



The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

THE MORELIA DECLARATION

PROTECTION OF THREATENED TROPICAL DRY-FORESTS IN JALISCO, MEXICO

WHEREAS the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve of coastal Jalisco, Mexico is one of the most important protected areas and best-studied tropical dry forests in the Neotropics, and provides habitat for more than 1200 species of plants, of which 314 are endemic to Mexico; 427 species of vertebrates, of which about 79 are endemic to Mexico; and more than 2000 species of insects; and

WHEREAS the Reserve is part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves of the UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB), and is part of the RAMSAR network of Wetlands of International Importance; and

WHEREAS several turtle-nesting beaches in this region are protected under the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, and the islands of the Bahía de Chamela were recently established as a wildlife refuge; and

WHEREAS, the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve is an area of very active biological research and student training, and therefore plays an invaluable role in the education of Mexican and international scientists; and

WHEREAS on November 22, 2006, the Mexican government's Environmental and Natural Resources Secretariat (Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT) authorized two tourist developments, known as "IEL La Huerta" and "Tambora". These developments were both located on lands adjacent to the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve and within the MAB International Reserve, along the coast in Jalisco state.

WHEREAS a technical panel of scientific researchers from four institutes of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Instituto de Biología, Instituto de Ecología, Centro de Investigaciones en Ecosistemas, and Instituto de Geografía, conducted a detailed analysis of the Environmental Impact Assessment reports (EIAs) of these two tourist developments, and

concluded that they lacked scientific and technical rigor (1) because key information on the biodiversity and conservation status of the flora and fauna was incomplete, and therefore the reports fail to adequately characterize the high biological importance of the region; (2) because both EIAs do not demonstrate that water, which is a very scarce resource in the region, would be used sustainably; and (3) because the EIAs fail to identify the type and extent of potential environmental and social impacts; and (4) because the reports do not establish viable mechanisms for the reduction or mitigation of those impacts.

WHEREAS the UNAM technical panel concluded that both projects, as proposed and approved, will have serious negative impacts on the integrity and ecological functioning of (1) the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve, (2) the International MAB Reserve, (3) nearby protected areas, and (4) the ecosystem of the region as a whole, and because these developments could also threaten the stability and equitable social development of the human populations in the region.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, during its 2007 annual meeting in Morelia, Mochoacan, Mexico, from 16-19 July, urges the Mexican Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales to:

- 1) assess the authorizations given to these two projects very carefully, to ensure that they were conducted according to current official norms and environmental laws, and taking into account relevant international treaties; and
- 2) reevaluate the EIAs for each of these projects, explicitly considering the analyses provided by the UNAM technical panel; and
- 3) suspend both project authorizations unless it can be demonstrated that the above objections to these projects have unquestionably been satisfied.

THE ATBC FURTHER ADVISES the Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales to:

- 1) critically evaluate two additional projects currently under evaluation (Rancho Don Andres and San Carlos), as well as any future development projects that would potentially impact the critical Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve, considering not only their individual effects but their synergic impacts on this biologically outstanding region of the world; and
- 2) carefully consider the views of the relevant scientific community when assessing these impacts and proposed development projects.