

cradling a sick dog and singing a haunting song. Curious foresters and villagers crowd around, snapping photos with their iPhones. As Maria's anxiety increases, Fagan calls everyone to withdraw to the boats, to avoid exacerbating a situation that verges on chaos.

After camping on a wide beach, the next morning the team heads back downriver. A figure appears on the far bank: Epa himself. He wears a knit cap and a blue and yellow striped shirt and has a small circle of metal cut from a tin can suspended from his nos-

trils. His eyebrows are shaved, and he looks past middle age. He invites some of the visitors to his compound.

Epa—the name means “father” in the Pano language family—says that his real name is Shuri and that although he has no children, he has 10 family members in the forest. “I often visit my family in the forest, and they often come to visit me here,” he says through an interpreter. His people do not farm or build canoes, he says. He boasts that he recently shot a tapir, a large snouted mammal, taking half to his family,

and he proudly shows off his bow and arrow, skillfully made of local wood and fiber.

When asked about the maloca that Fagan saw from the air, he nods. “Those are our enemies,” he says, adding that he fled here in part to avoid their violence. Such clashes among tribes are common and may intensify as the jungle shrinks, anthropologists say.

Epa says his family is reluctant to join him because game and fruit are scarce nearby. “We need cooking oil, sugar, salt, knives, machetes, tobacco, and clothes. If you give me plenty of these things—all the

Mercy on these people, and give us a road

By **Andrew Lawler**, in *Puerto Esperanza, Peru*

When the Peruvian government created the Alto Purús National Park in 2004 to protect biodiversity and isolated peoples (see main story, p. 1072), Miguel Piovesan, the priest in this frontier town, was outraged. He says the park sealed Puerto Esperanza off from the rest of Peru, leaving its people impoverished and ill, without access to medical care or modern conveniences. “People call the Amazon the lungs of the world,” he says in an interview at his modest rectory close to the town's quiet landing strip. “But here we have children suffering from tuberculosis.”

No roads lead into or out of this town of fewer than 2000, located just upstream from Brazil on the Purús River. The only way to get here is by infrequent flights from the town of Pucallpa, Peru, 450 kilometers away, or by a monthlong river trip through Brazil. Teachers and doctors are reluctant to move to such an isolated place, says Piovesan, a thin and ascetic figure dressed in white. “Many families are leaving for Brazil, since living costs are so high here,” he adds.

Piovesan wants a road, as do his allies, who include Catholic bishops, military officers, and local mestizos (people of mixed white and indigenous ancestry), who own most of the small businesses here and are eager for economic growth. The preferred route would hug the Brazilian border and connect the town with the Peruvian city of Iñapari to the southeast. Next to the Puerto Esperanza airport, supporters have

erected an optimistic sign pointing down a rutted path: “Iñapari—207 kilometers: Have a Nice Trip!”

Piovesan also spreads his message from the pulpit. Behind the altar of his church, above the crucifix, large red and white block letters spell out “Jesucristo Camino: Apiadate De Este Pueblo y Danos Une Carretera,” or “The way of Jesus Christ: Mercy on these people, and give us a road.”

Piovesan's message resonates in Lima with some politicians who are keen to develop the Amazon and suspicious of foreign environmental groups. “Three and a half thousand people are living in an unacceptable and unjust situation,” lawmaker Carlos Tubino Arias Schreiber told the Peruvian Congress in 2012, citing lack of education and emergency medical care in the province of Purús. “Human beings are worth more than trees and animals.”

But advocates for the environment and for indigenous people decry the plan for the road—“the Death Road,” as Survival International, a London-based group that defends indigenous rights, calls it. If built, the road would cut through a long swath of the Alto Purús National Park and the Madre de Dios territorial reserve. In the past, such roads have brought economic gains but also a flood of outsiders and pathogens, alcohol, and material goods, anthropologists say. Glenn Shepard of Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in the Brazilian city of Belém, who works extensively in the Amazon, notes that a logging road extending west from Iñapari already threatens the isolated Mashco Piro people, who have recently had aggressive interactions with outsiders. The proposed road's only beneficiaries, says one indigenous organization, will be “illegal logging mafias.”

Jose Borgo Vasquez, the regional coordinator of the nongovernmental organization ProPurús, argues that a better approach to boosting Puerto Esperanza's fortunes would be to encourage small-scale businesses such as aquaculture or cultivating turtles for export down the river to Brazil and eventually perhaps even China. A road, he argues, will simply destroy the forest on which indigenous people, both isolated and not, depend.

For now, the Peruvian government has declined to approve the road due to its high cost as well as the international pressure. The path from the airport ends in dense jungle. Piovesan and his opponents do agree on one point: Lima's failure to help the indigenous people who make up most of Purús province. “The government is doing nothing for the contacted people,” Piovesan says, “so how can they plan to help the uncontacted?” ■



A road linking the town of Puerto Esperanza to the outside world would slice through isolated tribes' territory in the Alto Purús National Park.

Science

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Science **348** (6239), 1078.

DOI: 10.1126/science.348.6239.1078

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Science (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.

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