

## Bribri, Naso Tjër-Di, Buglé, Wounaan, Emberá, Guna, Ngäbe

Consejo General Bribri, Consejo General Naso Tjër-Di, Congreso General Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé, Congreso Nacional Wounaan, Congreso General Emberá Alto Bayano, Congreso General de Tierras Colectivas Emberá y Wounaan, Congreso General Emberá Wounaan, Congreso General Guna de la Comarca Wargandi, Congreso General Guna de la Comarca Madungandi, Congreso General Guna de Dagargunyala, Congreso General de Guna Yala



Panama City  
June 20, 2012

Mrs. Lucía Chandeck,  
General Administrator of the National Environment Authority (ANAM), Panama,  
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Mrs. Kim Bolduc,  
Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, Panama, [kim.bolduc@undp.org](mailto:kim.bolduc@undp.org)

Dear Mesdames Chandeck and Bolduc:

As Traditional Authorities of COONAPIP, principal Caciques, Sagla Dummad, King, Bülu, General Congress and General Council Presidents, and Regional Caciques, we send you greetings. May the all-powerful God bless you and your activities.

As leaders of COONAPIP and the maximum authorities representing the Indigenous Peoples of Panama, we wish to inform you of our position regarding the participation of COONAPIP and Indigenous Peoples in the preparation of the REDD+ Strategy for the Republic of Panama, coordinated by UN-REDD and the National Environment Authority (ANAM). Before doing so, however, we must point out that Indigenous Districts and Territories contain an estimated 85% of all remaining forests outside protected areas, and as such play a central role in any proposed REDD+ initiative or mechanism.

Some of the relevant events that have occurred include the following:

1. In September 2009, ANAM claimed that Cacique Gilberto Arias of the Guna General Congress and Cacique Betanio Chiquidama of the Embera-Wounan Congress had endorsed Panama's REDD strategy on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples, and it assured the international agencies concerned with REDD that was the case. That false claim angered the Traditional Authorities of COONAPIP and led us to create an Indigenous Working Group to analyze the deficiencies of the REDD documents from the perspective of the Indigenous cosmovision and the participation mechanisms that existed at that moment. The Indigenous Working Group conducted its activities between September 23 and October 14, 2009.
2. As a result of this effort, on October 6, 2009, COONAPIP, ANAM, and UN-REDD agreed on a consensus document, which specified 19 points to be integrated into the main REDD document and added three annexes, which the process was to take into account. This document was subsequently presented to UN-REDD authorities and ANAM officials in Washington on October 29, 2009, who accepted it in its entirety (**Annex 1**).
3. On the basis of that agreement, UN-REDD provided US \$5.3 million to the Government of Panama, to formulate the REDD Strategy in coordination with the indigenous communities, including the direct participation of COONAPIP, in representation of those communities. At the



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- time, Mr. Leslie Marín, the ANAM official responsible for REDD, announced that there would be an indigenous coordinator for the REDD Strategy, in addition to the national coordinator.
4. In their reflections on the REDD process in Panama, the Traditional Authorities made clear that for COONAPIP to participate effectively in the process it would need to be strengthened as an institution. With this in mind, COONAPIP, with support from other organizations, prepared a strategic plan (PEIP), which it approved on May 6, 2011. COONAPIP formally delivered its strategic plan to UN-REDD and ANAM in August, 2011, with a proposed budget of US\$ 1.9 million. The President of COONAPIP followed that up with another letter in October 2011, expressing concern about the lack of progress related to the PEIP.
  5. After COONAPIP presented the PEIP and budget and the letter mentioned above, UN-REDD and ANAM made a counterproposal to COONAPIP, offering US\$ 1.3 million to fund COONAPIP's participation in the activities to formulate the REDD Strategy between October, 2011 and December 2013. Later, in a formal meeting between COONAPIP, UN-REDD, and ANAM on September 21, 2011, the three agreed that COONAPIP and UN-REDD would sign a Cooperation Agreement with a budget of US\$ 1,789,845.95 (**Annex 2**). Soon after, Ms. Vanessa Retana, of the UNDP Regional Center, officially announced that UN-REDD would transfer US\$ 1.7 million to COONAPIP so it could be an integral part of the REDD process in Panama. She made that statement during a workshop titled "Mesoamerican Consultation on the Common Approach to Environmental and Social Safeguards of the FCPF in the REDD+ Framework", organized by COONAPIP and the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests, in the Roma Hotel in Panama from September 26 to 28, prior to the Intersessional Meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Panama.
  6. After this official announcement, UN-REDD asked COONAPIP for documentation of its legal status, so that they could transfer the funds related to REDD. That generated a discussion among the Traditional Authorities, since COONAPIP's role is to represent the Indigenous Peoples in policy processes and to facilitate; it is not an NGO that implements projects. Given that, the authorities provided the UN-REDD with a list of Indigenous organizations that it trusted to administer the funds on behalf of COONAPIP. They proposed this option to Ms. Giselle Didier, the official responsible for UN-REDD in Panama, but she indicated that UNDP only had a few possible mechanisms that would allow it to transfer the resources (she mentioned five), and that there was no way to them to transfer more than a maximum of US \$50,00 to COONAPIP using the only really valid mechanism.
  7. This situation caused the COONAPIP to lose its offices and paid technical staff in early 2012, and led to great delays in implementing the PEIP, which was a very strong blow to the organization, particularly given the current difficult state of relations between Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Panama. Recently the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) provided COONAPIP US \$18,000, in coordination with the Panamanian Embera and Wounan Youth Organization (OJEWY), so that it could lease an office again from April, 2012 to April, 2013. On March 5, 2012, COONAPIP presented UNDP a budget of \$54,880 to hire technical staff needed to participate in the REDD process, which it was asked to present again on April 20<sup>th</sup>, however, UNDP has yet to respond.
  8. In April, UN-REDD and ANAM presented a work plan for 2012 that says that they will provide US\$ 200,000 to strengthen COONAPIP and \$69,390 for consulting Indigenous Peoples about



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the REDD+ process. They never consulted COONAPIP about the budget, and, needless to say, those amounts bare no relation to what was negotiated and agreed on previously.

9. At this point COONAPIP has lost all communication with UN-REDD and ANAM, despite the fact that COONAPIP designated a technical commission to work on these issues, headed by Cacique Betanio Chiquidama, COONAPIP's President. UN-REDD and ANAM have not designated any counterpart to work with the commission, which has made it impossible to continue work. Instead, ANAM official have made various attempts to meet Traditional Authorities separately and try to negotiate outside the framework of COONAPIP, which is totally improper.
10. In synthesis, 29 months have gone by since this process first started and we have seen no progress and no financial resources have been made available to carry out activities in our territories and communities. Nor have we seen good will and good faith on the part of UN-REDD; and even less from ANAM, the government entity responsible for the process of preparing the REDD+ strategy in the Republic of Panama in coordination with the Indigenous Peoples.

Given the above, we are obliged to conclude the following:

11. The process initiated by UN-REDD and ANAM has been riddled with incongruences and inconsistencies both with regards to the content of the proposed documents (R-PP) and the process itself.
12. UN-REDD+ and ANAM have failed to understand that COONAPIP is the political representative of the Indigenous People and a facilitating body, and not merely an implementing agency.
13. As COONAPIP we feel used in this process. We do not understand how it is possible that the United Nations— as the promoter and disseminator of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other initiatives to support Indigenous Peoples— can act in ways that are so inconsistent with these principles in its treatment of the Indigenous Peoples of Panama.
14. The mechanisms that UN-REDD and ANAM have used to strengthen our institution are not appropriate. The way they have acted with COONAPIP has generated confusion and inconformity in the indigenous communities and is an assault on principles and aspirations of our peoples, and their desire to seek unity and consolidate their efforts.
15. The annual plan that UN-REDD and ANAM presented in April in no way reflects the agreement they had made to provide \$1.79 to strengthen COONAPIP and implement the PEIP.
16. Informality and lack of transparency have been constants in the way UN-REDD and the ANAM have behaved in this process. To this date we COONAPIP has been unable to sign the agreement with these organizations that was negotiated and agreed in September, 2011.
17. This situation has left us with big doubts about the future: If we are having such problems in a process that is just beginning and the agencies involved behave in ways that are fundamentally inconsistent with the principles that are supposed to apply to REDD, what can we expect when the REDD strategy actually begins to be implemented?

Therefore and given the above, COONAPIP has decided the following:

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1. To denounce the failure of UN-REDD and the ANAM to comply with their commitments in the process and content of the REDD initiative in Panama.
2. To demand the establishment of a High-level Political Commission including UN-REDD, ANAM and COONAPIP to once again take up:
  - The original proposal to strengthen COONAPIP that was incorporated in the PEIP, with a budget of US\$ 1.79 million
  - The signing of the tripartite cooperation agreement negotiated in September 2011 and the definition of a clear work plan and appropriate mechanisms for transferring the resources promised to support COONAPIP.
3. To call for the government to issue the decree creating the National REDD Commission, including COONAPIP, civil society entities, and other government agencies that should be involved in preparing the REDD Strategy
4. To give the agencies involved a non-negotiable deadline of 30 working days from the time that this letter is formally delivered to comply with these demands. If that is not done, COONAPIP and the Indigenous Peoples of Panama will formally definitively withdraw from the REDD process in Panama, and we will communicate that to all pertinent entities.

With all of this in mind, we once again extend the good will and trust that characterizes us as Indigenous Peoples of Panama, and we fervently hope for a more open and direct relation with the government agencies and the international organizations that finance REDD+ in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sincerely:

**Betanio Chiquidama**  
President and General Cacique  
Emberá Wounaan District

**Elivardo Membache**  
Secretary and General Cacique  
General Congress of Emberá and Wounaan  
Collective Lands

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