

Letter to the President of Chile Against Pascua Lama with 18,000 Signatures

November 11, 2005

President of the Republic Ricardo Lagos Escobar:

These 18,000 signatures represent the fears -- and why not say it, the anger -- of thousands of Chileans over the Pascua Lama mining project located in Region III, on the Argentina border directly above the Huasco Valley.

As you probably know, throughout the approval process, this project has benefited from the many weaknesses of our institutions, through a series of irregularities and loopholes, many of whom are located in our very systems of justice.

Public officials of the Region III, some appointed by you and other members of the coalition that you head, have taken the liberty to communicate to the country that your government is totally committed to carrying out the mining project. If this project is carried out, your administration will go down in history as that which opened the doors to one of the most unsustainable projects, from the point of view of the development of our country, that we have ever seen.

If you are also including the development of the country in your consideration, Pascua Lama should not be approved, for the following reasons:

Economics: With an investment of around \$1.5 billion dollars Barrick Gold estimates that they will obtain 17 million ounces of gold in their 20 years of appropriating of natural resources that belong to the Chilean people. On their part, however, Barrick Gold will not pay taxes, just like in their mine El Indio for twenty years. Furthermore, of the estimated thousand jobs created in the project, only a handful will be from the region. However, the operation of the mine will put into jeopardy the livelihood of the over eight thousand people in the zone who live from agriculture, because of the effects on the natural freshwater watercourses. Finally, it must be considered that in Region III, mining provides only 0.1% of the jobs, where agriculture supports 18% of the population.

Ecological: One should consider the 48 thousand tonnes of earth to be removed daily, the particulate pollution emitted by the constant transit of trucks, and the daily transit of 16,000 tons of sodium cyanide daily -- an issue on which the company has a history of accidents in Australia. Furthermore the company will dispose of waste ore above the sources of our rivers, and will contaminate the rivers and the waterways of the region with acid drainage, including arsenic.

Ethical and Political: Pascua Lama is a telling example of how the Coalition Government has chosen to approach the issue of the environment, where officials of COREMA and CONAMA represent political and economic corporate interests. In fact, this system has made possible the illegitimate collusion between Barrick Gold and the Board of Oversight (Junta de Vigilancia) of the region, producing a flawed Environmental Impact Report based on cooperation which has been bought and paid for. Doubtlessly interests have prevailed in Pascua Lama which are very far removed from the care and protection of the environment.

It is time to stop this project. If not, national and international opinion will correctly assume that you are the politician responsible for the consequences of Pascua Lama.

Sincerely, the organizations and citizens of the Anti-Pascua Lama Front, represented by:

Consejo de Defensa del Valle del Huasco (Board of Defense of the Huasco Valley)
Comunidad Diaguita de los Huascoaltinos (Diaguita Community of the Huascoaltinos)
Oceana
Olca (Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales)
Attac-Chile
Greenpeace-Chile
Senador Nelson Avila
Ocac (Organización de Coordinación de Asistencia Campesina)
Colectivo Re-Existencia
Agrupación Defendamos la Ciudad
Centro Ecocéanos
Colectivo Ciudadano Esopo
Kryac
Pro-Homine
CEDEM (Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo de la Mujer)
Rap-al
Colegio de Profesores