Hundreds contest "XI Round" oil licensing

Quito, Ecuador – Hundreds of indigenous people gathered outside the Marriott Hotel in Quito today at the VII Annual Meeting of Oil and Energy where the Ecuadorian government announced the opening of the XI Round, an oil auction in which 13 oil blocks went on sale covering nearly eight million acres of rainforest in the Amazonian provinces of Pastaza and Morona Santiago near the border with Peru.

Led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Confederation of Amazonian Indigenous Nationalities (CONFENIAE) and representing seven indigenous nationalities, the group overtook the entrance to the hotel and were meet by military, police, private security forces and pepper spray. Several indigenous leaders entered the meeting and publicly confronted Minister of Non-Renewable Energy Wilson Pastor.

"CONFENIAE was never consulted about this," said Franco Viteri, President of CONFENIAE. "Our position on oil extraction is clear: We are absolutely opposed."

The indigenous groups have long resisted oil drilling on their ancestral lands, fearing that the arrival of extractive industries would damage their water supply and threaten their traditional way of life. Indigenous representatives criticized the government's consultation process, a right guaranteed by the Ecuadorian Constitution, international treaties and rulings by international courts including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. According to Achuar leader Domingo Peas, the so-called "consultation" process by the Ecuadorian government did not include indigenous participation and was not in accordance with traditional decision-making practices nor carried out in native languages.

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