



Martin Alegria and The Great Stitch-Up

THE EIA "CONSULTATION" IN SUNDAY WOOD WAS NEITHER FREE NOR FAIR.



Gregory Ch'oc communities' representative addressing the meeting in Sunday Wood.

The sole public consultation to discuss the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for US Capital Energy's proposal to drill in the Sarstoon-Temash National Park did not allow for a full and proper venting of community concerns, nor did it facilitate responses to critical questions impacting the indigenous communities.

The meeting began at 5pm on Thursday October 25 2012, in the community centre of the Village of Sunday Wood. Many people from various communities were brought in by buses organized by the oil company, and were first faced with more than two and a half hours of presentation by representatives of the Department of the Environment and US Capital Energy's Allan Herrera. Only a minority of people could fit inside the building, and many community members could not follow proceedings from outside the hall, as the sound of a generator drowned out the speakers.



Gregory Ch'oc being forcibly stopped from speaking on behalf of his people, by Martin Alegria, Chief Environmental Officer.

Gregory Ch'oc had been appointed by resolution of the communities of Graham Creek, Crique Sarco, Conejo and Midway, to be their representative and spokesperson at the consultation. He was the first to rise to speak and address several issues relevant to the EIA and the impacts on the national park and the communities. He handed the resolutions from the four villages to Martin Alegria, who without opening or reading them, handed them immediately to his aide, and soon interrupted Ch'oc and urged him to stop talking. Then, with the help of Sunday Wood's Alcalde, Mr. Mateo Tush, an outspoken supporter of oil drilling, he attempted to wrestle away the microphone and **drag** Gregory Ch'oc across the room.

The initial rules had never indicated that each speaker would only be allowed one minute to speak, and once Gregory Ch'oc - as the representative of the buffer communities - began to speak, this rule was arbitrarily instituted on the spot to automatically prevent him from voicing these communities concerns. Even the police and members of the military were called in to try to restrain him. The Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM), the Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA), the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA), and the four communities that had mandated SATIIM to represent them, denounce this denial of freedom of expression that tramples on the rights of the indigenous peoples whose lands, territories and resources are the subjects of the EIA.

Before his participation, Gregory Ch'oc had called upon an elder from each of the communities he represents to start the discussion with a spiritual invocation, asking mother earth and the great creator to guide them in wisdom to come to a consensus that would have the best interest of the communities as the heart. This is the traditional way of beginning dialogue in these indigenous communities. However, Mr. Martin Alegria totally disrespected these elders and their communities by not allowing such traditional practice to occur. He prompted Ch'oc to begin without this and allowed only one elder, Mr. Pedro Ishim from Midway village to do the invocation as he claimed there was no time for this. These communities' spirituality has been insulted. Their way of conducting dialogue has been totally disregarded.

Rather than acting as the guardian of people's right to be fully informed, and rather than insuring that debate could occur in an informative and unbiased manner, Martin Alegria made no attempt to hide his support for US Capital's proposals. While he would exchange smiles with Allan Herrera when views were expressed in support of drilling, his refusal to respect or even to read the official nominations from the four villages showed the hand he was playing – to ensure

that the “consultation” was completed without the concerns and wishes of the most affected communities being fully expressed.

The organizers made no allocation for people to be given adequate time to address pressing and critical environmental, social and economic issues. Neither was adequate time given for proper translations of these. When the question and answer segment started the first reaction was for the government officials to shut down anyone who dissented.

Further injustices were perpetuated through the translation of the EIA presentation and the “questions and concerns” segment, which was conducted by US Capital Energy’s employee Lucio Shol. Shol failed to accurately and honestly translate arguments opposing the drilling proposals into and from Q’eqchi’, weakening critical comments, and finding himself unwilling or unable to translate technical information accurately.

SATIIM observed that members of NEAC, CEO of the Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry and Sustainable Development, Petroleum Director and other government officials were in the room, but they were never presented to the audience and so the communities could not address questions to them.

Regardless of their position on the issue, all event participants demanded that there be other consultations, and that the deadline for the approval of the EIA on October 31 is unfair, especially since the EIA was never translated into the native language of Q’eqchi’. While it was announced that summaries of the EIA were available in Q’eqchi’, these were never seen by, nor distributed amongst, the audience.

SATIIM, the MLA, the TAA and the four communities represented by SATIIM, maintain their call on both US Capital and the Government to translate the full 300 page EIA into Q’eqchi’ and Garifuna and to make copies available to the people of each village. Without examining the details of the EIA, the affected communities cannot exercise any informed consideration of the potential impacts of oil drilling.

SATIIM denounces the outright denial of the right of the representative of the buffer communities to express their concerns on their behalf.

SATIIM, the MLA, the TAA and the four communities represented by SATIIM, demand that genuine consultations be arranged that respect international human rights laws regarding consultations and the right to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples. A failure to follow the unambiguous international rules which have been developed precisely to govern such negotiations between indigenous communities, governments, and extractive industries will leave US Capital’s project without any legal basis.

This disgraceful situation has forced the four communities that SATIIM represents, to take a unanimous decision, which will be made known to this country and the international community in days to come.