



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Indigenous Bolivians challenge road through Isiboro Secure Park, 2011

15 August

2011

to: 25 October

2011

**Country:** Bolivia

**Location City/State/Province:** *Trinidad, La Paz*

**Location Description:** *March began in the Amazonian city of Trinidad and ended in La Paz, the highland capital city of Bolivia*

**Goals:**

Full cancellation of the project to build a 177km road across the Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS).

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 038. Marches

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 038. Marches

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 038. Marches

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 038. Marches

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 038. Marches

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 034. Vigils
- 038. Marches

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 006. Group or mass petitions › A group of some 60 international indigenous rights and environmental groups delivered a protest letter to President Evo Morales for the immediate cancellation of the road through TIPNIS.

**Notes on Methods:**

Following the September 25 police crackdown, protest leaders temporarily ceased the march to reorganize. Though exact timing is unclear, marching had definitely recommenced by October 11. There is also some mention of demonstrations in support of the protesters throughout Bolivia at this time, but specific locations and methods are unclear.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Environment

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- Indigenous peoples from the humid Amazonian lowlands of Bolivia
- mostly of Chiman or Yurucare or Moxos Indian heritage.

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Fernando Vargas, Rosario Barradas

**Partners:**

TIPNIS Native Communities, the Conference of Indigenous People

**External allies:**

Survival International, Amazon Watch

Also, see note on group/mass petition in methods section

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- TIPNIS Native Communities
- the Conference of Indigenous People

**Groups in 2nd Segment:****Groups in 3rd Segment:****Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:****Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Involvement of international environmental and indigenous rights groups not known in detail. Date of petition delivery not found.

**Segment Length:** 12 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Bolivian President Evo Morales, the Bolivian Government, Brazilian Development Company OAS, Brazilian Development Bank

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

### Campaigner violence:

Some accounts state that on September 24th, protesters forced their way through the police barricade near the town of Yucumo brandishing bows and arrows and using Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca as a human shield. Protest leaders insist that no protesters were armed. Mr. Choquehuanca was later released.

### Repressive Violence:

A police barricade blocked the march for a number of days in late September. On September 25th riot police fired tear gas into the crowd and beat protesters with batons. The Bolivian government maintains that no protesters were killed, though protester accounts list the death toll at 4 people.

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

Late on October 24th, Bolivian President Evo Morales pushed a bill through legislature cancelling the project through TIPNIS and meeting 15 other demands presented by the protesters.

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On August 15, 2011, some 1000 indigenous peoples from the Isiboro Secure Park (known by its Spanish Acronym TIPNIS) in Bolivia began their protest march against a highway project through the park and their traditional homes. The 500km march from the Amazonian town of Trinidad to La Paz was organized by many indigenous leaders, including Fernando Vargas, president of TIPNIS Native Communities, and Rosario Barradas of the Conference of Indigenous People.

The highway in question was a 177km segment of a larger 300km project linking inland Brazil to Pacific ports in Chile and Peru. The road was contracted by the Brazilian company OAS and Brazil's National Bank for Economic and Social Development promised to fund \$330 million of the road's estimated \$415 million cost. Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, was in great support of the road, which he saw as an investment in Bolivian development.

President Morales's support of the road project was highly criticized by indigenous groups in Bolivia, as well as international environmental organizations, who saw the TIPNIS highway in direct conflict with Morales's election platform of indigenous rights and protection of "Pachamama" or "Mother Earth."

Some 60 international organizations signed a petition letter to President Morales to cease the highway. Meanwhile, marchers continued to approach La Paz.

The people of Bolivia were split over the issue of the TIPNIS highway, and some trade unions and businesses saw the road (which would cut a 16 hour drive to 4 hours) as a necessary step for Bolivian development.

In mid-September, the Bolivian government sent some 1500 riot police north of the town of Yucumo, with the stated purpose of “preventing clashes with communities along the road.” The police barricaded the marchers and impeded their progress for a number of days. On September 24, the protesters broke through the barricade. According to police reports the protesters were brandishing bows and arrows and wounded one officer. It is known that at one point the protesters seized Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca, though he was released without harm.

On September 25, riot police violently cracked down on the protest, firing tear gas into the crowd and beating protesters with batons. On Monday September 26, the Bolivian government insisted that no protesters had been killed, though the protesters claimed that three adults and one child had died in the police attack.

Following widespread outrage at the police crackdown the Bolivian Interior Minister Sacha Llorent, the Defense Minister, and the Migration Chief resigned. President Evo Morales called for an international investigation of the crackdown and arrest of hundreds of activists. President Morales also called for the immediate suspension of the highway project pending further national discussion.

The protest marchers took some time to reorganize, but recommenced marching in mid-October. The march reached La Paz on October 19. On Friday October 21, Morales announced that he had sent an amendment to Congress halting the project. Protesters held a vigil in La Paz over the weekend and the amendment was signed into law late Monday October 24. In addition to the halt of the TIPNIS highway project, the amendment recognized 15 other demands by the protesters, including a protection clause stating that the TIPNIS area would be made off-limits to other development projects.

Leaders from the protest later stated that the success of the march could unite other efforts for indigenous rights and environmental protection in Bolivia, and the leaders intended to continue actions.

## Research Notes

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