

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF HALTING ILLEGAL GOLD-MINING ACTIVITIES IN PROTECTED AREAS OF THE GUIANAS AND NORTHERN AMAZONIA

WHEREAS, parks and indigenous reserves in French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuelan Guayana, and the northern Brazilian Amazon are critical for the conservation of biological diversity and maintenance of ecosystem functions, are vital locations for the protection of indigenous peoples' natural resources, and provide flagship resources for regional tourist industries; and

WHEREAS, the rapid proliferation of uncontrolled gold-mining into national parks and indigenous reserves has greatly impacted the environment, especially through mercury contamination of forest soils, fishes, people, and waterways; extensive stream sedimentation; loss of protective vegetation cover; and local decimation of fauna through poaching by miners; and

WHEREAS, existing measures to protect natural resources in most parks and indigenous reserves in the Guianas and northern Amazonia have been ineffective in preventing illegal mining and its associated impacts; and

WHEREAS, a serious shortage of law-enforcement personnel charged with protecting these parks and reserves permits illegal miners to freely invade parks and indigenous reserves; and

WHEREAS, unabated illegal mining leads to severe ecosystem degradation, especially for riverine habitats; threatens local tourism industries; and increases human misery from methyl-mercury contamination of fish and people, from declining water quality caused by uncontrolled sediment discharge, and from the spread of life-threatening human diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation urges the Governments of Brazil, France, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela to deploy rapidly in those national parks and indigenous reserves that suffer from rampant illegal gold mining, the equipped security personnel, infrastructure, and monitoring needed to uphold the legal status of these vital protected areas for the benefit of the local, national, regional, and global communities; and to closely regulate the sale of mercury, which is used in illegal mining operations.