

### European Parliament Urged to Hold Hearing On World's Most Biodiverse Area Under Threat Ecuador Must Implement the Yasuni-ITT Initiative

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The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and the coalition YASunidos in Ecuador call on the European Parliament to denounce the decision of Ecuador's President to exploit one of the world's most biodiverse areas that hosts indigenous peoples, despite the country's initial pledge and leading role in the preservation of the region.

Ecuador is one of the few countries in the world that still has indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation: the Tagaeri and Taromenane indigenous peoples. In order to protect these vulnerable tribes, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights imposed precautionary measures in 2006, which were reinforced by the United Nations Guidelines of Protection for Isolated Indigenous Peoples (2012), the National Policy of the Peoples in voluntary isolation of Ecuador and the ILO-convention 169 ratified by Ecuador in 1998.

In 2010, Ecuador gave an example to the world with the so-called Yasuni-ITT Initiative that prevented the exploitation of the oil reserves of the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini oil field in the Yasuni National Park, one of the world's most biodiverse areas. The landmark proposal, that was seeking to fight climate change and protect the indigenous people and biodiversity of the region, was welcomed by all major governments and institutions, amongst them the European Parliament. The international community pledged to provide Ecuador with at least 50% of the value of the oil reserves (equalling 3.6 billion USD) by the end of 2011, under the supervision of the UN.

However, on 15 August 2013, President Rafael Correa's commission designated to implement the project concluded that the economic turnout was insufficient, after which the president issued an executive decree that put an end to Yasuni-ITT. The United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples has expressed its concern about this decision, and the President reportedly received numerous letters requesting him to implement Yasuni-ITT. Over the course of the past few months, many instances of violence have been reported between indigenous peoples and loggers and oil workers, now the territory and livelihoods of the Tagaeri and Taromenane come under significant pressure.

In light of this negative prospect, a popular consultation has been set up to allow the Ecuadorian

people to express their opinion on the matter. However, the attempts of civil society groups to speak up are being undermined by the government, a fact that reduces the chances of seeing a free and democratic process resolve the issue.