

Panama's Indigenous Seek Help from the Pope in Land Struggle



Panama City, July 29 (teleSUR-RHC)-- An indigenous tribe in Panama has requested the intervention of Pope Francis in their fight to shut down a hydroelectric project that could cause mass displacement and damage sacred sites.

The indigenous Ngabe Bugle tribe, which has led the fight against the project called "Barro Blanco," handed a letter to the Apostolic Nunciature, the leading mission of the Holy See, calling the Pope's intervention on Tuesday, news agency EFE reported.

"We expect the intelligent and wise words of Pope Francis to appeal to the national government to proceed to cancel Barro Blanco and avoid bloodshed," activist Ricardo Miranda told reporters.

The letter requested the Pope's intervention to stop the repression that has been taking place in retaliation to the resistance movement against the hydroelectric project.

The letter comes as the April 10 Movement, which represents the Ngabe Bugle people in the ongoing conflict, decided to withdraw from negotiations with the government on Tuesday. Organizers blame the government for violently arresting activists, who blocked one of the main highways on Saturday in protest to failing dialogues.

The government has said Barro Blanco will continue, saying the generation of electrical energy is a priority for the country. The company hired to start construction in 2011 said last week it has lost \$40 million since protests started against project.

Critics say the Barro Blanco dam would displace tens of thousands of people, harm the local agricultural sector, and damage Ngabe Bugle land and traditional sacred sites with flooding.

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