

## **EARTHWORKS Update: Summer 2007**



### *Mining Threatens Communities and Cloud Forests in Ecuador*

Since 2002, EARTHWORKS has worked with local organizations in the Intag cloud-forest region of western Ecuador to protect the region's ecosystems and communities from the impacts of large-scale copper mining. The proposed Junín mine in Intag has generated controversy since 2004, when a Canadian mining company called Ascendant Exploration (now Ascendant Copper) acquired the rights to a copper concession. The copper deposit itself lies under a 3,000-hectare community-owned nature reserve located in the southern side of the Toisan, a mountain range that predates the Andes.<sup>i</sup>

The Intag cloud forest region, home to spectacled bears, howler monkeys, and endemic spider monkeys, is an integral part of the last remaining stretch of western Ecuador's forests.<sup>ii</sup> For over a decade, local communities and organizations have been working to protect the region from large-scale mining. Local communities – in particular the region's 18,000 peasant farmers – are concerned about the risks to their livelihoods, which includes coffee farming and ecotourism.



Intag Cloud Forest, Ecuador (Photo Credit: Carlos Zorrilla)

EARTHWORKS has helped to bring international attention to the threats facing the community and activists in the area. Intag resident Carlos Zorrilla co-founded the organization DECOIN to protect the region's pristine environment and natural resources. Carlos and other local activists who are working to protect Intag have reported increasing levels of intimidation and harassment by mining proponents. Carlos and his colleagues also received death threats that even targeted their families. When Carlos reported this spring that he was facing trumped-up charges of robbery that could result in his arrest, EARTHWORKS activated our membership to write and demand an end to the

intimidation of Ecuadorian mining activists and urge officials in Ecuador to investigate the circumstances of the police raid and false charges. In response, Carlos wrote:

*"When you told me of the thousands of letters sent supporting me, I thought that in the midst of this insanity and travesty of justice, there is a bright side. And it is a very important bright side -- the fact that there is this impressive and committed group of people who care. It's very reassuring to know you are all out there and helping. Without this kind of international pressure cases like mine would be hopeless, and my life would be in much more danger. Thank you to all of EARTHWORKS? members. And please keep up the pressure!"*

According to DECOIN, the violence in Intag has recently become worse, with attacks against four activists in the past month. DECOIN reports that the environmental community is experiencing a climate of terror that did not previously exist in the region.

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<sup>i</sup> "Ascendant Copper Corp." *Standard & Poor's Corporate Descriptions plus News*. June 16, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> "Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena Biodiversity Hotspot." *Conservation International*. 19 June 2007. Accessed July 31, 2007.

[http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/tumbes\\_choco/](http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/tumbes_choco/)