

TRADEJUSTICE

New York Metro

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News Release

Activists and Actress/Dancer Cynthia Paniagua Protest Peruvian President's Human Rights and Environmental Abuses at Award Dinner

On Wednesday, September 22, 2010 at 7PM at 680 Park Avenue at 68th Street, members of TradeJustice NY Metro; Global Justice for Animals and the Environment/Wetlands Activism Collective; Rainforest Relief; the NY Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador; and the Tiksi Group, a Peruvian community organization, protested Peruvian President Alan García as he was awarded the Gold Insigne by the Council of the Americas, an association of corporations backing NAFTA-style free trade agreements, at a dinner sponsored by Freeport-McMoRan and Barrick Gold, corporations notorious for environmental and human rights abuses in Peru. The activists were joined by Actress/Dancer Cynthia Paniagua, star of the film "Soy Andina."

The Peruvian Amazon is threatened by mining, logging (much of it illegal), natural gas, oil, coal, cattle grazing, and plantation agriculture. As a result, wildlife species are being driven to extinction and indigenous communities are being displaced. Yet, instead of protecting his nation's unique and irreplaceable ecosystems and defending indigenous communities, Garcia has used the pretext of the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement to turn indigenous lands over to corporations and increase the rate of destruction for profit. Nonviolent uprisings by peasant farmers and indigenous people have met violent and deadly state repression. Indigenous leaders have been driven into hiding. The murder of community anti-mining activists has gone unpunished.

New York City is the largest municipal user of tropical rainforest wood in North America, primarily exported from Peru. Cumaru is now the rainforest wood of choice for the NYC Parks Department and much of the ipê being used in the city for municipal projects is from Peru. Environmentalists have been working years to ban tropical rainforest wood imports, but Governor Pataki committed New York to a side agreement to the Peru Free Trade Agreement that limits the state's ability to set ethical selective purchasing standards and could open the door to a legal challenge of the ban by Peruvian wood exporters. Rainforest logging, much of it illegal, has been directly linked to the murder and displacement of indigenous peoples, with recent reports of uncontacted communities near the Brazilian border being displaced by loggers.

According to Tim Keating, Executive Director of Rainforest Relief, "Rainforest loss is one of the major drivers of climate change. Mayor Bloomberg needs to immediately end the use of tropical hardwoods by NYC municipal agencies to make good on his commitment to reduce NYC's carbon footprint. 80% of the wood exported from Peru has been logged illegally, meaning that New York benches and boardwalks are made with contraband wood linked to human rights abuses and rainforest destruction."

According to Ana Maria Quispe of The Tiksi group, a NJ-based Peruvian community organization, "The so-called Council of the Americas, in reality a lobby group for corporate polluters and human rights abusers, insults the Peruvian people by honoring Alan Garcia. Instead of receiving an award, Garcia should stand before the International Criminal Court for the atrocities he has committed against the people and environment of Peru. Garcia sold out our country with the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement, attempted to steal the lands of indigenous community for companies like Barrick Gold and FreePort McMoRan, and sent police to murder his own people for peacefully protecting their rights and their lands."

Peruvians protest Barrick in the Ancash region year after year with a regional 48 hour strike, supported by local politicians. Protesters have been killed in confrontations with the police during the strike. Meanwhile, Barrick has reportedly employed many of these police. Notorious for environmental and human rights violations in West Papua, mining company Freeport-McMoRan is pursuing a major expansion of a copper mine in Peru amidst strikes by workers demanding fairer compensation.

Home to 1800 bird species -10% of the bird species on the planet - Peru is second only to Colombia in avian biodiversity. Butterfly diversity is even greater with 4000 species – 20% of the world total.. The Peruvian lowland rainforest, the cloudforest and the northern Peruvian dryforest have been declared biological hotspots by several national and international conservation organizations. Aquatic life abounds in Peru, with more than 1000 species of fish, more than 1400 mollusk species and more than 600 crustacean species. More than 30 species of whales and dolphins (37 % of the world's whale and dolphin species) can be found in Peruvian waters. Among the more than 500 mammal species that reside in Peru are jaguars, pumas, deer, skunk and Alpacas, vicuñas, chinchillas and, and the rare spectacled bear. They are joined by over 300 reptile species, include the iguana and the giant turtle. (View photos of Peruvian wildlife at <http://travel.mongabay.com/peru/highlights/Wildlife.html>).

Additional info at <http://gjae.org/?page=COA2010>