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CABEI, the World Bank, the Bosawas Reserve, and the Extermination of Indigenous Peoples

The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) announced on November 13, 2020, that it would award Nicaragua US\$115.7 million from the Green Climate Fund and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), consisting in part of a donation from the World Bank to support Indigenous peoples in adaptation to climate change and to prevent the deforestation of Bosawas in the Northern Caribbean region of Nicaragua.

However, less than 24 hours after CABEI's announcement, Indigenous Mayangna leaders from the **Mayangna People's Union in Defense of Territory** reported an attack that resulted in the murder of Nacilio Macario, a 43-year-old Mayangna man with five children, the youngest of whom was recently born. Mr. Macario was from the community of Musawas and was killed in an ambush carried out near the Wiwinap River on November 14, 2020, at 8:30 a.m. The Mayangna leaders received a telephone call requesting assistance. "The settlers are attacking us!" said one of the community members in the ambushed group, which had been carrying out a patrol of a parcel of land in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve from which a number of non-Indigenous settlers were removed several months ago.

Bosawas was recognized by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme in October 1997, a decision that was subsequently ratified by the government of Nicaragua in 2001 through Law No. 407, "An Act Declaring and Defining the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve." The second largest rainforest in the Americas after the Amazon, Bosawas is part of the core of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and is under consideration to be named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Bosawas was superimposed on Indigenous territories—which the state has subsequently titled to those Indigenous peoples—where the Mayangna and Miskitu peoples have traditionally lived. However, the uncontrolled flow of settlers pushing forward the agricultural frontier; the activities of the company Alba Forestal; changes in soil use; and the contamination of waterways caused by illegal goldmining have resulted in the destruction of these Indigenous peoples' ways of life and the dramatic degradation of Bosawas, which lost 92,000 hectares of forest between 2011 and 2016.

Since 2012, groups of settlers consisting of between 20 and 200 men armed with military-grade weapons have regularly attacked Mayangna and Miskitu communities, the communities' leaders say, forcing them to either flee or live in fear amid constant threats and violence. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the violence against Mayangna communities in Bosawas has increased this year, including attacks against the following communities: Alal (January 29), Wasakin (March 25 and 27), Amak (July 10), Sangni Laya (September 10 and 21), Mukuswas (October 11), and Wiwinap River (November 14). These attacks have left 12 people dead; ten disappeared; three wounded, including one who was left a paraplegic and one whose leg was amputated; and two kidnapped. This—together with the direct attacks against Miskitu girls in which one was wounded in the face on February 16, 2020, and another was kidnapped on July 14, 2020—leaves a total of 29 victims of direct physical attacks. Further, 30 families—some 180 peoples—from the community of Sangni Laya were forcibly displaced to the community of Auhyapihni and the city of Puerto Cabezas on September 3, fleeing the settlers' threats that jeopardized their physical safety and, like other members of these Indigenous peoples, denied them their economic, social, and cultural rights as well as their psychological wellbeing and dignity.

Indigenous peoples around the world are defenders of forests due to their intimate relationships with and dependence on them. Bosawas is no exception, and the forced displacement of these communities under threat of massacre is far from compliance with international standards for the protection of the human rights of these peoples or with World Bank safeguards for the environment, natural resources, and Indigenous peoples, which are all inevitably linked to the protection of Bosawas.

For these reasons, unless the state of Nicaragua reverses its policy of open colonization of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua in general and of Bosawas specifically, and instead complies with its responsibilities to protect the lives, physical integrity, and dignity of the members of Indigenous communities in Bosawas; investigates and brings to justice those responsible for the systematic and repeated crimes committed over the course of many years in total impunity; and adheres to the precautionary and provisional measures issued to the besieged communities by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Inter-American Court of Human Rights since 2015, the efforts of CABEI and the World Bank to protect Bosawas and its vulnerable communities will not only be in vain. Rather, the incompatibility of the state of Nicaragua's policies in Bosawas with the banks' own operational policies and environmental and social safeguards could lead CABEI and the World Bank to be perceived publicly as complicit in the commission of the crimes against humanity that the Indigenous Mayangna and Miskitu peoples have suffered for many years in the Bosawas Reserve.