

by [Human Rights Watch](#)

Correa Cracks Down on Environmental Activism

During his visit to Ecuador last month, Pope Francis delivered a speech on environmental stewardship and urged the administration of President Rafael Correa to "open spaces for dialogue" on how to manage the country's resources. The 4,000-square-mile Yasuní National Park is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet but also contains vast untapped oil reserves. Correa assured the pope that he shared the pontiff's concern for nature but has instead taken aggressive steps to curtail public debate: harassing, intimidating, and punishing environmental activists and indigenous leaders who object to his plans to expand exploitation of the Yasuní's oil.

When Correa took office in 2007, he announced that Ecuador would impose a permanent ban on oil extraction in a "block" of the Yasuní National Park known as Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini, or the ITT block, but only if the rest of the world helped compensate for the loss in revenue by donating \$3.6 billion (that amount is about half of what Ecuador could make from the estimated 800 million barrels of oil in the ITT).

It was a bold—albeit controversial—proposal, and it served to raise awareness within Ecuador and abroad about the vulnerable state of the Ecuadorian Amazon. But it failed to attract the international support Correa sought, raising only around \$13 million in pledges. And so, in August 2013, he abruptly announced that he would open the ITT block for oil exploration.

