

Guayaquil, Ecuador
9 October 2008

To: Board of Directors, WWF, and NGOs

The below signatories, representatives of peoples, traditional mangrove ecosystem communities, and local populations of Ecuador and Latin America; organizations represented by C-CONDEM of Ecuador; and member organizations of Redmanglar Internacional from Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, declare:

The dialogue established between producers, scientists, and NGOs to create standards for the certification of shrimp has not included the incorporation and participation of peoples, traditional communities, or populations who have been directly affected and have suffered displacement, poverty, and violation of their human rights: to life, to work, and to health as a consequence of the destruction of the mangrove ecosystem, for which their just and legitimate interests have not been considered. Neither has the process been transparent as all involved have not participated, especially the most affected.

The PRINCIPLES themselves at the fundamental base of CERTIFICATION discard the possibility that the shrimp farming industry can obtain certification: we will analyze only two of them; PRINCIPLE 1: Locate shrimp farms according to a national plan and legal regime in environmentally appropriate areas.

This contrasts with the current reality in Latin American countries and especially in Ecuador, which from 1987 until 2002 has lost 254,503 hectares, of the 362,802 hectares of mangrove declared as protective forests. The principle cause has been the shrimp farming industry, which has continuously violated the law, since 23 October 1978 in the Supreme Decree 2938: “The construction of ponds for the growth and cultivation of shrimp in areas covered with mangroves is prohibited,” a prohibition also stated in the Civil Code, Penal Code, Law of Fish and Fishery Development, Bioaquatic Species Growth and Cultivation Rule, among other norms.

PRINCIPLE 8: Develop and operate shrimp farms that are socially responsible; that provide benefits to the producer, to local communities, and the country; effectively contributing to rural development – particularly to poverty alleviation in coastal areas – without compromising the environment.

The districts where the shrimp farming industry has established itself have poverty rates higher than 80%, reaching up to 100% in some districts, such as Bolivar (Muisne canton) and Palma Real (San Lorenzo canton).

Food security of peoples, traditional communities, and local populations has been put at risk through the loss of their natural source of work and sustenance. Free transit through public lands has been impeded, and in some cases it has gotten to the point of

displacement of communities and physical aggressions and death, simply due to transiting and occupying public spaces.

CERTIFICATION has the goal of GUARANTEEING TO THE CONSUMER that the product is socially and environmentally responsible; but in the case of shrimp aquaculture this is not fulfilled, on the contrary, it is based on the destruction of the mangrove ecosystem and of the impoverishment of peoples, sufficient reasons that CERTIFICATION in the case of shrimp aquaculture in ponds is NOT VIABLE; moreover, it would not be respecting the RIGHT of the consumer to know the reality of consuming a product, which in this case brings poverty and environmental degradation.

In the dialogue it is recognized that “An ecologically sensitive habitat, such as mangroves, can be cut down in order to create ponds for the production of shrimp,” that “Jobs can be eliminated upon reduction of the capture of wild shrimp ...and the consequent restriction to public access routes.” And that human health is not guaranteed, but that “the risk to human health and ecosystems due to the chemicals used” will be reduced.

These acknowledgements made in the dialogue concerning shrimp farming allow us to determine that this activity must not obtain certification; doing so would violate human rights, collective rights and laws, and would establish impunity for an illegal and destructive activity of one of the five richest ecosystems in the world.

That it is important to initiate throughout Latin America the recuperation of the public spaces occupied illegally, an immediate process of mangrove restoration that will benefit thousands of shellfish collectors, crabbers, and fishers, and indemnify the peoples and traditional communities.

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