

Las Lianas

Resource Center for Science, Culture, & Environment

Quarterly Update--Spring 2005

Las Lianas Incorporates in Ecuador

In April, Las Lianas took the important step of obtaining formal status for our Ecuador office as a registered Ecuadorian non-profit organization. Incorporated under the name Centro Lianas, the Quito-based office will continue to facilitate the execution of our programs, as before.

This step broadens our fundraising opportunities and provides important visibility to the Ecuadorian operations. With interlocking boards and a shared mission, the two halves of Las Lianas will work together to continue and expand our work for indigenous rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development.

Oil Companies' Links with Military Revealed

Bolívar Beltrán and Jim Oldham

Recent research by Las Lianas has brought to light a disturbing process of militarization of the Amazon region and privatization of the control of Ecuador's military to protect the interests of multinational oil companies. We have obtained copies of secret contracts and security agreements between the Ecuadorian armed forces and foreign oil companies that reveal a military for hire and oil companies usurping the role of the elected government. There is a troubling history of links between multinational oil companies operating in the developing world and the armed forces of the host countries. Unocal in Burma, Chevron and Shell in Nigeria, and Occidental in Colombia have all been linked to lethal violence and human rights violations carried out by the armed forces in these countries while providing "security" for the oil companies. Although Ecuador has not suffered the history of military abuses that these three countries are known for, private contracts and security arrangements between foreign multinationals and the local security forces remain a serious threat to human rights and democratic rule.

While it is not news that oil exploration has generated conflict between multinational and indigenous peoples in Ecuador, or that the government and the military have generally allowed oil companies to impose terms on the communities whose land they enter, Las Lianas is now able to document formal links between the oil companies and the military and illustrate how multinationals direct military policy in Ecuador's Amazon region.

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Support Secoya Artists; Rest Easy All Summer



Handmade Secoya hammocks are now available from Las Lianas! Woven in the traditional manner, these hammocks are beautiful and strong—perfect for backyard relaxation. Prices are \$250-\$300 (depending on size), for hammocks made from hand-twisted palm fiber twine and \$140-\$180 for cotton string hammocks, with proceeds split between the artists and our projects. All hammocks come with artist's photo and background information.

For more information or to purchase a hammock, please contact us at laslianas@msn.com or by regular mail (address on back). Early orders will be filled instantly from hammocks we have in stock. Additional orders will allow us to commission new hammocks to be delivered in time for August vacations. To see other Secoya crafts available, visit our website: laslianas.org.

Oil --Military Links

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Central to these relations is a master agreement, the "Military Security Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry of Defense and the Oil Companies that Operate in Ecuador," signed in July 2001 by 16 multinational oil companies including the US companies Occidental, Burlington, and Kerr-McGee. The purpose of the contract is: "To establish ... the terms of collaboration and coordination of actions to guarantee the security of the oil installations and of the personnel that work in them."

This seems innocent enough. However, the reality is that these companies have oil concessions covering hundreds of square miles including, all or most of many indigenous territories. The result is that, at the request of the oil companies, the vast majority of indigenous lands in the Amazon region are militarized. Conflict has become more intense and communities resisting oil development, such as the Quichua settlement of Sarayacu in Napo province, as well as Shuar, Achuar, and Shiwiari communities to the south, have experienced threats and violence.

This master contract, like dozens of supplemental contracts between individual oil companies and the armed forces, was made in complete secret. Now that we have them, we can see that military involvement in conflicts between indigenous communities and oil companies, such as threats to force Sarayacu to accept oil development, are not isolated instances but part of a policy of intimidation by oil companies using the military as a private army. Look, for example, at the contract signed between Occidental and the Ministry of Defense. In this document, the armed forces contract with Occidental to:

Carry out armed patrols and checks of undocumented individuals in the area of Block 15...provide security guards for ground travel of personnel, materials, and equipment within the area of operations and its area of influence...[and] plan, execute, and supervise counterintelligence operations to prevent acts of sabotage and vandalism

What is striking is the way this agreement militarizes ancestral indigenous lands and threatens human rights. Block 15, Occidental's oil concession, overlays virtually all the lands held by the Secoya and Siona nationalities, as well as large portions of Huarani lands, and those of several Quichua and Shuar communities. None of these communities were informed about the security agreement, in direct violation of the Ecuadorian constitution and other laws.

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Donations can be sent to:

**Las Lianas Resource Center
301 East Hadley Road
Amherst, MA 01002**

Or you can donate on-line at: laslianas.org

Please consider signing up on-line to make a recurring donation (monthly, quarterly, or annually). Such commitments ease our financial planning and reduce fundraising costs.

The agreement puts indigenous people in potential conflict with the military just for carrying out normal activities on their lands. The concept of controlling "undocumented" individuals on indigenous lands is ludicrous if not dangerous. Many indigenous people, particularly elders, have no documentation; those who do don't carry their papers while moving about the rainforest. Thus, they are immediately at risk of being stopped and questioned or held by armed soldiers working for the oil company.

Occidental has also persuaded the army to base a detachment in a Quichua community. In August 2001, Occidental's head of security wrote Ecuador's commander of ground forces to describe Occidental's activities in the region and lay out the advantages to building a base in the community of Edén, on the Napo River. The base has since been built and is in use, on land expropriated from an indigenous community.

It's unusual, to say the least, that a foreign owned oil business should advise the Ecuadorian Armed Forces as to where best to base their soldiers and it is a sad reflection on the power relations in Ecuador that the advice was followed. The danger is that, now that the oil companies have established their authority over the military and made indigenous lands a target for military intervention, it would be all too easy to carry out military terror in support of oil development as has been seen in Burma, Nigeria, and Colombia. We hope that our efforts to make this information public can help the Ecuadorian people reclaim democratic control of their armed forces and of the foreign multinationals operating in the country.

A Spanish version of this article has been published in the Ecuadorian magazine Tintají, and a longer English version has been submitted to the Green journal Synergy and Regeneration for Fall publication.