

Postponing Yasuní oil closure ignores popular will



Oil in Yasuní National Park

By María Josefina Arce

The declarations of President Daniel Noboa about the possibility of proclaiming a moratorium, of at least one year, on the closure of the oil field located in the Amazonian Yasuni National Park has provoked an

immediate rejection of the indigenous communities and environmental activists of Ecuador.

If this measure, justified by Noboa to obtain resources to confront the high level of insecurity in the country, were to be implemented, the president would be ignoring the result of the popular referendum of last August 20, when the citizens were in favor of leaving the existing oil in that area in the ground.

Sixty percent of Ecuadorians who participated in the historic referendum voted in favor of suspending oil extraction in Yasuní, considered one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet.

The battle lasted ten years to get the citizens to decide whether oil exploitation should be carried out in this area, designated a Biosphere Reserve in 1989 by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Finally, in May 2023, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the consultation, held in conjunction with the early general elections, after the declaration of cross death by the then president Guillermo Lasso.

According to the stipulations, with the victory of the yes vote, the Ecuadorian government cannot sign any more extraction contracts, in addition to having one year for the progressive withdrawal of the oil infrastructure in Yasuni.

Now Noboa's declarations have set off alarm bells. Representatives of indigenous, environmental and human rights groups have warned that if Noboa does not respect the will of the people, they could promote a mechanism to remove the president from office. Pedro Bermeo, leader of the Yasunidos collective, which promoted the consultation, affirmed that non-compliance with the result would be an attack against a democratic decision, and would entail administrative, criminal and civil responsibilities.

For his part, Leónidas Iza, president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, pointed out that the application of a moratorium is not legally possible, since there is already a popular vote. The Unitary Workers Front recalled that during his electoral campaign the president pronounced himself in favor of the end of oil operations in Yasuní.

For many it is vital the preservation of Yasuni, where 600 species of birds and 3 thousand plants are found, but also where an indigenous population in voluntary isolation lives and which also needs to be protected.

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