

'Ecocide' in Guatemala Passion River Causes Deep Impacts



Guatemala City, July 22 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The United Nations expressed concern on Tuesday over serious contamination of Guatemala's Passion River and the risks the environmental damage poses to thousands of families.

The Passion River has been declared an ecological disaster after having been severely polluted by industrial pesticide used for the production of African oil palm, a chemically intensive crop grown as a monoculture.

"The main impact is water pollution, because these people live off the river, use the water for drinking and for personal hygiene, as well as feeding themselves with the fish," said the U.N. coordinator in Guatemala, Valerie Julliand.

Julliand added the contamination has had a "psychological impact" on local families, compounding the situation of poverty with the experience of "mourning the loss of the river," which is a lifeline for Guatemalan people who live and work along its banks.

The extent of damage to the river started to come to light in June, when thousands of dead fish surfaced in northern Guatemala near the border with Mexico, leading authorities to investigate what they called an "ecocide."

According to the Guatemala's National Council for Protected Areas, the contamination has affected 23 species of fish and 21 other species including birds, reptiles, and mammals.

Julliand called for uncovering who is responsible for the contamination.

According to the U.N., between 2.5 and 3.75 tons of industrial waste are generated by each ton of a palm oil produced.

U.N. delegates have requested investigations and ecological assessments to ensure the environmental catastrophe is not repeated and have recommended water laws be implemented. "We want to ensure the case will not be forgotten not matter how long it takes," said Julliand, "and ensure that there is justice to avoid (the case) being repeated."

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