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Ministerio de Cultura
Gobierno del Perú
Av. Javier Prado Este 2465
San Borja, Lima 41
Perú

Dear Madam Minister Diana Álvarez-Calderón Gallo:

I write on behalf of the two hundred members of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA) to express our deep concern over the precarious situation of the isolated Mashco-Piro people in Madre de Dios, the absence of any coordinated response by Peruvian authorities, and the chaotic and sometimes careless way that missionary organizations, local indigenous peoples and even tourists have filled this void with well-intentioned but potentially dangerous interventions that could have disastrous impacts on the health and livelihood of this vulnerable indigenous population. We urge the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and other institutions to take immediate steps to remedy this situation.

As a signatory of ILO Convention No 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Perú is bound by international treaties to defend the cultural and human rights of all indigenous peoples, including the Mashco-Piro and other isolated groups of people who require special attention due to their unusual degree of vulnerability. While SALSA insists on the Mashco-Piro's right to territorial integrity and self-determination, including the right to voluntary isolation if they continue to choose it, we also recognize that their susceptibility to introduced diseases and external pressures could eventually require intervention on the part of the state.

We applaud the Peruvian Ministry of Culture's recent initiative to establish a working agreement with Brazil's National Indian Foundation, FUNAI, that will address the situation of isolated indigenous groups along the Peru-Brazil border. FUNAI recently demonstrated its unique competence and experience in handling precarious, unpredictable situations of contact, in the case of the isolated peoples of the Xinane River in Acre, who are closely related to the Nahua, Chitonahua and other isolated and recently contacted

peoples of Peru, as well as in last month's case of the Korubo group of the Javari valley, close to the frontier between Peru and Brazil.

We strongly urge the Ministry of Culture, along with other relevant governmental institutions (for example, the National Protected Areas Service, which administers Manu Biosphere Reserve and Alto Purus National Park, where the Mashco-Piro live), to strengthen this collaborative work with concrete actions, including the immediate development of emergency response plans and trained, specialized medical teams. We also suggest the Ministry do more, in conjunction with FUNAI, to learn as much as possible in the field as to the location of these various isolated groups and to identify the specific set of pressures (regardless of whether it is caused by environmental, territorial, internal or external conflicts) that have coincided, in recent years, to make several isolated groups in different regions independently seek out their neighbors for assistance.

Incidents with isolated peoples tend to concentrate in the dry season, when these populations are more mobile and when they also may experience particular nutritional distress. These incidents will likely intensify in coming months and years. Therefore, we strongly urge the government to develop, finance and implement a fully operational strategy to deal with this isolated population—ideally in coordination with FUNAI and the government of Acre—by next year's dry season (May-November) at the very latest.

The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA) is an international professional association for anthropologists specializing in lowland regions of South America. SALSA's main goals are to foster sound and ethical research on the peoples and environments of lowland South America, and to promote the education of students and the general public on issues that we study. In view of this mission we urge the Peruvian government and regional authorities to fulfill their obligations under international human rights law by committing to the following specific actions:

- 1) Maintain a permanent presence in the region in order to minimize risk to the Mashco-Piro from tourists, missionaries, extractive industry workers, and other agents;
- 2) Develop and deploy anthropologically sound contingency plans and protocols by, with and for neighboring populations as part of wider protection plans for isolated peoples;
- 3) Develop and deploy a specific plans for dealing with emergency situations involving the Mascho-Piro and other isolated peoples both in Alto Madre de Dios and in Las Piedras
- 4) Strengthen its ongoing collaboration with FUNAI while also working closely with indigenous federations like FENAMAD that are dedicated to protecting the rights of isolated peoples.

SALSA members are deeply committed to the well-being of indigenous peoples of Peru and we continue to monitor their situation. We recognize that you have expert advisers already, but would be happy to provide you the names of SALSA members with long-term experience and intimate knowledge of these matters, should you request them.

We call upon the Peruvian government to fulfill its constitutional and international obligations to protect all indigenous peoples within its borders. We look forward to receiving information about the measures you are taking to resolve the situation of the isolated Mashco-Piro people.

Respectfully,

Jonathan Hill
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