



Geneva, March 16, 2011

Mr. President,

VIDES International welcomes the active and constructive participation of Panama at the Universal Periodic Review.

Nevertheless, VIDES International remains concerned about the human rights situation of indigenous peoples and those living in the most marginalized areas of the country, especially in the region of Darién. Disparities between main cities and remote regions still persist with respect to access to basic social services such as -- drinking water and sanitation, and education.

Panama is one of the most abundant countries in the world in terms of water resources. The region of Darién has the biggest water basin in the country but most areas afar from main cities suffer from partial or total lack of safe drinking water and insufficient aqueducts to dispense the water. Therefore, citizens in the said areas are deprived of their basic needs.

In this regard, VIDES International recommends Panama:

- to take measures to guarantee the right to water for all citizens; and
- to invite the Independent Expert on the right to water and sanitation to visit Panama.

Concerning education, VIDES International welcomes Panama's acceptance of the recommendations to establish educational infrastructure in remote areas, to improve the transportation system, and to reduce poverty.

With special regard to intercultural education, despite the adoption of national law N° 34 in 1995 and the efforts of the government to implement it, at present, current system neither provides bilingual education nor recognizes the value of indigenous culture.

In this regard, we perceive major issues concerning the teaching staff, especially the lack of adequate remuneration and training.

VIDES International, therefore, recommends Panama:

- First, to fully implement the national legislation concerning education of indigenous peoples;
- Second, to guarantee the teachers adequate remuneration that shall allow them to fully cover transportation and other expenses in performing their duties in remote areas; and
- Third, to provide indigenous teachers with adequate training on the value of indigenous cultures to promote the creation of a truly multicultural society in Panama.

Thank you.