

Prevent Indigenous Communities Displacement and Destruction of the Amazon Forest in Colombia

Supported by: Colombia Support Network

Deadline: Friday, June 26 COB

Dear Colleague,

Please join me in sending a letter to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos urging him to recognize two indigenous communities' ancestral and constitutional rights to their land in the Amazon region of Colombia.

As part of China's infrastructure investment in Latin America, Brazil and China have started construction on a trans-Amazonian railway whose path will cut through some of the world's most biodiverse forest. Part of this project will create a highway to connect the railway to a Colombian port on the Pacific. The highway will cut directly through the Sibundoy Valley, which is part of the Amazonian foothills and Andes region where Colombia, Ecuador and Peru intersect.

Two indigenous peoples, the Kamentsa and Inga have inhabited this land for centuries, and now need formal legal recognition and protection of six *resguardos* (reservations) in Sibundoy Valley to preserve their culture and environment. They fear the railway and mining prospects will ruin their vital waterways and the rivers which feed into the Amazon.

The Colombian Constitution provides protection to these indigenous communities and a 2009 Colombian Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the Inga and Kamentsa's right to prioritized protection. However, President Santos' Ministers have ignored repeated requests to fulfill the communities' request.

Please join me in sending a letter to Colombian President Santos urging him to ensure the Inga and Kamentsa indigenous communities are given legal recognition of their land in the Sibundoy Valley.

For more information on the letter or to sign on to the letter, please contact Leslie Zelenko at Leslie.Zelenko@mail.house.gov or 225-2906.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mark Pocan

July X, 2015

President
JUAN MANUEL SANTOS
Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 # 7 - 26
Bogota, Colombia
South America

Dear President Santos :

Colombia is home to two unique indigenous communities, the Kamentsa and Inga, with extraordinary history in the Sibundoy Valley in Putumayo. Their familial land was bestowed to them by their ancestor *Taita* (Elder) Carlos Tamabiyo in the 1700s, and they now seek legal recognition and protection of six Inga and Kamentsa *resguardos* (reservations). We urge you to abide by Article 7 of the Colombian Constitution and the 2009 Colombian Constitutional Court ruling, which ordered the Colombian government to protect 32 indigenous communities, including the Inga and Kamentsa, and recognize their ancestral and constitutional right to this land.

Without this legal recognition, these sacred lands are vulnerable to destruction due to invasive mining and infrastructure projects. The preservation of the Sibundoy Valley is vital to the existence of these indigenous communities and to the survival of one of the most important ecosystems in the world. These lands are home to important rivers such as the Mocoa, the San Pedro, and the Putumayo, which are vital to irrigating the Amazon region and maintaining its extraordinary biodiversity.

We understand the INCODER (Colombian Institute for Rural Development) has entered into an agreement with the communities to execute sociological, legal, and topographic studies of the areas and land holdings to be incorporated into these six *resguardos*. These studies are now completed, and should be ready for validation and approval by the INCODER Board of Directors in July 2015. We urge you to ensure the INCODER fulfills its commitments and approves the legalization of the six Inga and Kamentsa *resguardos* of the Sibundoy Valley.

Sincerely yours,