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**Nominated for the Public Eye Award 2005**

**in the category:**

**E N V I R O N M E N T**

**Nominated by: Programa de Aprovechamiento Integral de Recursos Naturales A.C. (PAIR), Mexico and Direkte Solidarität mit Chiapas, Switzerland**

## Conservation International

Headquarters: Washington D.C  
Branch of trade: Environmental conservation  
Owned by: NGO  
No. of employees: 800 (in 2003)  
CEO: Peter A. Seligmann  
Member to the WEF: NO (in January 2004)

### Outline

*Programa de Aprovechamiento Integral de Recursos Naturales A.C. (PAIR), Mexico and Direkte Solidarität mit Chiapas, Switzerland, consider 'Conservation International' (CI) a Trojan horse for multinational corporations in Central America. CI appropriates territories in ecologically sensitive regions and seems to grant companies access to natural resources through the so-called 'bioprospecting'. Moreover, the nominating organisations argue that CI forces the local communities to adopt its protection methods. In most cases, the methods seem to be inept and the needs of nature are put above the needs of the local population.*

### General Information on the Case

There are several hints that CI is involved in "bioprospecting" in Chiapas, Mexico. In September 2004, the Mexican Senate ordered an investigation of the case. In the territories it administers, CI allows scientific studies on biological diversity. Such studies are often financed by multinational pharmaceutical companies. In 1997, CI for example signed a contract on common 'bioprospecting' with the American company Hyseq, which is specialized in gene sequencing. Hyseq safeguarded its intellectual property rights on the investigated plants.

For the supervision of the biosphere reservation Monte Azules situated in the Selva Lacandona, CI uses a small aircraft with a modern aerial view camera. The received data allows a comparatively detailed definition of the composition of the vegetation in the protected area. Pharmaceutical companies, in search of medical plants, show an interest in such data.

'Conservation International' (CI) collaborates with approximately 50 of the biggest multinational corporations in the world. The Ford Company and CI founded the „Center for Environmental Leadership in Business“ (CELB). The CELB is presided by Lord Browne de Madingley, the executive director of BP. It focuses on conservation and biological diversity. CI also manages the "Center for Conservation and Government" (CCG). The CCG is used to establish contacts to governments, UN, World Bank etc. in order to involve them in them in CI's projects. This is done

very successfully and World Bank, USAID and the American government support CI on a big scale.

### **Characteristics of Irresponsible Behaviour**

- The nominating organisations value CI as a Trojan horse because, in pretence of environmental protection, it enables multinational corporations access to regions rich in biological resources.
- CI's international environmental policy does not have a positive effect on the Southern communities; they still get poorer every year and their economic situation is weakened daily. On the basis of the Rio process, Southern governments signed international contracts. One of the consequences was that entire districts are administered by CI in the course of a „debt for nature swap“ (e.g. Monte Azules, Mexiko). Local communities living in these areas are forced to follow CI's environmental protection methods that are often contradicting their own needs.

### **Consequences**

Indigenous people such as in Mexico, generally acknowledge the necessity to intensify environmental protection measures. However, local communities (Asambleas) are often excluded from participation in the decision making process and are denied access to the natural resources in the territories managed by CI.

### **Current Status and Demands**

PAIR and Direkte Solidarität mit Chiapas nominate Conservation International in order to launch a public discussion on its strategies of global environmental protection. They argue that big international environmental protection organisations like CI do not help to promote independent and sustainable development. The nominating organisations claim that a support of local structures is needed. Building on that, regional development processes should be fostered. PAIR and Direkte Solidarität mit Chiapas demand CI to close its lab for genetic resources in the Selva Lacandona suspected of “bioprospecting” for pharmaceutical corporates. In addition, CI should stop its aerial view camera screening of the region.

### **Link to the details of the nomination: [www.evb.ch/nominations.htm](http://www.evb.ch/nominations.htm)**

Further information and links:

- Bellinghausen, Hermann, “Conservation International, Trojan Horse of US Government and Transnational Corporations: Capise”, La Jornada, Mexico City, 7 June 2003
- Choudry, Aziz, New Zealand, regularly writes for the ZNet (<http://www.znet.com/>), is a renowned critic of Conservation International (e-mail: [notoapec@clear.net.nz](mailto:notoapec@clear.net.nz))
- [www.chiapas.ch](http://www.chiapas.ch)