

Mapuche Indigenous Peoples Mobilize Against Dam Projects in Chile



Santiago de Chile, June 6 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Land conflicts in the central region of Araucania between the indigenous communities of Mapuches and local residents and hydroelectric companies have intensified this week following the visit of the energy minister to the region. Minister Maximo Pacheco argued the new dams will significantly improve electricity access in the region, reduce the electricity rates.

However, indigenous leaders demand the complete withdrawal of hydroelectric companies from their lands. The Network for the Defense of the Territories called his announcements a “true slap in the face of human rights and interests of the region's inhabitants ... on the grounds of an immoral collusion.”

In the town of Curacautin, three indigenous leaders were charged for their participation in the protests against the hydroelectric project “Doña Alicia” and the smaller plant “Pintoresco” that never received an environmental or social evaluation. They are awaiting trial scheduled for July 2nd.

In Melipeuco, local authorities denounced various abuses in this sector, as the transnational firm Latin America Power, along with the Chile's Enacon, are illegally setting up infrastructure facilities in the area of Shuelhue and Melipeuco.

Opponents to the project have claimed that the area was being “sacrificed” for economic interests at the expense community-led development, and the preservation of environmental spaces crucial for the whole region.

In Pitrufquen, the National Institute of Human Rights released a report based on an investigative mission that confirmed the hydroelectric project “Los Aromos” presented a threat to the communities living in the area. The dam would also be located on a sacred indigenous place.

In Curarrehue, where a few projects have been abandoned for being unsustainable, others have been maintained like the project “Añihuarraqui” from the Chilean firm GTD, also planned to take place on a Mapuche sacred place.

In Renaico and Collipulli, the hydroelectric project “Aguas Vivas” have raised many concerns as the water levels have dramatically decreased and a serious contamination was observed by the plastic company CMPC, also triggering an active resistance.

Mega-dams projects have devastating social and environmental impacts, forcing communities to displace and polluting lands and rivers, critics say. Moreover, they produce one of the least efficient and dirtiest energy forms as they release high amounts of methane – the greenhouse gas emissions second most responsible for climate change.

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