

ALERT OILWATCH VENEZUELA 2004

1. MANIFESTO AGAINST THE DEATH OF LAKE MARACAIBO

Towards a popular agenda for environmental rescue

We, the women, men, young and old people, children, natives or from afar, of many social, cultural, political and economic differences, we as simple human beings, manifest our adhesion to this definitive proclamation against the death of Lake Maracaibo, condemned for many years to succumb at the hands of the evil named “development”.

Our grandparents, our parents, and even our very own selves, have been witnesses to the torture that the model of oil development and its related components of uncontrolled urbanism, pollution, easy profiteering, and insensitivity to nature have caused this beautiful and necessary body of water in Venezuela, leading it to become the sad spectacle that we see today, full of distressing signs of decomposition.

For nearly 30 years counted from the creation of the Environment Ministry, we have witnessed innumerable governmental declarations and non governmental proclamations, alongside the interminable protest of the fishermen, still in effect. Often the official discourse is characterised by tremendous and bombastic attitudes, such as the evil named the “Second Naval Battle of Maracaibo Lake” or the “Integral Rescue and Clean-Up of the Lake”. Such verbosity decorated with rhetoric and propaganda reveals itself to us today to have been a part of a great charlatanism, whose worst consequence has been to bore and make the population passive, rooted in the trust it placed in the environmental authorities for many years, authorities for whom “everything was under control”. Hundreds of pages of scientific articles and millions of dollars spent on projects, research infrastructure and environmental protection do not show us today the hoped-for results of giving health back to our ill lake, especially when the Lemna wake us up out of our dull developmental dream, which still pressures us to forget the chronic environmental emergency.

The situation has not changed with new governments. Each governor has, in his own time, taken up the old discourse of “everything under control” in spite of the fact that (as Lemna shouts to us today), everything is definitely out of control. We listen with shock the very same discourse of “environmental emergency” coming from the government and its different levels. Nowadays we hear long-winded and detailed explanations about the phenomenon known as the “green stain” and they make new proclamations about the “solution” that we no longer believe - not in the slightest. We are tired of hearing the inevitability of officials convincing us that “everything is on the right track towards a solution”. Experts of all colours, with knowledge of chemistry, biology, engineering etc

distract us further, reducing the problem and attributing the blame to the very consequence. They even tell us about the positive aspects of the disaster.

It is necessary to look at this problem in the context of the whole Maracaibo Lake basin, and observe with clarity that the Lemna are not the cause of the problem, but actually the consequence. The illness that the Lake has today is the consequence of the deforestation of the Perijá mountains around the carbon and livestock plains; furthermore, the result of urban growth with no environmental regulations, of the idleness of the government's history in delaying the installation of treatment plants, of the uncontrolled use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides, and definitively, of the dumping of industrial, oil, petrochemical and fishing effluents without the due exercise of control. None of the hypotheses that are given today to explain the phenomenon of the so-called "water lentil" are enough to salvage the responsibility of the political and economic actors of the official and private environmental management of the Maracaibo Lake basin.

Nowadays, we the Zulianos have come to demand something different. Promising not to be sent back to sleep by the media's spells and political juggling that buried us into passivity and indolence for many years with our backs to our lake, we swear never again to believe in false promises of "integral lake rescue" and supposedly conservationist campaigns.

We now pledge to remain firm to our own struggle:

Apart from the emergency plan decreed by the government, we demand:

- A concrete plan and timeframe for the elimination or control of contamination sources, signed by the responsible public officials, under penalty of resignation or sacking from their position and public apology to the sovereign Venezuelan people when they fail in their objectives. This plan will involve the affected communities themselves as guarantors, and they will exercise real social control through vigilance of the commitment of governors who failed to attend to the Lake as it deserved, and today take on their responsibility once again.
- That the President of the Republic recognise the failure of the Venezuelan State's environmental management in rescuing the Maracaibo Lake.
- That the Minister for the Environment, the Governor of Zulia, each Municipal Mayor, the President of PDSA, the President of ICLAM and the President of Hidrolago recognise the failure of the Venezuelan State's environmental management in rescuing the Maracaibo Lake.
- That the Rectors of Universities and their respective University Councils and the Education Ministers recognise the failure of the Venezuelan State's environmental management in rescuing the Maracaibo Lake,
- That the President of Fedecámaras recognise the failure of the Venezuelan State's environmental management in rescuing the Maracaibo Lake.

- That there be an official revision and popular consultation of the development plans that threaten the continuity of this failed contaminating development model, such as the Puerto America coal project in the Venezuelan Gulf, the exploitation of coal in the Perijá mountains, the large scale salt industry in the Los Olivitos swamps, shrimp production in the Maracaibo Lake and along the coasts of the Caribbean sea, among others, with the aim of exercising democratic and active participation in environmental management and the rescue of the Maracaibo Lake.
- That each of the official authorities sign a certificate in which they promise to comply with the popular agenda for the environmental rescue of Maracaibo Lake, arising from the ecology constituency held by the popular communities of Zulia to organise the people and save the Maracaibo Lake from the death penalty imposed by development inherited from the IV Republic, today expressed in the plans of the so-called Western Development Axis.

We ask:

- That every parish authority, every leader or neighbourhood representative, every Zulian resident, every citizen, recognise that they have failed in providing necessary vigilance to make the Venezuelan State comply with the necessary environmental management to rescue the Maracaibo Lake.
- That every Zulian, above their political, economic or cultural differences, pledge to monitor the rigorous compliance with the new agenda for the rescue of the Maracaibo Lake and its hydrographic basin.

Signed by:

Zulia Ecologist Federation (Federación Ecologista del Zulia)
 Man and Nature Society (Sociedad Homo et Natura)
 Zulian Environmentalists (Ambientalistas del Zulia – AZUL)

Bolivarian Federation of Students (Federación Bolivariana de Estudiantes)
 Bolivarian Federation of Fishermen (Federación Bolivariana de Pescadores)
 Asashí Itanobibai Ecological Group (Grupo Ecológico Asashí Itanobibai)

Betulio González (San Francisco) Neighbourhood Association (Asociación de Vecinos del Barrio Betulio González - San Francisco)
 Domitila Flores Parish Neighbourhood Association (Asociación de Vecinos de la Parroquia Domitila Flores)
 "Ecological Note" Environmentalist Group (Grupo Ambientalista "Nota Ecológica")

OASIS Ecological Group (Grupo Ecológico OASIS)

El Bajo Environmentalist Group (Grupo Ambientalista de El Bajo)

El Bajo (San Francisco Municipality) Pro-Environment Comité (Comité Pro-Ambiente de El Bajo - Mun.San Francisco)

El Paraíso (San Francisco Municipality) Neighbourhood Association (Asociación de Vecinos de El Paraíso - Mun. San Francisco)

Playwright Nicanor Cifuentes Gómez, Dept of Dramatic Art, Cultural Directorate, Zulia University

Prof. Amparo Gil Vanegas, teacher and researcher, Rafael María Baralt University

Prof. Tito Barros, Director, Biology Museum, Zulia University

Nicanor Cifuentes, Researcher, Biology Museum, Zulia University

Prof. Jorge Hinestroza, Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Lusbi Portillo. Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Jonny Alarcón. Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Morelva Leal. Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Marlene Socorro, Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Carmen Paz, Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Prof. Antonio Boscán, Research Lecturer, Anthropology Unit, Science Faculty, Zulia University (LUZ)

Add your signatura here:

We would be grateful if this communiqué could be adapted to the conditions of those interested, in accordance with their nationality, language or other circumstances, in such a way that it can be adopted and distributed without distorting its content and essence.

We ask that neighbourhood and indigenous communities; peasant, academic, cultural, human rights, fishing, student, workers', environmentalist organisations, professionals and citizens in general add their signatures to this communiqué, to disseminate it as widely as possible, and let us at the Zulia

Ecologist Federation know of new signatures via the following email addresses:
vitae@cantv.net y homoetnatura@telcel.net.ve

Yours sincerely,

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Zulia Ecologist Federation

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