



Written by [James Heiser](#) on April 13, 2011

Bolivia Pushes for Equal Rights for Mother Earth

The Plurinational State of Bolivia is presenting a message to the world via the United Nations: Nature should have just as many rights as human beings do. Air has a right to be clean. Water has a right to be pure. And nature has “the right to balance.” Bolivia’s ambassador to the UN, Pablo Salon, will be presenting a treaty to the UN with the goal of codifying these sentiments into international law.



Although the phenomena of environmentalists proving themselves to be “watermelons” (that is, “Green” on the outside and “Red” on the inside) is nothing new, some of socialist President Evo Morales’ (photo, left) anti-Capitalist rhetoric sounds like the stale boilerplate from the Cold War. As President Morales declared in [a 2009 interview](#) with Amy Goodman for DemocracyNow.org: “Capitalism is the worst enemy of humanity.” And Morales does not mean “enemy” in some sort of nebulous fashion: he wants to put the evil capitalist polluters on trial. Goodman specifically addressed this point with Morales:

My last question is: you’ve called for a climate tribunal; what do you mean?

PRESIDENT EVO MORALES: [translated] Those who do damage to planet earth and those who do damage need to be judged. Those who do not fulfill the terms of the Kyoto Protocol should also be judged. And for those ends, we have to organize a tribunal for climate justice in the United Nations.

However, given the fact that the political party which Morales’ leads is called “The Movement for Socialism-Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples,” (or MAS-IPSP) was instrumental in changing the definition of the government of Bolivia from a republic to a “[Social Unitarian State](#).”

The government which represents the nearly ten million residents of Bolivia has its work cut out for it, when it comes to convincing the world to abandon capitalism, prosperity, and the industrial revolution. Fortunately for President Morales, Ambassador Pablo Salon appears to be a “True Believer.” [Steven Edwards wrote for the Vancouver Sun](#):

In a 2008 pamphlet his [Salon’s] entourage distributed at the UN as he attended a summit there, 10 “commandments” are set out as Bolivia’s plan to “save the planet” — beginning with the need “to end capitalism.”



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Reflecting indigenous traditional beliefs, the proposed global treaty says humans have caused “severe destruction . . . that is offensive to the many faiths, wisdom traditions and indigenous cultures for whom Mother Earth is sacred.”

It also says that “Mother Earth has the right to exist, to persist and to continue the vital cycles, structures, functions and processes that sustain all human beings.”

Pairing anti-capitalist rhetoric with invocations of worship of “Mother Earth” may find receptive ears among some of the wackier disciples of Al Gore, but more moderate environmentalists are likely to be turned off by the overtly religious character of the Bolivian proposal. As John Vidal observed in [an article for *The Sydney Morning Herald*](#), “The law has been heavily influenced by a resurgent indigenous Andean spiritual world view, which places the environment and the earth deity known as the Pachamama at the centre of all life. Humans are considered equal to all other entities.”

The Bolivian blend of New Age spirituality, anti-development and anti-capitalist rhetoric, and politics of victimization begins to sound like a lethal brew. Again, as the *Vancouver Sun* observes:

The bid aims to have the UN recognize the Earth as a living entity that humans have sought to “dominate and exploit” — to the point that the “well-being and existence of many beings” is now threatened.

The wording may yet evolve, but the general structure is meant to mirror Bolivia’s Law of the Rights of Mother Earth, which Bolivian President Evo Morales enacted in January.

That document speaks of the country’s natural resources as “blessings,” and grants the Earth a series of specific rights that include rights to life, water and clean air; the right to repair livelihoods affected by human activities; and the right to be free from pollution.

It also establishes a Ministry of Mother Earth, and provides the planet with an ombudsman whose job is to hear nature’s complaints as voiced by activist and other groups, including the state.

Of course, if one literally believes in Mother Earth, would not a “Ministry of Mother Earth” be a ecological priesthood? The planet does not need an “ombudsman” funneling the incoherent, unscientific ramblings of “activists” into punitive policies. In a world which never lacks an ample supply of hot air from the environmentalist fringe, the latest round of pontificating by the government of Bolivia is particularly ill conceived.

Lost in all of the posturing about the “rights” of water, air, mountains, trees and bugs is any reference to their responsibilities. If a spring produces water which is not pure, will the Bolivians drag that spring before a UN tribunal? Of course not. Will locusts be standing trial for their wanton destruction that often causes men and animals to starve? Because the very notion of nature being held “responsible for its actions” is absurd, any discussion of the “rights” of nature is equally absurd. Rhetoric about the “rights of nature” may be emotionally evocative, but it is utterly irrational because all *rights* necessarily come with attendant *responsibilities*.

Rather than resorting to the “Ministry of Mother Earth,” mankind’s responsibility is to recognize that stewardship over the natural world places both rights and responsibilities on the shoulders of the human race. Posturing at the UN about the rights of “Mother Earth” may be emotionally gratifying, but taking responsibility for one’s own actions is far more useful.



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