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By Jeremy Hance

A visit to a rainforest slated for oil drilling has blown up into a diplomatic row between Ecuador and Germany. Ecuador has said it will no longer partner with Germany on environmental issues and will return aid money, after the South American government discovered that German legislators were attempting to visit the much-embattled Yasuni National Park.



Cobalt-winged parakeets (Brotogeris cyanoptera) at a clay lick in Yasuni National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Photo by: Jeremy Hance.

"If they think they had the right to doubt the word of Ecuador's government on the issue of Yasuni because they were providing funds, we'll give them their money back with interest," Ecuador's Foreign Minister, Ricardo Patino, said. "Ecuador unilaterally ends all cooperation with Germany on environmental issues."

Ecuador has said it will return around \$9 million in funds from Germany for environmental projects around the country. The country cancelled the visas of the visiting German legislators and did not allow them to visit Yasuni National Park as planned. The German legislators were set to meet with groups opposed to oil drilling in the park—which scientists say may be the most biodiverse on the planet—and to see on the ground the impacts of fossil fuel extraction.

community to not drill inside the park. When the money didn't come fast enough, however, Ecuador dropped the bold initiative. Activists tried to spare the park through a national referendum, but the government's National Electoral Council threw out the majority of the activist's signatures.

In his weekly address, President Rafael Correa, lectured Germany.

"Go ahead, take your seven million euros. If you like, we will give you another seven million euros for training programs in respect, on sovereignty and on international law," he said adding that the German legislators "are welcome as tourists. They are welcome as brothers. They are not welcome as supervisors."

He told Germany that Ecuador "stopped being a colony 200 years ago."

Correa's government has been cracking down on environmental groups as criticism over Yasuni National Park and other environmental issues mounted. A year ago, the government shut down one of the country's biggest environmental NGOs, Fundación Pachamama, over actions regarding the oil issue.