



PSG Statement on the Amazon Situation

June 11th 2009

Over the last few days, Peru has been witness to probably the worse loss of life since the end of the country's internal armed conflict in 2000, following protests by indigenous groups against a series of legislative decrees, collectively known as the 'Law of the Jungle' (Ley de la Selva)¹. It has been reported that some 50 people (and the estimates continue to rise), both indigenous protestors and members of security forces have died.

Indigenous groups, principally in the Amazon region of the country, have been protesting since April 9th against a legislative package which was approved last year by President Alan García to make Peruvian law conform to the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States.

The current reaction of President Alan García's government reflects its ongoing determination to regenerate the Peruvian economy by promoting private, particularly foreign investment. This 'development plan' was mapped out in García's infamous newspaper article in October 2007, entitled the 'Dog in a Manger Syndrome' (El Síndrome del Perro del Hortelano - http://www.elcomercio.com.pe/edicionimpresa/html/2007-10-28/el_sindrome_del_perro_del_hort.html).

Due to increasing levels of protest, the Peruvian government declared a state of emergency of up to 60 days on May 9th in the regions of Cusco, Ucayali, Loreto and Amazonas, suspending residents' constitutional rights. In addition, the Ministry of Defence has authorised the army to give support to the police in dealing with protests by indigenous groups over land, oil and mineral rights for up to 30 days.

In a speech made by President García on June 7th, he stated "We have suffered an aggression that is the product of a conspiracy of those who seek to block the progress of the country," and went on to blame unnamed international networks for promoting the disorder in an attempt to prevent Peru from exploiting its natural resources (<http://www.presidencia.gob.pe/contenido.asp> - See Press Release 2644).

The Peruvian government has also issued a statement to the international community, via its Embassies, which states that "Peru has a long tradition and constitutional commitment for the protection and promotion of human rights...it has actively supported various international initiatives that seek to recognise the rights of indigenous peoples...". The Peru Support Group therefore asks the Peruvian government to respect its international obligations on human rights at all stages of development of the country and not repeat mistakes of the past.

Background information:

Peru is a party to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention 169 and is one of the countries that supported the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), which calls for the full respect of indigenous peoples' rights, including the rights related to their traditional lands, territories and resources and to their free, prior and informed consent.

¹ A set of 99 decrees issued by President García to facilitate the privatisation of collectively held land.