



To

Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, President of the Republic of Panama

Cc

Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado, Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Panama

Nanno Kleiterp, Chief Executive Officer of the Dutch Development Bank (FMO)

Dr. Nick Rischbieth, Executive President of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI)

Bruno Wenn, Chairman of the German Development Bank (DEG)

RE: Immediate suspension of test flooding in Barro Blanco

Dear President Varela,

We, the undersigned organizations, are deeply concerned for the personal safety and security of the Ngäbe communities, affected by the Barro Blanco Hydroelectric Power Plant Project.

On May 22, Panama's National Authority for Public Services (ASEP) announced in a press release that Barro Blanco's reservoir would be filled¹, starting on May 24. ASEP's press release indicated that the water would rise up to 103 meters above sea level by June 21, 2016.

According to a fact finding mission led by the United Nations Development Programme in 2012², the Ngäbe communities of Kiad, Nuevo Palomar and Quebrada Caña will be directly impacted by the flooding. This report indicates that 6 hectares + 9816.86 m² of their lands, including 6 houses and a petroglyph located in the community of Quebrada Caña, will be under water.

Furthermore, we have received reports from affected community members that floodwaters of the Barro Blanco reservoir have reached the limits of the Bakama Area (*Corregimiento*) of the Ngäbe-Bugle Territory (*Comarca*) in Western Panama. At this point, the Ngäbe communities of Quebrada Plata, Quebrada Caña, Kiad and Nuevo Palomar - as well as the Mama Tatda ceremonial sites - could be seriously harmed by the so-called test flooding this week, much ahead of the estimated June 21 peak level announced by ASEP.

¹ <http://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/economia/asep-anuncia-el-inicio-del-periodo-de-prueba-de-central-hidroelectrica-barro-blanco-1027251>

² <http://canal-empresarias.ciudadelsaber.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/0-informe-mision-verificacion-final-20121219.pdf>

Contrary to what is stated by ASEP press release, and as confirmed by Milton Henriquez, Minister of Internal Affairs³, the affected communities were not notified or consulted prior to the test flooding. This goes against international human rights standards, which stipulate that indigenous peoples have the right to consultation and free, prior and informed consent. As derived from the right to property protected under the American Convention on Human Rights and other agreements, indigenous peoples have also the right to adequate housing, to possess, use, and “freely enjoy” their traditional lands and territories, and to “not be forcibly removed” from them⁴.

The Ngäbe communities are determined to stay and defend their sacred lands, regardless of the ongoing flooding. We urge you to protect their life and their integrity and to immediately suspend the test flooding which is violating their rights and placing them at risk of irreparable harm.

Sincerely,

- Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense – AIDA
- Both Ends
- Carbon Market Watch
- Center for International Environmental Law - CIEL
- Center for Research on Multinational Corporations - SOMO
- Collective Voices for Peace
- International Rivers
- Rettet den Regelwald - Salva la Selva
- Task force on the Americas
- Urgewald

³ <http://www.mingob.gob.pa/mingob/inside.php?artID=3246>

⁴ For more information, please see http://www.ciel.org/Publications/BarroBlanco_Appeal_18Feb2014.pdf