

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Investigation Announced into Harm Caused by Inter-American Development Bank-Funded Airport Expansion in Colombia

(SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 10, 2015) — This week, the Inter-American Development Bank’s independent accountability office announced that an investigation will move forward of the Bank’s role in severe harm to human health caused by expansion of the El Dorado International Airport in Bogotá, Colombia.

In December 2010, the Bank approved a \$165 million loan to a private consortium to expand and modernize El Dorado International Airport. The resulting increase in the volume and schedule of flights exacerbated already severe noise-related harm. Bank project documents identify noise-related harm as a risk, but failed to require effective, modern means of noise mitigation. Planes land on the runway adjacent to the neighborhood of Fontibón up to 24 hours a day and there is no reprieve from the noise. As a result, at least one third of residents of Fontibón suffer from chronic insomnia, leading to symptoms such as frequent headaches, irritability, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating. The noise has also caused severe hearing damage in children, impacting their development and academic progress.

Communities have been raising concerns about this project for many years. In August 2011, a community-based organization in Fontibón, Comunidades Unidas Macroproyecto Aeropuerto El Dorado (“Comunidades Unidas”), filed a complaint to the Bank’s independent accountability office seeking to hold the Bank accountable for the project’s harmful impacts. Discussions between the parties stalled and then terminated after the Bank’s client continued to deny that it had any responsibility for noise-related harm. The accountability office will now investigate whether the Bank breached its environmental and social obligations causing the harm to communities.

“While this development is positive,” said Lani Inverarity, an attorney with Accountability Counsel, “communities continue to suffer daily from abusive levels of noise more than four years after their initial complaint was filed.” Accountability Counsel, a non-profit legal organization that defends the rights of communities harmed by development projects, will continue to assist Comunidades Unidas to advocate for a robust and timely investigation and to seek remedy and accountability for the harms caused.

Notes for editors

1. The complaint was submitted to the Bank’s Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism, an independent office that investigates allegations by people who claim to have experienced harm or who fear future harms as a result of Bank-funded projects. The supplementary complaint, providing more detail of the noise issues, is available at: <http://www.accountabilitycounsel.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Supplementary-filing.pdf> (in Spanish only).
2. More information about the case, and a video by communities documenting the severe noise, can be found at <http://www.accountabilitycounsel.org/communities/current-cases/colombia-el-dorado-international-airport-expansion-project/>. See also the Mechanism’s website at <http://www.iadb.org/en/mici/complaint-detail,1804.html?id=CO-MICI002-2011>.

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