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## **Achuar Block 39 New Oil Wells on their Territory**

### **Communities Celebrate Major Victory in Battle to Protect Ancestral Lands**

**San Francisco, CA** – Achuar indigenous communities in the northern Peruvian Amazon were today celebrating a major victory over the oil industry after the Argentine company Pluspetrol agreed to forego drilling 39 proposed new wells on Achuar land.

The decision was announced by Pluspetrol's General Manager in Peru, Roberto Ramallo, at a meeting with members of the Achuar representative organization FECONACO and in front of senior government officials including Iris Cardenas, the Director of the environmental department of Peru's Ministry of Energy and Mines. He said no new drilling would take place without Achuar consent.

It came after the Achuar informed Mr. Ramallo that the Achuar would not permit any new drilling on a concession known as "Block 1AB", located on a vast swath of primary tropical rainforest near the Corrientes River and which the Achuar have inhabited for centuries.

Achuar elder and spiritual leader Tomas Maynas said: "In this meeting we spoke clearly but firmly about our right to health, food and life and the decision of our people not to allow the exploitation of new wells given the high levels of contamination which we are facing."

The agreement came after two recent oil spills in 1AB, both in July. In total, approximately 15 miles of rivers, on which the Achuar depend for their water needs and for fisheries, were contaminated. FECONACO's legal adviser Lily la Torre added: "Native communities do not want to prohibit, but to avoid any harm to their territories."

According to a FECONACO statement, the Peruvian state's auction of 1AB was in violation of ILO 169, an international indigenous rights convention of which Peru is a signatory and which stipulates that indigenous communities have a right to prior consultation about infrastructure projects taking place on their lands.

The oil industry and the Achuar are old foes. Until 2000, that same concession was held by Occidental Petroleum (Oxy) who drilled for oil for approximately 30 years, unnecessarily dumping nearly one million barrels of toxic wastewater a day, allegedly poisoning the rainforest and local Achuar communities. The Achuar recently filed a lawsuit against Oxy in a Los Angeles court.

Pluspetrol, which is also heavily involved in the controversial Camisea gas project in the southern Peruvian rainforest, took over as operator of the Oxy concession before Achuar protests forced the new oil company into an agreement in October 2006 to revamp the outdated technology and bring the dumping of toxic production waters to a phased end. At one stage, nearly 800 Achuar women and men shut down one of Peru's largest oil facilities for two weeks, demonstrating the power they could wield over oil companies attempting to intrude upon their land.