



To

Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing
Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders
Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons
John Knox, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment
Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples

February 23, 2017

RE: On-site visit request to assess situation regarding the Barro Blanco project

Dear Special Rapporteurs,

We, the undersigned organisations, want to draw your attention on the worrying situation faced by the local communities affected by the Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam located in the Ngäbe-Bugle Comarca (autonomous territory), in Western Panama, and kindly ask you to carry out an on-site visit in order to meet with the communities and assess their situation.

Since June 2016, local communities of Kiad, Nuevo Palomar and Quebrada Caña have been directly impacted by a so-called test flooding¹ of the dam reservoir without being notified or consulted beforehand. Several houses have been inundated and, as a result, families have been forced to move to higher ground without adequate compensation. As you can see in this [video](#) shot in the beginning of January 2017, the stagnant lake is also seriously affecting their health as well as their food and water resources. According to Panama's National Authority for Public Services (ASEP), the test flooding was initially scheduled to end in August 2016². However, the reservoir remains filled and there is no indication as to when it will be emptied.

Furthermore, on 27 December 2016, Panama's Supreme Court ruled against a judicial action initiated by representatives of the local communities. Communities sought to invalidate a resolution by ASEP stating that Barro Blanco is a matter of "national interest" and of "urgent nature". According to our partners, this decision gives a green light for ASEP to evict local communities from their lands.

¹ See this article: <http://carbonmarketwatch.org/barro-blanco-communities-flooded-despite-rejected-agreement-ngos-ask-for-withdrawal-of-cdms-registration/>

² <http://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/economia/asep-anuncia-el-inicio-del-periodo-de-prueba-de-central-hidroelectrica-barro-blanco-1027251>

Given the past violent actions of national security forces against indigenous demonstrations³, our local partners are worried that a forceful eviction might happen if international human rights bodies do not adopt urgent measures. With this letter, we would like to relay our partners' concerns and ask you to carry an onsite visit in order to meet with them and ensure that their rights are respected.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,

Sincerely,

- Asociacion Ambientalista de Chiriqui
- Both Ends
- Carbon Market Watch
- Center for International Environmental Law - CIEL
- Center for Research on Multinational Corporations – SOMO
- Collective Voices for Peace
- FIAN Germany
- Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
- Movimiento Victoriano Lorenzo
- Rettet den Regelwald - Salva la Selva
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team
- Task force on the Americas
- Urgewald

³ See for example the two reports attached to this email on how security forces crushed a demonstration against Barro Blanco in Gualaquita in August 2016