

REQUEST CR-MICI001-2011, December 20, 2010

PROJECT: ELECTRIC INTERCONNECTION SYSTEM FOR THE CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES- SIEPAC

URGENT

As President of the SIEPAC-La Alfombra Committee, Mrs. Yamileth Romana S., National Document 1-456931, on behalf of the following communities of La Alfombra, Tinamaste, San Cristóbal, Blanca Cana, San Juan de Dios and Piedra Tres, would like to submit a formal complaint regarding the IDB Project 0035 (SIEPAC) - Road Section 7.

We think that the route selected by the Alfombra people violates the Bank environmental policies under the terms and conditions of the loan agreement. The selected road, which requires deforestation -- cutting more than 1,600 trees -- has not been subject to any proper environmental and biodiversity assessments. If completed as expected, it may cause irreversible damages to the area and its inhabitants. As shown by any supporting documentation, the proposed route cuts through the source of an important watershed mostly covered by a primary cloud forest. The steep mountain slopes will be unstable and highly vulnerable to landslides if the forest is disturbed in any way. This watershed area is at the head of the Cana Blanca River, which supplies water very much needed by thousands of people and animals living downstream along the Barú River, and then ends in the Pacific Ocean. Over the last years, there have been some of the most extreme climate conditions in Costa Rica, from drought to excessive rain, and any alteration of this vital significance, affecting such a sensitive watershed area, would not only be dangerous, but would violate our constitutional rights.

The community needs such water to be protected against the most difficult climate conditions. We are in the process of creating an ASADA to guarantee our rights to have the drinking water suitable for consumption from this watershed be preserved forever.

Furthermore, this area belongs to the Paso de la Danta Biological Corridor, which is part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, which is important for any future protection of plant, bird and animal population whose survival depends on the protection of this natural habitat. This makes Alfombra unique in its potential to become an ecological tourist destination. We currently have a new eco-tourist lodge, the Río Magnolia Lodge, operating in Alfombra in conjunction with several rental houses and cabins and restaurants that support the local economy. The proposed route would have a tower installed on the right-hand side of this hotel entrance, posing a risk for this multi-million investment. Ecotourism is our future, and it cannot be endangered by people who do not depend on it for their sustenance.

We have maps indicating alternate routes for ICE to use. In the ICE application, the SIEPAC-La Alfombra Committee has researched and submitted to ICE an alternate route that does not require the same degree of destruction along its path through grazing lands, and above everything, such area is less populated, and has a lesser impact on the economy. ICE has studied this route, and at a community meeting, did not want to answer any questions about the decision-making process for selecting the best route.

Since the inception of this Committee in 2009, there have been numerous attempts at reaching an agreement between the Committee and ICE. The current SINAC Director, a former MINAET Minister, the CCT Executive Director, an environmental lawyer representing both the CCT and ACLAP, and the Minister for "Peace with Nature", together with other individuals, had worked hard on helping to organize a meeting for us with the presence of the former ICE Executive President, Pedro Pablo Quirós.

Such meeting finally took place in November 2009, and Pedro Quirós announced thereon that the route selected by ICE would not go through our community. We felt a huge relief, and believed that his word was final.

However, four weeks later, ICE came back to resume working in the area. It was a devastating blow to us, but we recovered promptly with more determination to go on using the judicial system what we are currently doing. We would like to emphasize that ICE has not received the required permit from SETENA for such route.

We have become a strong and devoted support group, including environmentalists, lawyers, politicians, and public servants, as well as many local supporters. We need to expose the SIEPAC mistakes and the ICE decisions "to ignore the facts and put in danger an important biological area and sole source of water for future generations and the future of our community.

Therefore, we submit our complaint together with all supporting documents, pictures and maps for the Bank to review. We would like to receive an answer as soon as possible. ICE keeps ignoring the Costa Rican laws requiring a written consent of landowners to enter in their property, and as recent as last week, it was present at the forest outside the expropriation area, checking new trees without the consent of the landowner.

Please find enclosed police report and photos. We are also sending copies to CNN, national and international news agencies, local news shows in Costa Rica, television and radio stations, and NGOs, with the purpose of stopping this unnecessary environmental disaster from moving forward, since there is an alternate proposal from our committee and agreed by the MINAE, MAG, SINA, AyA, both local and international, NGOs and many thousands of individuals that may end up being affected by this route.

We demand that the SIEPAC-ICE be asked to immediately stop any works in La Alfombra until a thorough investigation is completed.

Mrs. Yamileth Romano S.