

PRESS RELEASE – 5th August 2010

ROAD TO BE BUILT THROUGH A PRIME CONSERVATION AREA IN BOLIVIA DESPITE AN ORDER FROM THE PRESIDENT TO HALT IT.

The local council of Villa Tunari in the coca growing Chapare region of Bolivia is going ahead with the construction of a 7 km stretch of road which will pass through a National Heritage site, despite an order from the Bolivian President himself to stop it.

The road is being built to create access for the coca growing communities deeper into the forest, so that they can transport their products more easily to the main road which passes through the town of Villa Tunari, connecting the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

The final 2 km of the proposed road will cut directly through the wild animal refuge Parque Machia, a state owned park which is managed by the Bolivian NGO Inti Wara Yassi, who have received and released thousands of wild animals during their 15 years managing the park, including several species of monkey, parrots, macaws and turtles among others. The refuge is also a permanent home to many animals which cannot be released, including pumas, jaguars, ocelots and a number of monkeys with history of mistreatment and abuse. The proposed route for the road passes through many of the park's animal management areas, and will take away many of the animals' territories, both those still in rehabilitation as well as those which have already been released.

Besides the devastating impact the road will have on the park, previous work and extensive studies have shown that the terrain will not be able to sustain the construction of a road. There have been several attempts in the past to build a road through the same area but the instability of the land has proved it impossible. Back in 1970 was the first attempt to open a road along the route, it was abandoned after three months as landslides sent the entire road into the nearby river.

More recently, in 2008, there was another attempt to build the road through the park (work began without any prior warning to the park) but this was stopped after pressure from the local media. Despite this, a year later in 2009, construction began again, again with no warning, and heavy machinery was sent in past the park limits, destroying one of the primate management areas which was still populated with monkeys while the tractors were trying to flatten it. That time the construction was stopped by presidential order from Evo Morales.

Since then, the area which was cleared has been completely eroded away by landslides, as well as causing other serious landslides in both sides of the road, up to 2km away. This is further proof that not only will the road not last, but the surrounding forest on the hillsides is facing the threat of complete erosion by landslides. Not only will the forest and animal refuge be destroyed, but neither will the local community have a road.

There is an alternative route for the road to be built. It would be 4km longer but would still connect the communities with the main road, without destroying a key habitat for thousands of animals, and an important tourism resource for the local communities (the park is one of the few tourist destinations in the area, and many hotels, restaurants, transport workers etc. benefit from the visitors and volunteers which come to the park).

Despite all of the above, the construction of the road is set to go ahead at the beginning of August 2010. Inti Wara Yassi is working hard with a very limited time scale to try to create new management areas for the animals, but the fact that the park is on the side of a hill means that there are very few appropriate flat areas to create cages and enclosures for the animals. Furthermore, the few areas which do exist are likely to be destroyed by landslides as a result of the opening of the road.

Inti Wara Yassi is appealing to the local community, local government, national government and national and international organizations for one last time to help to prevent what is not only going to be an environmental

catastrophe, but is also almost certain to be a waste of government funds and a false promise to the local communities, when their promised road falls into the river.

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Notes to Editors: The Inti Wara Yassi Community is a Bolivian NGO which has worked in the conservation of wild animals and their habitats since 1992. It now has three refuges in different parts of Bolivia, has received thousands of animals rescued from the illegal pet trade and circuses, as well as creating an international community of volunteers from all over the world. The organization has received international recognition from organizations such as ASHOKA and the Jane Goodall Institute, and is working closely with international organizations to share its extensive experience and learn from similar refuges in the world.

For more information please visit www.intiwarayassi.org

Contact and photos:

(Spanish) Tania Baltazar (CIWY President), Parque Machia, Villa Tunari, Bolivia. Tel 00 591 44136572, nenal@intiwarayassi.org

(English) Jonathan Cassidy (CIWY International Relations) Tel. 00 44 7730 985835, jon@intiwarayassi.org