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Press Release

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Government Concedes to Conejo's Demands

The Department of Geology and Petroleum will order US Capital Energy to halt its illegal seismic work on Conejo's communal lands, and remove all seismic markers from the seismic trail it cut through Conejo.

The promise follows a meeting in Conejo on 9 February between Andre Cho (Director of Geology and Petroleum Department), Pedro Cho, Mandela Wade (both of Geology and Petroleum Department), Marcelo Windsor (Forest Department), Anthony Mai (Environment Department), Eufemio Makin (Alcalde of Conejo), Enrique Makin (Chairperson of Conejo), four councilors of Conejo, and Martin Choco (Permitting Officer, US Capital Energy).

The company sacked the entire workforce from the community (23 men) last Thursday because the village did not immediately give US Capital Energy permission to operate the illegal line.

During Conejo's subsequent village meeting on Sunday 5 February US Capital Energy's Martin Choco presented to villagers a letter drafted by the company, granting US Capital Energy freedom to conduct seismic work throughout Conejo, and condemning the community's leadership for objecting to the seismic line. Choco forcefully sought signatures from villagers, telling them they could then return to work.

US Capital Energy's Alistair King then stated on Monday that the company would, on the basis of this letter, return to conduct seismic work on the trail through Conejo this week. It is important to note that the permit granted to US Capital Energy prohibits the company from entering Conejo's land.

The majority of Conejo's adult population then signed a petition asserting that they did not give their free, prior, and informed consent to US Capital's operations on their land. The leaders fortified this position and communicated it forcefully to the Government's representatives. This represents the community exercising the rights established by the Supreme Court in 2007, which established that no operations could occur on Conejo's territory without their consent.

The rule of law has prevailed, however Conejo's leadership is now waiting for a written copy of the Geology and Petroleum Department's order to US Capital, instructing them not to proceed with their operations in Conejo and instructing them to remove the markers on the seismic line.

The government has acceded to Conejo's demand that the rule of law be respected, reinforcing indigenous peoples' property rights. This is a landmark action by an indigenous community, proving that the judgments of the Supreme Court can be enforced on the ground through a collective resolve not to be pressured by economically powerful interests.