



Peace Brigades International GUATEMALA PROJECT

“ALERT” September 2010

ALERT ABOUT THE SITUATION OF 37 COMMUNITIES IN LAGUNA DEL TIGRE, PETÉN, THREATENED BY MILITARISATION, EVICTIONS AND MEGA-PROJECTS

An “Alert is an occasional mailing by the PBI Guatemala Project to draw attention to violations of or concerns about human rights in Guatemala, from PBI’s position of non-interference, non-violence and non-partisanship. This information sheet is distributed to individuals, organisations and institutions that have offered their support to the Guatemala Project.

Communities of Sierra del Lacandón, El Centro, Las Cruces and Laguna del Tigre, in the municipalities of La Libertad and San Andrés, Petén, have expressed their concern about the increase of military presence in the area and evictions in Laguna del Tigre National Park – proposed for September – that president Colom and other government authorities announced during June and August. The communities have demanded information about the affect these plans will have on the population, and about the economic projects planned for the area.

The government has extended the oil extraction contract in the Laguna del Tigre National Park as well as announcing its decision to carry out evictions in the area and open six new military detachments, which it says are to protect the environment and combat drugs trafficking. The president has said that socioeconomic development is an important factor in his support for the extension of the oil contract for the next 15 years inside the protected area.

According to the communities themselves and to Guatemalan human rights organisations, there is no public confidence that the extension of the oil contract will result in socioeconomic development for the population. They say they are unhappy about the lack of information, knowledge and social participation in decisions made about mega-projects and fear that the extension of the oil contract and the measures announced by the president will result in land grabbing, violence and forced displacement of the population, rather than development. They particularly fear the eviction of 37 communities located in Laguna de Tigre (San Andrés, Petén).

In a Congress hearing on 10 September, in which Petén communities were able to express their concerns and demands to different public authorities, some ministers emphasised their disagreement with the decision of the Administration to extend the contract of the oil company Perenco. The Ministers of the Interior and Defence promised that they would not evict the communities settled in Laguna del Tigre. They explained that the eviction orders referred exclusively to cattle herds and people involved in drugs trafficking activities.

The communities, however, remain afraid that they will be forcefully evicted eventually, having seen the eviction of other communities in the area, and because in the past government authorities have accused them of links with the drugs trade. There has been no evidence put forward for these accusations, which are denied by the Laguna del Tigre communities, and are very much questioned by Guatemalan social organisations.

By means of this “Alert”, PBI wishes to express its deep concern about the conflict in Laguna del Tigre in the context of the oil extraction contract that has been extended without consultation with the communities and the tension and fear generated by government announcements of evictions and the opening of new military detachments.

We also wish to call attention to the threat that the proposed evictions could cause to the security and human rights of the 37 communities in the area, as well as to the safety of those who publicly and actively defend and promote human rights.

We therefore **request** that you remain **attentive** to the events in the communities of La Libertad and San Andrés, with special attention on Laguna del Tigre.

We also **encourage** the International Community to actively make contact with the human rights defenders, organisations, communities and other Guatemalan social groups, to offer them support and protection in the context of the *European Union Guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders*, and other international instruments and mechanisms that exist for this purpose.

Yours sincerely,
PBI Guatemala Project