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Dear Friend of Probe International,

While Petro-Canada is spending millions of dollars at home on an advertising campaign expressing concern for endangered plants and animals, it and 7 other multinational oil companies are embarked on an adventure in the Amazon that, if successful, will destroy vast tracts of rainforest. With the destruction of rainforests comes the loss of countless species - rare Amazonian plants and animals but also familiar ones, including Canadian songbirds that winter in the tropics. And rainforest destruction leads to decimation of native communities that are uprooted from their homelands to the poverty of urban slums.

Petro-Canada and the others mean no harm, of course - they only want to extract oil from the Amazon. But to get at the oil they usually build roads, and with those roads come settlers from other parts of the country who clear the forest for farmland. Because jungle soils usually can't support crops for more than a few short years, the settlers are soon forced to go deeper into the forest to clear more land, on a vicious cycle that perpetuates their own poverty while destroying forest land that sustainably had supported the Indians.

Because the need to preserve the world's remaining rainforest is so pressing, Probe International and other environmental groups from around the world met in Malaysia last spring to tackle the problem. These groups, members of the World Rainforest Movement, assigned responsibility for various tasks around the world. Probe International took on the task of mending Petro-Canada's ways, while environmental groups from other countries are tackling their own multinationals, and their own governments.

Petro-Canada is exploring for oil at two sites deep in the Ecuadorian rainforest, on land claimed by the Huaorani Indians. Some of the Huaorani do not object to the extraction of oil - their overriding concern is the protection of their land from settlers, and they argue that environmental damage could be minimal if Petro-Canada carried out its operations by helicopter instead of road.

But most Huaorani are either undecided or opposed to drilling. Like Indians in Canada's own Mackenzie Valley in the 1970's, they want more time to assess what oil extraction would

mean to their community and to their way of life. And they insist that they be given more time to try to settle their land claims, so that their subsequent negotiations with the oil companies and the Ecuadorian government take place on solid footing. In Canada, the Indians were given that time in the 1970's -- to have done otherwise would have been unconscionable.

By the time we learned of Petro-Canada's activities in the Amazon, it had nearly completed one road (to site "A") and was preparing to build a second to site "B". After months of correspondence, telephone calls, and meetings - and a press conference to publicize the environmental harm it was doing - we were able to convince Petro-Canada to act more responsibly. Exploration at site B is now proceeding by helicopter. The site A road was too far along to stop, but Petro-Canada did arrange to have the settlers who had already moved in relocated and compensated for the crops they were forced to leave behind. Petro-Canada is also patrolling the road to keep out other settlers, and according to a report we recently received from the region, the road, and so the Indian territory, is being protected. I will personally be monitoring the area later this month with the Confederation of Indian Nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon, to make sure there have been no violations.

But these are temporary solutions at best. Petro-Canada will only keep up the patrols as long as it's in Ecuador. And worse still, Petro-Canada has decided to build a road to site B should it strike oil.

If it does strike oil, we are asking it to halt operations until the Huaorani's land claims are settled, and until they have had a chance to decide whether or how they wish to develop. The Huaorani have been true guardians of the rainforest since time immemorial, and we know of no better protection for it than their stewardship.

Right now, Petro-Canada insists on building that road should it find oil regardless of the cost to the rainforest and its peoples - but we know that Petro-Canada's profits ultimately depend on the Canadian consumer, and experience shows that Petro-Canada will act responsibly if Canadians force it to.

Please address your concerns about the rainforest to: Mr. Wilbert Hopper, President, Petro-Canada, P.O. Box 2844, Calgary, Alberta T2P 3E3.

Sincerely



Peggy Hallward  
Director, Forestry Research

P.S. Please write to Mr. Hopper soon, as Petro-Canada expects to find oil any day. And please, if you value our efforts, support this campaign with a generous tax-deductible donation. As you can imagine, neither corporations nor governments will support controversial work such as ours - we depend on the donations of thousands of Canadians to conduct our research and publicize our findings.