for peoples in isolation and initial contact' in South East Peru were surprised to bump into a team of investigators conducting environmental surveys in the headwaters of the remote river Serjali. The researchers were working for Environmental Resources Management (ERM), an environmental consultancy that had been hired by the Camisea gas consortium, a mega natural gas project with operations in the neighbouring river basin.

The Nahua were outraged they were being treated with such disregard and forced ERM to leave. Pluspetrol, the Argentine energy company and consortium leader, managed to smooth over a potential conflict; persuading the Nahua that they didn't need to worry about potential contamination as these investigations weren't connected to the search for oil and gas but were simply efforts to monitor the local wildlife.

Pluspetrol's position was supported by the local mayor, the local Priest and most vociferously by the Institute for the development of Andean, Amazonian and Afroperuvian peoples (INDEPA) - the government agency responsible for the protection of isolated peoples. After great pressure was exerted the Nahua finally succumbed and permitted the continuation of these investigations in return for three boxes of medicines, a refrigerator for medical supplies, pens and notebooks for schoolchildren and temporary employment for twenty Nahua men to observe the research.

As the Nahua president (Enrique Dixpopidiba Shocoroa) explains in this video testimony (<http://vimeo.com/27287600>)<sup>1</sup> neither ERM, Pluspetrol and least of all INDEPA thought to conduct a prior consultation with the community. It later emerged that these investigations were connected to the environmental impact assessments for the planned expansion of the Camisea Project within the Reserve. Initially, these plans include the opening of three wells in the upper river Serjali and an intensive seismic campaign in the same area.

The Nahua are naturally concerned about the potentially devastating and irreversible environmental impacts of gas exploitation in the headwaters of the river Serjali as any contamination could threaten the entire watershed on which their water supply and

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<sup>1</sup> See link for full transcript at <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/extractive-industries/publication/2011/transcript-nahua-testimony-describes-unauthorized-entr>

livelihood depends. Meanwhile, internal sources within Pluspetrol were also able to confirm informally that they understand that the remainder of Nahua territory and practically the rest of the Reserve is to be gazetted as Lot 117, a new oil and gas concession. As far as we know the Nahua are yet to be formally informed that their territory is part of the expansion plans of the Camisea gas project. Predictably the people most affected by these developments always seem to be the last to know.

### **Violating rights of the most vulnerable people**

Boxes of medicine and school books may seem like a bizarre exchange but it is more understandable when we consider that the Nahua only experienced their first contact with Peruvian national society in 1984. Within a few months almost half the population died from introduced diseases. Today, they may not be as physically vulnerable but, as the Nahua President describes, this doesn't mean they are any better prepared to negotiate with a major oil and gas company over a project worth billions of dollars. In fact, their increasing dependency on western material goods that resulted from their contact has made them even more vulnerable; their 'conquest' is easy when all it takes are a few boxes of medicines and some temporary jobs. In such circumstances it is almost impossible to speak of a level playing field for negotiations.

And so a scandal is rapidly unfolding in a remote corner of the Peruvian Amazon: A multi national consortium of oil and gas companies is taking advantage of a people highly vulnerable to exploitation and a government agency supposed to defend the rights of isolated peoples is lending a hand. Not only is this a violation of Nahua rights to free, prior and informed consent (as provided for by international law and jurisprudence), it is also yet another infringement of the supposed ban on extractive industries within those Reserves' established for isolated peoples in Peru<sup>2</sup> and an article within a 2003 decree that prohibits any further expansion of the Camisea gas project within the Nahua/Kugapakori Reserve<sup>3</sup>.

### **Evading the issue and distorting the facts**

Instead of recognising these issues or the legitimacy of these concerns, Pluspetrol has opted for another version of events. In written responses to letters they simply evade the issue<sup>4</sup>. In later meetings held in Lima in July with civil society they explained that ERM did not have an encounter with the Nahua but 'with a team of loggers with a Nahua guide' and that there had been no subsequent problems with the community. Worse still, they had the audacity to argue that in fact it was ERM who startled these imaginary loggers and forced them to leave; conveniently implying that the Camisea consortium are the real 'guardians' of the reserve.

Finally once again in these meetings the existence of isolated peoples in the area proposed for expansion was questioned. Pluspetrol representatives admitted that while they may doubt the existence of such peoples they still have to respect the fact that it is a Reserve and this is why they trumpet their contact protocols and contingency plans.

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<sup>2</sup> The law for the protection of isolated peoples (2006) in Peru establishes that the reserves are 'untouchable' or off limits to any resource use other than that practiced by its inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> Supreme Decree N° 028-2003-AG

<sup>4</sup> See FPP letter to Pluspetrol 21/6/2011 and their response at <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/extractive-industries/news/2011/06/letter-and-response-pluspetrol-peru-corporation-regarding->

“Don’t worry” goes the familiar argument, “We checked there aren’t any isolated people here, we did some seismic testing and didn’t see anybody”. Well that’s no surprise, if your land was suddenly invaded by helicopters and hundreds of people dressed in bright orange setting off explosions under the ground would you decide it was a good idea to hang about?

But why sow doubt in the first place about the existence of isolated peoples? The answer is painfully obvious. If there isn’t anybody there then there is no problem with a mega gas Project and if there isn’t anyone there it is one more argument for disbanding the Reserve. Once all the people have slowly died or fled the area it becomes very persuasive to argue that the Reserve serves no purpose.

This is what Pluspetrol say in Lima, but to the Nahua they admitted their ‘mistake’ and apologised. So why can’t they just tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Perhaps it would be too embarrassing to reveal the reality of a project as prominent as Camisea and with such prestigious backers as the Inter American Development Bank (IDB).

The truth that the IDB might not like to hear is that their golden project is being illegally expanded within a reserve for isolated peoples, behind the backs of the real owners of the forest and only later negotiated with those owners with the help of boxes of paracetamol and paper and pens.

Dr Conrad Feather is an anthropologist who has spent much of the last ten years conducting research amongst the Nahua people and supporting their efforts to defend and protect their lands and livelihoods. He currently works for the Forest Peoples Programme.