

VXP



Tracking #: *1C1D1QQD*

From: KUNA MBARETE/ BLANKA
EMMANUEL MACRON

Package: Pak
Service: Delvry

To: **French Mission**

Floor: 44 Suite:

Attention: Receptionist

Location ID



VXP



Tracking #: *1C1D1QQB*

From: KUNA MBARETE/BLANKA
GRETA THUNBERG

Package: Pak
Service: Delvry

To:

Swedish Mission

Floor: 46 Suite:

Attention: Receptionist

Location ID



New York, September, 2019

**Open Letter¹ to the Secretary General of the organization
of the United Nations (UN), Mr. António Guterres
on the responsibilities (of) and Actions to be taken by the
Government of Bolivia in relation to the fires in
“Chiquitania”² - Request for your good offices.**

**Bolivian citizens demand that the BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT fulfill our international
responsibilities and commitments and so must demand it the international community.**

At the time that President Morales was giving his speech at the General Assembly of the UN, on the morning of September 24, the Chiquitanian Dry Forest in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, continued to burn (after more than 50 days, 49 fires remain active in 12 municipalities, 46% of burnt land belong to protected areas)³. As a result, BOLIVIA and the WORLD have lost an irreparable part of their lungs.⁴ Moreover, they have lost unique biodiversity and ecosystems that serve the planet but in particular, **serve 5 indigenous peoples of the Bolivian eastern lowlands**, among which the indigenous **“Chiquitanos” people**, that inhabit the department of Santa Cruz, the most populous department in Bolivia. With 3 out of 11.3 million inhabitants, Santa Cruz is responsible for the production of 70% of the food consumed by the country.

Since July, but with greater intensity since August, forest fires have devoured more than 3 million hectares of Chiquitanian dry forest (the size of Switzerland), at a rate of 120,000 hectares per day. No less than 80% or what is 1.5 to 2 million animals and other living things have died. About 4,000 families (40,000 people) have been affected, many of whom are being evacuated.⁵ **But worse, the fires have not been controlled to this date**, contrary to what President EMA⁶ declared during his address to the UN General Assembly on September 24⁷. Moreover, according to international cooperation experts currently in Bolivia, these are 40-metre-high flames in some cases (capable of generating fire cyclones), called sixth (6th) generation flames, which are normally seen in volcanic eruptions and other major natural disasters. Every day that goes by, the situation becomes more

¹ Esta carta abierta se escribe y suscribe en forma simultánea en Nueva York y Santa Cruz de la Sierra, versiones idénticas en Inglés y Español para ser entregadas a cada destinatario en Nueva York y Bolivia.

² <https://www.facebook.com/789557856/posts/10156742616787857?sfns=mo>

³ El Deber, September 26

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/24/opinion/bolivia-amazon-fires.html>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/CabildeoDigital/videos/2523233557754304?sfns=mo>

⁶ Evo Morales Ayma

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEp4l-oi5_Q

complex and the less effective that international cooperation is becoming due to lack of coordination of efforts on site, among other not so clear reasons.⁸

In the face of this, more and more voices are being added to the hundreds of thousands already erected in Bolivia and beyond, which ask the **Bolivian government to issue a NATIONAL DISASTER declaration**, along with the repeal of national legislation and policies that made the forest fires possible. Voices that we want to raise here, through your intercession, before the community of nations, member states of the United Nations (UN), also States party to the Paris Climate Agreement (2015), meeting at the annual UN General Assembly, and at the Climate Summit, in response to your urgent call, Mr Secretary-General, to move from speech to action. Among them, the Bolivian State.

Just as we protested⁹ in front of the UN at the time of the speech by President EMA before the General Assembly (GA)¹⁰, we hereby denounce the President's failure to speak the truth (he lied) on both his address before the Climate Summit and his address before the GA. **It is not true that the government was surprised by the fires, nor that the government's response was "immediate and effective" nor that the fires had then been controlled¹¹. The only true statement is that the fires are still uncontrolled today.**¹²

It is in this context that we publicly call on the **GOVERNMENT of BOLIVIA**, through your good offices, Mr. Guterrez, to **reaffirm its commitment –moving from speech into action- to the fulfillment of its international responsibilities**. Notably, (a) its first and most urgent obligation to **provide assistance to the people and communities affected by the environmental and human rights crisis** caused by the Chiquitanian forest fires; (as above cited the fires have been going on for 7 weeks and have not yet been controlled). As well as comply with its general obligations to inter alia, (b) **ensure sustainable use of natural resources, develop and implement substantive environmental standards, (...) pay due regard to the precautionary approach**¹³, which compels the Bolivian State to **take effective measures to prevent severe or irreversible damage even in the absence of scientific certainty¹⁴** and (c) **to protect ecosystems and biodiversity and against environmental harm that interferes with the enjoyment of human rights (to life, health, food, water, and culture)**. All of the above, within its obligations under environmental and human rights treaties and conventions to which it is party, including Bolivia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) commitments to stop climate change under the Paris 2015 Agreement on Climate Action.

⁸ [lcentinelavirtual.com/2017/07/13/hallan-mega-laboratorio-cocaina-la-chiquitania/](http://centinelavirtual.com/2017/07/13/hallan-mega-laboratorio-cocaina-la-chiquitania/)

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/KunaMbareteComunidadInternacional/videos/788904921543508/>

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/2026013460997697/posts/2305665219699185?sfns=mo>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/2026013460997697/posts/2305599726372401?sfns=mo>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/789557856/posts/10156742616787857?sfns=mo>

¹³ Human Rights Council, General Comment no.36 on Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, relating to the right to life.

¹⁴ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion 23/2017. The Environment and Human Rights (interpretation and scope of Articles 4(1) and 5(1) of the American Convention on Human Rights.

More specifically, we ask the EMA government to **demonstrate to the international community that it has taken and will continue to take the necessary steps to stop the fires**, identify and punish those responsible, and that it has developed a credible plan (including its financing) to repair the irreversible damage to the Chiquitanian Dry Forests and restore the biodiversity and ecosystems to the extent possible, well as to prevent the fires from recurring. **We have serious doubts that it will be able to do so!!** (Please refer to the Attachment integral part of this letter describing the cause / effect relationship between national legislation and policies and the fires, as well as the government's slow and ineffective management of the ensuing environmental and human rights crisis)-

But beyond urging the government of Bolivia to provide explanations to the international community on its compliance with international responsibilities and obligations (moving from speech to action) and to reaffirm its political will to contribute to the international crusade to stop climate change, in relation to the Chiquitanian forest fires, we ask the international community, through your good offices, Mr. Guterrez, the Secretary General of the UN, to put pressure on President EMA to undertake, as a matter of urgency, the following three (3) Concrete Actions:

1. To issue a "National Disaster" declaration

First and foremost, that the Government of EMA issue a "NATIONAL DISASTER" declaration and thus allow access to the United Nations specialized mechanism that ensures the logistical coordination necessary for the effective and efficient use of available resources on the ground. Consisting of both international cooperation and humanitarian aid being deployed by civil society and local entities, resources to combat the fires are significant and should be enough to put out the fires, if only used effectively. It is the dispersion of efforts and resources undoubtedly one of the causes of the spread and continuation of forest fires, besides, the apparent "lack of interest" (other interests) of the national government¹⁵. In doing so, respond to the plea of Bolivian civil society¹⁶ and in particular, that of the groups directly affected, which have declared that their local and national capacities to put out the fires have been largely exceeded thus, fulfilling a prior condition for declaration of natural disaster (see pronouncement of the Assembly of the Cruceñidad by Comité Cívico Pro Santa Cruz¹⁷, on September 11)¹⁸.

It is not true that the capacity of the Bolivian government has not been exceeded. **On the contrary, Bolivia is losing the battle against the fires!!!!** In particular, the fires have exceeded the country's technical and coordination capacities, and surely the country's financial capacity, even though the government does not admit it. Losses to BOLIVIA and to the world will continue to

¹⁵ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20190823/hallan-laboratorio-cristalizacion-cocaina-santa-cruz>

¹⁶ <https://fmbolivia.com.bo/lea-las-11-resoluciones-del-comite-pro-santa-cruz-en-defensa-de-la-chiquitania-y-el-21f/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/ComiteProSC/>

¹⁸ infobae.com/america/america-latina/2019/09/11/la-asamblea-ciudadana-declaro-desastre-nacional-por-los-incendios-en-bolivia-y-crecen-las-protestas-contra-evo-morales/

grow if the government of BOLIVIA continues to refuse international cooperation to better manage the crisis even if it means giving up some state control of resources and information.¹⁹

At the same time, we ask you and the international community to encourage the EMA government to join and respect our departmental and national state of mourning²⁰. While local authorities and institutions (including private sector entities taking part at FEXPO 2019) have cancelled all acts to celebrate the September ephemerides of Santa Cruz, the current **unconstitutional and illegitimate candidates**²¹ EMA and AGL²² “on-office”, running for president and vice-president of Bolivia for the 4th time,²³ in the coming general election on 20 October, based on their “alleged human right to indefinite reelection, in contravention of the Bolivian Constitution and the results of the February 21 referendum, **continue to campaign and party (with state assets) in affected Chiquitanian towns, and in the city of Santa Cruz**, exchanging votes for humanitarian assistance.²⁴ Such acts are non- acceptable in face of a disaster of severe magnitude that amounts to a crime against the environment, a crime against indigenous peoples, against the Bolivian people and genocide against humanity.

2. To Repeal and reverse national legislation and policies that contravene the national constitution and make the Bolivian State non-compliant with its obligations and commitments vis a vis its citizens and towards the international community

Secondly, and even more forcefully, we ask you and the international community, through your good offices, to URGE the GOVERNMENT OF BOLIVIA, to **the repeal national legislation and policies that allowed the environmental disaster in “Chiquitania”**, in sheer contravention of the Bolivian Constitution (CPE), Law 300 of Mother Earth and other Bolivian legislation in contravention of international environmental and human rights law. We demand specifically, compliance with provisions of **Article 342 and ensuing articles enshrined in the Bolivian Constitution**, that demand:

"the duty to preserve and protect natural resources and to contribute to the environmental balance, considering the natural heritage a public good / public interest, so that people have the right to be consulted on any decision that may affect the quality of the environment, the duty to avoid, mitigate, .repair, and immediately compensate for any damage, while establishing responsibilities and sanctions for environmental crimes which do not prescribe with time. Furthermore, the government of Bolivia is bound by its constitution, **to use natural resources in each subsystem in sustainable ways**, and to respect and guarantee the use of land based on biophysical, socio-cultural and economic variables linked to the characteristics of the soil, thus prohibiting the conversion of soils to uses different than those stemming from their technical

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/CabildeoDigital/videos/2523233557754304?sfns=mo>

²⁰ https://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2019/2019_09/nt190920/principal.php?n=79&

²¹ https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-011/18

²² Alvaro García Linera

²³ Art.168 of the Bolivian Constitution allows reelection for 2 consecutive periods or mandates.

²⁴ https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/Quintana-Robore-Presidente-Evo-anos-bolivia_0_3216878298.html

classification according to its natural uses, and making infringements of the law punishable”, just to name the most important relevant CPE provisions.

Accordingly, the GOVERNMENT OF BOLIVIA must repeal the following national legislation:

- **Supreme Decree D.S.3793 of 9 July 2019, that allowed “controlled burning” and clearing of forests in private and communal land;**
- **Law 741 of 29 September 2015** which gives the green light to cut or burn down up to 20 hectares, (before this law the maximum was 5 hectares) and allows the occupation of forest land without a technical “plan for the use of the soil”;
- **Law 1171 of April 25 2019, on the handling and use of fire in agriculture and cattle growing activities; and,**
- **Law 337 of 11 January 2013 on “forgiveness” for the dismantling of forests and restitution obligation of only 10% of the area.**

It must concomitantly, **reverse underlying national policies** aimed at expanding the agricultural frontier for food security as well as for the export of meat and soybeans to China and also for the production of ethanol and bio fuels, in addition to its “declared” policy of intercultural expansionism/internal colonization from the highlands to the lowlands of Bolivia, and other not so straightforward interests²⁵, as mentioned. Unless it can explain to the international community “what measures were taken to avoid piercing extremely sensitive rights such as environmental stability and for the protection of unique biodiversity and ecosystems, (where the practice of slash and burn is no longer justified)”.

3. **To respect and guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples of the Chiquitania – to respond positively and immediately to the rightful and legitimate demands**

Finally, we wish to convey to you, Secretary General Guterres, **the demands of the Chiquitanian indigenous nation**, represented by their Chiquitanian Indigenous Organization (OICH), for the same purpose, to **URGE the GOVERNMENT OF BOLIVIA, through your good offices, to respond to their just and legitimate demands for respect for their basic human rights, reflected in their 13 points resolution, summarized below. They have been so severely affected by the fires but also by discriminatory national policies and practices, and deserve ours and the world’s wholehearted support.**

Under the leadership of their Organización Indígena Chiquitana (OICH), members of the Chiquitano indigenous group, initiated their “**March no.10**”, leaving San Ignacio de Velasco. **on September 16**, in the direction of the city of Santa Cruz with final destination the city of La Paz where they expect to meet the president EMA and hand him over their 13 points plea. They are expected to arrive in Santa Cruz, prior to **October 4th** in time to participate in the “**Departmental**

²⁵ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20190823/hallan-laboratorio-cristalizacion-cocaina-santa-cruz>

Cabildo”, organized by the “Comité Cívico pro Santa Cruz”. The OICH’s 13 just and legitimate demands:

1. Conduct of an environmental audit and sanctioning of those responsible for the fires;
2. Cease interference with indigenous self-determination and self-government;
3. Compliance with the Bolivian Constitution and with Law 1715-3545 SNRA, Compliance and enforcement and full compliance with Law 1715 art.43.1-3
4. Immediate titling of all Communal Lands of Origin (TCOs) currently being evaluated/processed by INRA in favor of indigenous peoples and communities... (the Government of the governing MAS, substituted the ECAS for TCOs thus making it possible to endow land to new settlers, to the detriment of natives of the land).
5. Eviction from all illegal settlements and illegal occupations in the titled territories or in the process of being titled, through the competent authorities
6. Demand the Departmental Government of Santa Cruz, to in turn, require INRA and the ABT to form and operate the Departmental Agricultural Commission (CAD) in accordance with current regulations and with the mandated participation of the Chiquitania Indigenous Organization (OICH)
7. Implementation and Compliance of DS24125 ratified as Law 2553 (PLUS Law)
8. Abrogation of Law 741 of 29 September 2015 and DS 3973 of 10 July 2019
9. NATIONAL DISASTER status declaration, to allow mobilization of... (..) and international aid to tackle forest fires in Chiquitania...
10. Respect and guarantee of compliance with the rights to a safe and healthy environment, to biodiversity and ecosystems
11. Direct management and management of the 22 Protected Areas (APs) and forest reserves by indigenous organizations and nations.
12. Repair of environmental damage and compensation for socio-environmental and cultural affectation to indigenous peoples.
13. Require strict application of international and national regulations relating to free and informed prior consultation for any land distribution, land use or natural resource extraction measures, in the Chiquitanian territory.

Finally, we would like to the inform you as well as inform the international community, through your intercession, that there is a **general consensus among Bolivians**, as described in the Attachment, both on the serious consequences (although they need to be determined more accurately), that the Chiquitano disaster will have in ecological environmental terms,²⁶ as well as its damaging effects on the population²⁷, and in particular on the livelihood of at least 5 indigenous nations living in the Chiquitania region of Santa Cruz, (approximately 80,000 people). Furthermore, there is general agreement about the direct cause/effect relationship between legislation and government policies and the most devastating forest fires in Bolivia's recent history. In particular, we hold President EMA, as head of government, and his ministers accountable for the causes and origin of the fires, as well as for the government’s ineffective management of the subsequent environmental and human rights crisis.

²⁶ <http://eju.tv/2019/09/morado-tipa-y-roble-el-fuego-arrasa-con-maderas-preciosas-de-la-chiquitania-boliviana>

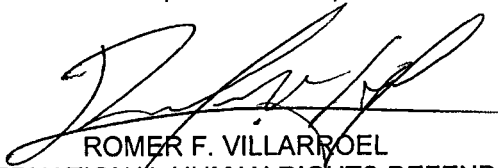
²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/2026013460997697/posts/2307617259503981?sfns=mo>

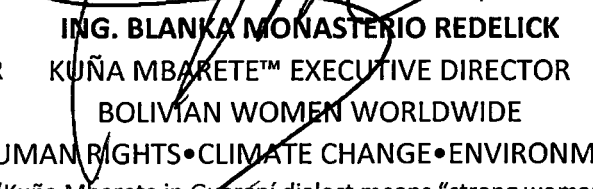
In short, the Bolivian community²⁸ that raised our voices in front of the United Nations headquarters on 24 September²⁹, at the time when the President of the Bolivian State was addressing the international community gathered at the UN General Assembly, as well as Bolivians at home, **reaffirm hereby our rejection and condemnation of the President's statements.** He said that he had been "surprised by the fire", that "the government's response had been swift and effective", that the government of Bolivia has the technical and financial capacity to control the fires (reason not to declare a national disaster). **This letter provides the links to abundant public information that confirm just the contrary, that the fires continue uncontrolled causing irreparable and irreversible destruction of Bolivian forests, biodiversity and ecosystems that serve humanity as a whole.**

We therefore add to our initial SOS call, **this new urgent call for your good offices, Mr. Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.** Time to save the planet is over, as we all know!!! It is therefore imperative that together, the international community, states and civil society exert joint pressure on the Bolivian Government, to urge it comply with its international commitments and obligations vis vis Bolivian citizens but also vis a vis global citizens. **That is, that the Bolivian Government, at once, (1) declare a National Disaster, (2) repeal national legislation and policies based on the unsustainable use of natural resources that enabled forest fires and, (3) finally respect and ensure respect for the rights citizens and the human rights of indigenous peoples.**

Please know that we are issuing copies of this letter to Greta Thunberg and other key stakeholders of climate action in the hope that they will all join our voices to save the Chiquitanian forest, a piece of the lungs of the world, and put pressure on the Government of Bolivia, and President EMA to act accordingly and with the necessary urgency, as requested in this letter.

We hope that our plea to you and to the international community through your good offices, will be heard and acted upon, and, take this opportunity to convey to you, Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Guterres, the assurances of our greatest consideration and respect.


ROMER F. VILLARROEL
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER
AICAC-HR ID Number:HR421018


ING. BLANKA MONASTERIO REDELICK
KUÑA MBARETE™ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BOLIVIAN WOMEN WORLDWIDE
HUMAN RIGHTS • CLIMATE CHANGE • ENVIRONMENT
(Kuña Mbarete in Guaraní dialect means "strong woman")

cc. Greta Thunberg

cc.: Señora Ana Angarita, Coordinadora Residente a.i. del Sistema de Naciones Unidas en Bolivia,
Representante Residente del UNFPA

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/KunaMbareteComunidadInternacional/videos/788904921543508/>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/johnny.auza.3/videos/10156627957651717?sfns=mo>

cc. President of France, Emmanuel Macron
c/o Permanent Mission of France to the UN
c/o Embassy of France, La Paz, Bolivia
cc: Organización Indígena Chiquitana (OICH)
cc: Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, Gobierno de Bolivia, Gobierno Autónomo Departamental
de Santa Cruz, Mancomunidad de Municipios de la Chiquitania, Comité Cívico Pro Santa Cruz
cc: National and international news agencies, and advocates of human rights

ATTACHMENT

TO OPEN LETTER TO UN SECRETARY GENERAL, ANTONIO GUTERRES ON THE “CHIKUITANIAN FOREST FIRES” in Santa Cruz, BOLIVIA

Role and responsibility of the Bolivian government for the causes and management of the Chikuitano environmental crisis

Probable Causes of the fires

From different environmental and academic institutions, it has been pointed out that the trigger for the environmental disaster, was the **Supreme Decree D.S.3973** promulgated by President Morales last 9 July, which authorized burning and dismantling (clearing) of forest land on private and communal property in the Santa Cruz and Beni departments of the country. (despite the existence of wildfires since July 1).

Knowledgeable intellectuals that are also familiar with the area, notably, experts from the CEJIS Foundation and Earth Foundation, recognize that laws have been enacted during the current EMA government to loosen environmental protection, biodiversity and ecosystem standards, in contravention of the **Bolivian State Constitution (CPE) and related legislation**. The new norms have given way to burning and clearing of forest land, including those within protected areas, with the justification of extending the agricultural frontier, for food production but also for the production of ethanol and biofuels associated with agro-industry, not to mention other possible interests³⁰.

In addition to the **D.S.3793 of 9 July**, they cite **Law 337 of 11 January 2013** on "forgiveness" for the dismantling of forests and restitution obligation of only 10% of the area; **Law 741 of 29 September 2015** which gives the green light to cut or burn down **up to 20 hectares**, (before this law the **maximum was 5 hectares**) and allows the occupation of forest land without the exigency of a technical "plan for the use of the soil", benefiting numerous communities to which the Bolivian "Instituto de Reforma Agraria (INRA) provided land titles between 2015 and 2016 and which conspicuously coincided with an increase in heat points (focos de calor) during comparable periods (from 2.000 in 2015 to close to 9.000 in 2016). Also, **Law 1171 of April 25 2019**, on the handling and use of fire in agriculture and cattle growing activities. In addition, the ensuing statements by the president himself and the minister of the area are very revealing of the true intent of those measures by the Bolivian government.

El Deber, 20 August, quotes the President's remarks that: "small families, if not by clearing land, how will they survive?"³¹ while in the newspaper "Los Tiempos, 21 August", Land Minister Cesar Cocarico said, "there must continue to be settlements otherwise we will not have food in the

³⁰ linked to illicit drug production

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/789557856/posts/10156742616787857?sfns=mo>

future”.³² Minister of Interior Juan Ramon Quintana, declared in an interview with DW in Spanish, “fires are almost the natural child of agriculture”³³

In the light of those statements, The BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT must explain to the world, the relationship between the fires and the above cited legislation, but more urgently, **explain the reasons for its refusal to issue a NATIONAL DISASTER declaration, including clarifying reports by foreign fighters about the government’s half-hearted response to the fires** (see news reports by Spanish and other firefighters, among others)³⁴, as well as reports about the finding of clandestine cocaine processing plants.

Government policies based on the unsustainable use of natural resources, discriminatory land distribution rights (re settlement of populations (internal colonization)) in detriment and in outright violation of the rights of indigenous populations of the Chiquitanian region of Santa Cruz

The president of Bolivia, EMA will also need to justify before the international community whether national policies being implemented during his 14 year tenure are "sustainable" and consistent with its international obligations under environmental and human rights treaties and conventions to which BOLIVIA is party to and/or to which it is bound by customary international law. In particular, we ask the President to account for current government’s national policies involving **resettlement of populations from the western Altiplano (La Paz, Oruro, Potosi) to the eastern lowlands (Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz), land distribution and titling rights which are clearly discriminatory of local populations including indigenous people.** According to historian Paula Peña Hasbun,³⁵ in the 10 year period between 2006 and 2016, (There is no available data by INRA for the ensuing 2016-2019 period) there were 1.400 new settlements (consisting of more or less 350.000 people) to the Chiquitanian region. Of all land titles granted by the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA), which is the central government entity **in charge of land titling, only 4% were granted to indigenous peoples. 90% were awarded to newcomers (colonos) from the National Workers Organization (CSUTB) and “interculturales”, all friends of the governing MAS party.** And worse, this opaque process is carried out without any participation in decision making by local governments and communities and without due respect for the forest use and/or status of protected areas of the land being granted. Furthermore, **in too many cases, “colonos” do not settle in, but instead immediately turn to land trafficking.**

Relationship between new settlements and the fires

Peña further points out that according to the information system of the Government of Santa Cruz (SATIF), the fire lines in Chiquitania, **coincide with the settlements as well as coincides with the**

³² <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/opinion/Error-fatal-20190910-9606.html>

³³ <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/Amnistia-pide-a-Evo-suspender-aplicacion-de-decreto-que-permite-quemas-20190909-8584.html>

³⁴ <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/santacruz/Medio-espanol-denuncia-que-hay-autoridades-en-Bolivia-que-no-hacen-lo-suficiente-para-combatir-los-incendios-20190919-9273.html>

³⁵ <https://www.sceconomico.com.bo/la-angustia-colectiva-crucena/>

complaints of the mayors most affected by the settlements, that these occur at election time. Such findings are consistent with what we are witnessing today as the decree D.S.3973 allowing for controlled burning of land was signed by President EMA on July 9 with elections due on October 20. News of Minister Quintana, reaching out to those affected by the fires, with offers of water, food and other supplies in exchange for votes have outraged our Bolivian society.³⁶

Management of the crisis³⁷

By the end of July, more than 300,000 hectares were already reportedly burnt, however, on **20 August**, the Ministry of Defense (with top responsibility for environmental risk management) – then, with more than 700,000 hectares in ashes-, said “the FIRE IS UNDER CONTROL”. Subsequently, **On 25 August**, with more than 1 million hectares burned, the national government decided to ACCEPT INTERNATIONAL HELP, without repealing any rule, let alone issuing a DECLARATION OF NATIONAL DISASTER.

After the declaration of NATURAL DISASTER by the Departmental Government of Santa Cruz (Gobernación de Santa Cruz), on **17 August 2019**, the central government took charge of actions to fight the fires. It declared NATIONAL EMERGENCY on **August 18** but it took two weeks to accept assistance from cooperating countries. Since then, it has not only contracted the SuperTanker (Boeing 747-400), the world's largest and most recommended aircraft in such disasters, but has also incorporated a Russian aircraft Ilyushin of equal characteristics and one helicopter Chinook. Helicopters from Peru and France are operating alongside 6 government helicopters. Our country has and continues to receive technical, financial support and equipment from countries acting within the framework of bilateral cooperation agreements (USA, France, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Belgium, Switzerland), as well as from the European Union (EU) and the (UN). However, a NATIONAL EMERGENCY is not the same as a NATIONAL DISASTER declaration in that the latter would have technical effects that will activate access to other types of aid including access to the United Nations (UN) mechanisms for the effective delivery of international cooperation and humanitarian assistance. The reason for not declaring NATIONAL DISASTER, in the words of the vice president AGL³⁸, is twofold: “the capabilities of the national government have not been exceeded or worse, “Bolivians are not beggars and are thus not willing to put hand over our country to an international body”. Vice-president AGL has reiterated that the central government has the financial capabilities to deal with the disaster and that the government has already spent \$23 million US dollars. However, the issue is not how much the government has earmarked but whether funds, technical and other resources are used effectively³⁹ to control the fires.

³⁶ https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/Quintana-Robore-Presidente-Evo-anos-bolivia_0_3216878298.html

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/789557856/posts/10156742616787857?sfns=mo>

³⁸ Alvaro García Linera

³⁹ There is also the issue of insufficient coordination of efforts since international aid is being channeled through the national government without adequate participation of local governments in the area nor with the departmental “Gobernación de Santa Cruz”.

As we write this letter on September 26, reports from the press inform that **44 fires remain active in 14 municipalities**⁴⁰. That is, the fires are still on despite the large deployment of national and international forces to the country. **Nor has the government repealed the norms that cleared the way for the disaster**, including realization a few days ago, that the announced legislation declaring NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PAUSE has yet to be passed. The only ENVIRONMENTAL PAUSE in force is Law 181 decreed by the Departmental Legislative Assembly of Santa Cruz on September 7. Finally, after 53 days on fire, the central government conformed a “single control command unit” based in Santa Cruz’ Viru Viru airport, which includes now experts from the departmental government of Santa Cruz and affected municipalities, and to which, international experts from cooperating countries have now been attached.⁴¹

⁴⁰ El Deber, September 26

⁴¹ ldeber.com.bo/santacruz/Abren-17-brechas-para-frenar-avance-del-fuego-en-8-municipios-20190922-0057.html