

Alfredo Palacio, President of the Republic of Ecuador
Anita Albán Mora, Minister of the Environment

We are writing to express the critical importance to the world scientific community and to humanity of protecting Yasuní National Park from new oil exploitation, beginning with Block 31.

National parks, indigenous territories, and other critically important ecosystems with high amounts of biodiversity and rare or threatened species, should be given the highest level of protection, permitting no oil or other extractive development. These places are absolutely essential for the protection of indigenous cultures and the full range of biodiversity on earth, as well as for scientific study. Indeed, the law in other Amazonian countries such as Peru and Brazil prohibit oil extraction in national parks.

The Amazon rainforest is world famous for its extraordinary biodiversity. But Yasuni, with its unique location at the intersection of the Equator and Andes Mountains, is one the most biodiverse parts of the entire Amazon basin. In fact, a report prepared by 50 of the park's scientists concluded that Yasuni may well be the single most biodiverse forest on earth.

Here are some examples which illustrate the global significance of Yasuni National Park's biodiversity:

- **Birds:** A recent article in the journal *Nature* illustrates that the region where the Amazon meets the Andes in Ecuador is the most biodiverse site in the world for birds. Over 550 species of birds have been recorded in Yasuni.
- **Amphibians:** According to the Global Amphibian Assessment, the first-ever comprehensive assessment of the conservation status of the world's amphibians, Yasuní is part of the western Amazonian region that contains the highest amphibian diversity in the world. To date, 105 amphibian species and 83 reptile species have been found in Yasuní.
- **Trees:** According to the Amazon Tree Diversity Network, the Yasuní region contains a large stretch of the world's most diverse tree community. An estimated 2,274 species of trees are found in Yasuní. In fact, according to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Yasuní has nearly as many tree species per hectare (644) as in all of North America combined (680).
- **Plants:** In addition to trees, Yasuni also has record levels of lianas and epiphytes. With all plant species combined—trees, lianas, epiphytes, ferns—the Yasuni region is one of the few parts of the world with 4,000 species of plants.
- **Insects:** Yasuni has the highest documented insect diversity in the world, with over 100,000 species per hectare.
- **Mammals:** Yasuni protects at least 173 species of mammals. This includes 10 species of primates—making it one of the most diverse sites for primates in the world—and 25 species of Threatened mammals such as the Giant otter, Amazonian Manatee, Pink River Dolphin, Jaguar, Amazonian Tapir, Woolly Monkey, White-Bellied Spider Monkey, and Giant Anteater.

Given this extraordinary biodiversity, we believe that fully protecting Yasuni National Park could be one of Ecuador's major contributions towards helping the world achieve the Convention on Biological Diversity 2010 Biodiversity Target, the global effort to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss. Yasuní is the only national park in the region capable of protecting this remarkable biodiversity—there isn't another Amazonian park for hundreds of kilometers to the south and east.

In contrast, if Ecuador allows Petrobras to construct oil facilities in the heart of Yasuní, this would represent a major defeat in the global effort to protect the world's remaining biodiversity and a loss to science and all humankind. Given the devastating impacts caused or facilitated by oil activities in the northwest section of the park—including deforestation, colonization, over-hunting, pollution of land and

water supplies, and edge effects—it is critical to now fully protect the northeast section of the park. Indeed, Block 31 is one of the most intact parts of Yasuni National Park. Oil extraction encompasses extremely intensive industrial processes, and even if carried out with the best intentions and newest technologies, they inevitably take a heavy toll on the natural tropical forest ecosystems.

We are especially concerned that if Petrobras is allowed to extract oil from the Nenke and Apaika fields, the company will soon attempt to extract oil from the Obe field as well. Oil activities in the Obe field—located in the extreme southwest section of the block—would come dangerously close to both the most traditional Huaorani community (Bameno) and the territory used by the Huaorani living in voluntary isolation (Tagaeri-Taromenane).

As your office is aware, on July 12 of 2005 the Huaorani marched through the streets of Quito in opposition to the Petrobras project and ultimately presented the Ministro de Gobierno a letter demanding a 10 year moratorium on new oil projects on ancestral Huaorani territory.

We fully support their position, as it would protect both the Huaorani and the region's outstanding biodiversity. This moratorium would ban new road building, expansion or paving of existing roads, seismic testing, and construction of new drilling platforms, processing facilities, or pipelines. We encourage the government to work with the Huaorani, scientists, NGOs, and other interested parties to develop ecologically sustainable and culturally compatible forms of development, such as ecotourism.

With so few intact, megadiverse natural areas left on our planet, and each year seeing accelerating destruction of those that remain, those places on earth with the extraordinary ecological qualities such as Yasuni should be preserved intact.

Sincerely,

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