

Dear Ingeniero Carlos Colóm,

**I am writing to oppose the construction of the Xalalá hydroelectric dam in Ixcán, Quiché.**

I am concerned about the project for the following reasons:

**1. The Xalalá dam will harm the local population and the environment.**

The Xalalá hydroelectric dam would flood some 31.8 km<sup>2</sup> (12 square miles), displacing dozens of communities. The majority of the population that would be uprooted is of the Q'eqchi' Maya ethnic group and agriculturally based. If their land is inundated, they will lose their livelihood and their way of life.

Communities that live downstream of the Xalalá site will also be impacted. Typical downstream effects of dams include diminished fish stocks, decreased water quality, and reduced fertility of farmlands and forests. Dams also spread waterborne diseases such as malaria.

Dams have well-documented environmental effects, including disruption of habitat and migration for both land-based and aquatic species. This in turn will affect the predominantly rural population of the Ixcán that relies heavily on farms, forest, and waterways for survival.

**2. In violation of international law, the government has not consulted with the people that will be affected.**

The Guatemalan government is required to consult with local indigenous groups regarding planned development on their lands, as per International Labor Organization Convention No. 169, Article 7, which reads:

*The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programs for national and regional development which may affect them directly.*

Not only has the Guatemalan government failed to seek the input of the indigenous inhabitants in the Ixcán regarding the Xalalá project; it has not even officially informed the affected communities of its intentions through adequate means.

**3. A lack of transparency characterizes the Xalalá plans.**

To date, the plans surrounding the Xalalá dam have been shrouded in secrecy. Communities scrambling for information have been met with conflicting data. For instance, details provided by the government at the Latin American Leadership Forum in New Orleans contradicts those presented at a June 2006 meeting with local leaders in the Ixcán. Potentially affected communities wonder how to prepare for their future in the midst of so many unknowns.

**4. The project will not provide electricity to needy Guatemalans.**

Approximately 20% of Guatemala's population as a whole, and 75% of Q'eqchi' Mayas, lack electricity (source: UNDP). Nevertheless, Guatemala is a net *exporter* of energy. The energy generated by Xalalá is slated to be sold to the export market rather than meet urgent local needs. In addition, the project is likely to fall short of its promises; according to the World Commission on Dams, large-scale hydroelectric dams are significantly less efficient than projected and are prone to high cost overrun. Dams of this magnitude are only marginally viable economically, and socially and environmentally they are a disaster.

Please do not let political pressure and individual economic interests in this project rule over respect for local peoples and international law. **Do not approve the Xalalá dam construction.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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