

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

X-Authentication-Warning: cronopio.alternex.com.br: uucp set sender to saii@igc.apc.org using -f
X-Sender: saii@pop.igc.apc.org
Date: Fri, 20 Dec 1996 11:31:28 -0800
To: eai@gn.apc.org, GRAIN@GN.apc.org, socioamb@ax.apc.org, tw@igc.apc.org, walk@igc.apc.org, proeib@dicyt.nrc.edu.bo, sivertsen@ilolim.org.pe, editoria@ECNET.ec, admin@amazanga.ecx.ec, ase@aseo.rds.org.bo, zuercher@sc2a.unige.ch, cadeco@laneta.apc.org, cdhbcasas@laneta.apc.org, cimi@ax.apc.org, spccpybr@ax.alternex.com.br, shernand@gauss.cfm.udec.cl, conaie@ecuanex.ec, cs@igc.apc.org, eai@gr.apc.org, abaforum.es, idex@igc.apc.org, ien@igc.apc.org, MOONCLOUD@aol.com, mjk@sinfo.net, quetzal@laneta.apc.org, seju@ax.apc.org, tw@igc.apc.org, wcip@web.apc.org, unponl@antenna.nl, info@conservation.org.br, kwia@knooppunt.be, hri@hri.ca, nnirr@igc.org, hrde@igc.org, Taino-L@corso.ccsu.ctstateu.edu, sharriso@sharriso.usa.com
From: saii@igc.apc.org (SAIIC)
Subject: ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guatemala
Sender: saii@igc.org
Sender: saii@igc.org

INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL
data ____/____/____
cod. 10000000

ACTION ALERT!
December 1996

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

- * The Maya Itzá are one of 21 Mayan linguistic groups in Guatemala.
- * The Itzá are on the verge of cultural extinction as fewer than one hundred people now speak the language fluently.
- * In 1991, the Itzá of San José, Petén banded together to halt illegal logging in their municipal forests and established THE COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSFERA ITZA RESERVE.
- * Since that time this community organization has effectively protected a 36-square kilometer municipal forest reserve and promoted activities for environmental conservation, cultural revitalization, and community development.
- * San José's current Mayor has recently announced under municipal decree that he is disbanding this community group. Like his predecessors he sees greater personal and financial benefit in logging the forest reserve than protecting it.
- * The Mayor has appointed his father as the new leader of the Bio Itzá Committee and secured the support of immigrants to serve on the committee.
- * These immigrants have been very clear in expressing their desire to cut down the forest for agricultural plots.
- * To reverse this injustice, the Bio Itzá Committee has requested immediate letters from international organizations to be directed at local authorities.
- * This is a situation when a letter can both save a tropical forest and ensure that the efforts of a threatened cultural group continue.

For more information contact:

Shaun Paul	Reginaldo Chayax Huex
EcoLogic Development Fund	Presidente
PO Box 383405	Comité Bio Itzá
Cambridge, MA 02238 USA	San José, Petén, GUATEMALA
tel (617) 441-6300	community telephone 011 [502] 928-8135
fax (617) 441-6307	

email: news@ecologic.org

~~~~~  
LETTER OF APPEAL  
WRITTEN BY THE BIO ITZA COMMITTEE

November 19, 1996

DEAR FRIENDS IN THE CONSERVATION AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES COMMUNITY.

The Committee of the Biósfera Itzá reserve wish to make known, both nationally and internationally, the following. Since 1991, when the reserve was founded, this organization has pioneered the conservation of the environment in the Department of Petén, Guatemala in Central America. As the last indigenous inhabitants of the Petén's forest, the Maya Itzá have fought to maintain the forest, culture and language of their great civilization. The reserve protects 6 km<sup>2</sup> of threatened primary forest under the guidance of a Management Plan; we also have a Forest Inventory, a map of the area, archaeological studies of the sites within the reserve, and currently have five on-going projects that are compatible with the environment. Furthermore, we have received technical and/or financial assistance from the following institutions: the University of Michigan, Cultural Survival, IIZ-Austrian Embassy, ProPetén/CI, TNC, CONAP, CATIE/RENAR, CCAD, EcoLogic Development Fund, and SEGEPLAN.

Unfortunately, for the past three years the Biósfera Itzá Committee has suffered at the hands of the current municipal leader, Julian Tesucún y Tesucún, who together with members of the immigrant population, want to extract the forest resources protected within the reserve. With this purpose in mind, the municipality held a meeting Saturday, November 16, 1996 in which Mr. Tesucún y Tesucún inappropriately permitted the election of a new Committee to manage the Biósfera Itzá. Those in attendance represent the immigrant population and other persons with personal agendas. Their interests are not the well-being and development of the Maya Itzá community, rather their primary goal is to log the reserve and divide it up for the extraction of forest resources--thereby converting it into a desert.

As such, we urgently protest before you, asking for your moral support to exert pressure on the authorities and institutions whose role it is to protect the rights of the indigenous communities and the environment. We want this situation to be resolved through the appropriate legal channels so that we can live and work in peace for the good of the environment and future generations. We are the first indigenous organization to worry about our natural environment in the northern forested region of the Petén, which has suffered deforestation and destruction due to the increasing number of immigrants from other parts of the country.

With the hope of receiving your words of support, we thank you for your consideration. For more information, please communicate with us by means of the community telephone in San José ([502] 928-8135).

Ecologically,

REGINALDO CHAYAX HUEX  
PRESIDENT

FELICIANO TZUL COLLI  
VICE PRESIDENT

LUIS FERNANDO LOPEZ

CESAR MUNOZ SUNTECUN

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

JUAN JULIO TUT

BERTA HUEX CHAN

~~~~~

!!

THE AUTHORITIES IN GUATEMALA NEED TO KNOW THAT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OBJECT TO WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE ITZA!

PLEASE WRITE A LETTER, PREFERABLY IN SPANISH, TO THE AUTHORITIES IN GUATEMALA.

AUTHORITIES FOR YOU TO WRITE IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:

- (1) Ing. Juan Francisco Asturias Fajardo, Coordinador Nacional
Comisión Nacional del Medio Ambiente, CONAMA
5 Avenida 8-07, Zona 10
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel: 011 [502] 332-7174
Fax: 011 [502] 362-6845
- (2) Dr. Edgar Armando Aragón González, Gobernador
Gobernación Departamental del Petén
Ciudad Flores, Petén, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: 011 [502] 926-1383

OTHER PEOPLE THAT NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU

- (3) Señor Diputado Mario Hugo Miranda
Presidente de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente
Congreso de la República de Guatemala
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel/Fax 011 [502] 232-1260 (Ask for the "extensión 327"
- tres dos siete)
- (4) Lic. Manuel Barquín
Delegado Departamental, Petén
Procuraduría General de la Nación
Santa Elena, Petén Guatemala
Tel/Fax: [502] 926-0318
- (5) Excelentísimo Señor Presidente
Alvaro Arzú
Palacio Nacional
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

EMAIL: AlvaroArzu@guate.net

PLEASE SEND A COPY OF ALL LETTERS TO:

Reginaldo Chayax Huex AND/OR Shaun Paul
 Presidente EcoLogic Development Fund
 Comité Bio Itzá PO Box 383405

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

San José, Petén GUATEMALA Cambridge, MA 02238 USA
fax c/o PROPETEN [502] 926-0495 fax (617) 441-6307
email: news@ecologic.org

OPEN LETTER FROM THE ECOLOGIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

December 16, 1996

Dr. Edgar Armando Aragón González, Gobernador
Gobernación Departamental del Petén
Ciudad Flores, Petén, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: 011-502-926-1383

Dear Dr. Aragón González,

I am writing on behalf of the EcoLogic Development Fund, an international charitable organization, to bring your attention to a problem of great concern to us regarding San José, Petén.

Both my organization and many other international agencies have recently received reports concerning the questionable dissolution on November 16, 1996 of the "Committee of the Biosfera Itzá Reserve" in San José by Mayor Julian Tesucún y Tesucún. If this is true, I am confident that you will join us in supporting the valiant efforts of the Bio Itzá Committee to protect their natural resources, promote the sustainable use of these resources, and preserve of their language and culture.

The Bio Itzá Committee was formally established in September 1991 in San José when Itzá community members established their general assembly. The area in which their development has been centered is located in the buffer zone of the Mayan Biosphere along the perimeter of El Zotz-San Miguel-La Pelotada Biotope. This 36-square kilometer area was conceded by the Honorable Corporation of the Municipality of San José as a municipal forest reserve (in the 34-91 session, of the folio 312-317 of the Act No. 37). The Bio Itzá Committee, under the leadership of Reginaldo Chayax Huex and Feliciano Tzul Colli, developed a management plan and established projects to protect this fragile area. These projects include the protection of San José's threatened forests, the reforestation of degraded areas, the promotion of ecotourism and most importantly, the education of Maya Itzá youth in their nearly lost traditions and language. They have been effective not only in their conservation work, but also in promoting the economic development and cultural well-being of the Maya Itzá people.

Because of its important work, many national and international organizations have supported and are willing to continue supporting the Bio Itzá Committee. Institutions that have joined forces with the Bio Itzá Committee by donating their financial, technological, and human resources include: Secretaría de Planificación Económica (SEGEPLAN); Dirección General de Bosques y Vida Silvestre (DIGEBOS); Plan de Acción Forestal Maya (PAF-MAYA); Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala; Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo (CCAD); Asociación del

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

Rescate y Conservación de la Vida Silvestre (ARCAS); Centro Argonómico Tropical de Investigación Enseñanza (CATIE); Consejo Nacional para un Bosque Sostenible (PROPETEN); OEW, Austria; Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France; Cultural Survival, USA; The Nature Conservancy, USA; UNESCO, UNICEF, the EcoLogic Development Fund, USA; University of Michigan, USA; Instituto para la Cooperación Internacional, Austria; US Agency for International Development (US AID).

We support the leaders of the Bio Itzá Committee, elected by the Itzá themselves, in their claim to their rights as indigenous people under United Nations Convention ILO 169, Article 15, ratified by the Government of Guatemala, which states that indigenous people have the right to participate in the use, management and conservation of their natural resources. The removal of the Bio Itzá Committee's leadership and their replacement by three of the Mayor's relatives and recent immigrants with little understanding of the local culture and intent on converting the forest into agricultural lands is in clear violation of this Convention.

Please join us by helping to resolve this conflict in San José. We believe that the Bio Itzá Committee should be rewarded for its valiant efforts rather than punished. This is the second time that Mayor Tesucún y Tesucún has tried to take land away from a community organization. The first involved the Ixchel group, under the leadership of Brenda Mayoí. Please join with us to stop this second attempt.

Both the EcoLogic Development Fund and many other international agencies would be most grateful to you for any action taken by your office to settle the conflict in San José for the well being of the Maya Itzá and all of Petén. We, in turn, are committed to investing financial and technical assistance to promote economic development and conservation in San José.

The Bio Itzá Committee has realized projects that serve not only as a model to other Guatemalans, but to the international community as well. I am sure that they would welcome you if you visited them to see first-hand the results of their efforts at reforestation and ecosystem preservation. We believe that this fragile parcel of land should remain with the Bio Itzá Committee, who has shown the desire and ability to improve and preserve it.

Knowing of your dedication to environmental and cultural conservation, I kindly ask you, Mr. Governor, to help ensure that the Bio Itzá Committee's vital environmental and cultural work continues. On behalf of the government you represent and in the interest of preserving the environment and upholding the human rights of the Maya Itzá, we await your assistance in resolving this urgent matter.

Thank you again for your attention.

Sincerely,

Shaun Paul, President
EcoLogic Development Fund

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

cc: Juan Francisco Asturias Fajardo, CONAMA
Señor Diputado Mario Hugo Miranda, Presidente de la Comisión de
Medio Ambiente
Lic. Manuel Barquín, Delegado Departamental, Peten; Procuraduría
General de la Nación
Arq. Jorge Cabrera, Director Ejecutivo, CCAD
Señor Reginaldo Chayax Huex, Presidente, Comité Bio Itzá

OPEN LETTER FROM THE ECOLOGIC DEVELOPMENT FUND IN SPANISH

16 de diciembre 1,996

Dr. Edgar Armando Aragón González
Gobernador
Gobernación Departamental del Petén
Ciudad Flores, Petén, Guatemala
Telefax: 011-502-926-1383

Estimado Dr. Aragón González:

Le escribo en nombre de EcoLogic Development Fund, una organización internacional y caritativa, para pedir su atención a un problema de gran interés para nosotros, que ocurre en San José, Petén.

Mi organización y muchas otras agencias internacionales recientemente han recibido reportes sobre la forma anómala de sustituir los miembros del "Comité de la Reserva Biosfera Itzá" en San José el 16 de noviembre 1,996 por el alcalde Julian Tesucún y Tesucún. Confío en que, de ser este el caso, Usted se unirá a nosotros para apoyar los valientes esfuerzos del "Comité Bio Itzá", en proteger sus recursos naturales, el uso sostenible de estos recursos, y garantizar la preservación de su lenguaje y cultura.

El Comité Bio Itzá fué establecido en septiembre de 1,991 en San José como resultado de la formación de una asamblea general con los miembros de la comunidad Itzá. El área en la cual su desarrollo está centrado está localizada en la zona de amortiguamiento de la Biosfera Maya a lo largo del perímetro del Biotopo El Zotz-San Miguel-La Pelotada. Estos 6 kilómetros cuadrados de área fueron concedidos por la honorable corporación de la Municipalidad de San José como una reserva de bosque municipal (en sesión del 34-91, folio 312-317 del acta No. 37). El Comité Bio Itzá, bajo el liderazgo de Reginaldo Chayax Huex y Feliciano Tzul Colli, han desarrollado un plan de manejo y establecido proyectos para proteger esta frágil área. Sus proyectos incluyé la protección de bosques amenazados, reforestación en las áreas degradadas, promoción del ecoturismo y algo muy importante, la enseñanza a los jóvenes Maya Itzá sobre sus tradiciones y lenguaje y lo trascendental de no perder ambos. Ellos han sido muy efectivos, no sólomente en su trabajo de conservación, sino también han promovido el desarrollo económico y cultural del pueblo Itzá.

Por el trabajo importante realizado por ellos, muchas organizaciones nacionales e internacionales hemos apoyado y estamos disponibles a

SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

continuar apoyando al Comité Bio Itzá. Las instituciones que han unido esfuerzos con el Comité Bio Itzá con recursos humanos, tecnológicos y donaciones financieras incluyen: Secretaría de Planificación Económica (SEGEPLAN); Dirección General de Bosques y Vida Silvestre (DIGEBOS); Plan de Acción Forestal Maya (PAF-MAYA); Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala; Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo (CCAD); Asociación del Rescate y Conservación de la Vida Silvestre (ARCAS); Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE); Consejo Nacional para un Bosque Sostenible (PROPETEN); OEW, Austria; Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France; Cultural Survival, USA; The Nature Conservancy, USA; UNESCO, UNICEF, the EcoLogic Development Fund, USA; University of Michigan, USA; Instituto para la Cooperación Internacional, Austria; y la Agencia Internacional para el Desarrollo (US AID).

Nosotros apoyamos a los líderes del Comité Bio Itzá elegidos por su asamblea general del pueblo Itzá en la reivindicación de sus derechos como pueblo indígena bajo la convención de la Naciones Unidas O.I.T. 169, Artículo 15, ratificado por el gobierno de Guatemala. El cual dice: La gente indígena tiene derecho a participar en el uso, mantenimiento y conservación de sus recursos. Remover el Comité Bio Itzá y reemplazar a sus líderes por tres parientes del alcalde y recientes inmigrantes, con poco entendimiento de la cultura local e intentar convertir el bosque en tierra para la agricultura, es una clara violación de esta convención.

Gracias por ayudarnos a resolver este conflicto en San José. Nosotros creemos que el Comité Bio Itzá debería ser gratificado por sus valientes esfuerzos, en lugar de ser castigado. Es la segunda vez que el alcalde Julian Tesucún y Tesucún trata de quitar la tierra a un grupo comunitario. La primera vez ocurrió en el caso del grupo Ixchel cuya lidereza es Brenda Mayol. Por favor únase a nosotros y bloquee este segundo intento.

EcoLogic Development Fund y otras agencias internacionales estaríamos muy agradecidos por cualquier acción tomada desde su oficina para resolver este problema por el bienestar de los Maya Itzá y todo el Petén. Nosotros, en respuesta, continuaremos ayudando técnica y financieramente a promover el desarrollo económico y conservación de San José.

El Comité Bio Itzá ha realizado proyectos que han servido no sólo como modelo a otros guatemaltecos sino también a la comunidad internacional. Estoy seguro que ellos le darán la bienvenida si Usted los visita, para ver los resultados de sus esfuerzos en reforestación y preservación del ecosistema. Nosotros creemos que esta frágil parcela de tierra debe ser trasladada al Comité que demostró su interés y habilidad de mejorarla y preservarla.

Conociendo de su dedicación por la conservación del medio ambiente y la cultura, atentamente le pedimos su ayuda para asegurar que el Comité Bio Itzá continúe con su trabajo, que es vital para el desarrollo de la región. En nombre del gobierno que Usted representa y que está interesado en la conservación del medio ambiente y de la preservación de los derechos humanos de los Mayas, esperamos su asistencia para resolver este problema urgente.



SAIIC, 11:31 20/12/96 -0, ALERT: Help Maya Itza of Guate

Gracias por su atención.

Atentamente,

Shaun Paul
Presidente
EcoLogic Development Fund

cc: Ing. Juan Francisco Asturias Fajardo, Coordinador Nacional, CONAMA
Señor Diputado Mario Hugo Miranda, Presidente de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente
Lic. Manuel Barquín, Delegado Departamental, Peten; Procuraduría General de la Nación
Arq. Jorge Cabrera, Director Ejecutivo, CCAD
Señor Reginaldo Chayax Huex, Presidente, Comité Bio Itzá

#####
This alert was provided by the ECOLOGIC DEVELOPMENT FUND
(news@ecologic.org), P.O. Box 3405, Cambridge, MA 02238-3405 USA
EcoLogic is a nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing the destruction of biodiverse tropical ecosystems by advancing economic development and self-determination among local communities in threatened habitats. To subscribe to EcoLogic News, respond to this message by providing your name, address and organizational affiliation if any.
#####

South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC)
P.O. Box 28703
Oakland CA, 94604
Phone: (510)834-4263 Fax: (510)834-4264
Email: saiic@igc.apc.org
Office: 1714 Franklin Street, 3rd Floor, Oakland

Home Page: http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/nativeweb/abyayala/orgs/saiic

For more information about SAIIC, send an empty email message to:
saiic-info@igc.apc.org