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1 November 2012

Dear friends in Minnesota:

I am writing to apologize for cancelling my trip

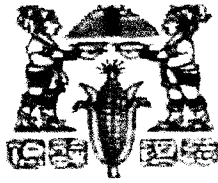
Let me acknowledge your hard work in arranging travel, lining up speaking engagements, and advertising these events at Hamline and Macalester, at the Maya Society, in Mendota Heights, Duluth and elsewhere. I deeply regret having to cancel our trip at the last minute and abruptly returning to Belize. I would only have done so because of an unexpected and severe emergency. Unfortunately, such an emergency did occur. Let me briefly elaborate.

As you know, for many generations the Maya communities of southern Belize have struggled so that our human rights and lands are recognized and respected. In recent decades we have faced numerous threats – for instance, when the Government has granted logging concessions to foreign companies – and we have long struggled to educate and organize our communities in defense of our lands. We have won many victories along the way. We have prevailed in the courts, winning legal recognition of our rights. And we have won in our communities by uniting our people in dignified and resolute defense of ourselves and our lands.

Today we face an even greater threat: the Government of Belize has granted an energy company, US Capital Energy, a license to explore for oil on Maya ancestral lands in southern Belize. Recently the company has begun its operations. The Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA) and our traditional leaders, the Alcaldes, initiated a public-awareness campaign, as well as legal steps, to prevent the company from working on Maya lands without the support of our communities. In turn US Capital Energy did what many foreign companies might do under such circumstances. They spread misinformation about Maya leaders and sought to bribe key figures to divide our communities. Until last week, fortunately, these corrupt measures found little progress.

Last Thursday, while I was speaking at UNC, I received an urgent phone call from my friends in Belize. “You won’t believe it, *Cri-ina*,” said the voice on the other end. “They got Mr. Coy.” I learned that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Maya Leaders Alliance, one of our most critical leaders, had sold out to the oil company and announced in public his support for their work – at a public hearing on the environmental impacts of the project (an EIA hearing). The shock is only now wearing off.

It is difficult to explain just how damaging it is to have a central figure of our movement “flip sides.” Among other problems, it meant that the other Maya leaders, including Pablo and I, needed to convene immediately to plan a response. That is why we had to suddenly depart from the USA. Since returning to Belize we have been working constantly to repair some of the damage done by Mr. Coy’s actions and statements. Among many other things we had to put out a press release denying that his words reflected the views of the communities (see attached pdf).



MAYA LEADERS ALLIANCE

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US Capital Energy is an aggressive, well resourced company and has promised that nothing will stand in their way "if they strike oil". In fact they have employed Maya people from Guatemala who speak our Q'eqchi Language to build a campaign which aims to divide our communities, to manipulate our leaders and silence any opposition. We have learnt over the last few days that Mr. Coy has been going out to visit our traditional leaders on the instruction of the company to coerce and convince them to support the oil company and give consent for exploratory drilling.

To conclude, I would like again to request your forgiveness for failing to come to Minnesota and following through on my obligations. In truth there is nothing I would rather do that to visit Minnesota, which is like a second home to me, with my family and to talk with you about the Maya communities. But we need to be here right now.

If that is not already too much to ask, I have another request. In the face of our intensifying struggle for the land, our communities, and the environment, the MLA and the Alcaldes have asked me to begin a new round of international fund-raising so that we can mobilize our communities. To that end I would like you to consider sending a modest donation to an account which we have designated for the oil campaign. All donated funds will be used to protect the Maya communities and keep the oil in the ground. (For details see below.)

With gratitude for your support and apologies for missing you.

Yours very sincerely,

Cristina Coc
Maya Leaders Alliance

PS. Here is the information needed to make a wire transfer to support the oil campaign

Bank of America - New York

ABA#026009593

SWIFT BOFAUS33

For further credit to account#0550-8-26053 of Belize Bank Limited

For final credit to account#0550-1-10955 (Maya Leader of Southern Belize-Land Rights) (This is the beneficiary name.)

If you have any questions, please email me