



Environmental Watch on North Caucasus

Russia, 385012, Maikop, Poselkovaya St. 36, tel/fax: +7(8772)540607; e-mail: <envwnc@gmail.com>

No. EW-78/I-09 From May 15, 2009

*To the Chairperson of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee
Mrs María Jesús San Segundo*

*The Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center
Mr Francesco Bandarin*

*The Executive Director of UN Environmental Program
Mr Achim Steiner*

*Chief of Sport & Environment Unit, UNEP
Mr Theodore Oben*

*The President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)
Mr Jacques Rogge*

*The Chairman of the IOC's Organizational Committee
Mr Jean-Claude Killy*

REGARDING NEW SERIOUS THREAT TO INTEGRITY OF THE WESTERN CAUCASUS HERITAGE SITE

In process of an independent environmental investigation, our organization recently came across a serious threat to the World Heritage Site "Western Caucasus".

The threat consists of a road construction project in Krasnaya Polyana district. Under the project, the road would lead to the Psekhako Ridge and the Olympic Ski Complex. It is part of the Olympic construction program. The starting segment of this road happens to fall on the territory of the Caucasus Reserve (near Laura Cordon), which is part of the World Heritage Site "Western Caucasus." The rest of the road falls, for the most part, into the protected zone of the Caucasus Reserve, which acts as the buffer zone for the World Heritage Site. The investor behind this road is the state company Gazprom.

Information about road intersecting the World Heritage Site has been available on the website of state corporation Olimpstroy (see link: http://www.sc-olympstroy.ru/ru/building_program/map2/). The road is also visible on official plans of Krasnaya Polyana district

(See links: [http://www.ewnc.org/files/KP_Schema~Lands\(2008\)_sm.jpg](http://www.ewnc.org/files/KP_Schema~Lands(2008)_sm.jpg)
and <http://www.ewnc.org/node/1462>).

Surest proof of this road's existing plans is that it is included in OAO Gazprom's project "Skiing complex with two access automobile roads, Psekhako ridge. First stage of development." (See link: <http://www.ewnc.info/node/4363>) The project was developed for Gazprom by Rosengineering Project company. It received a positive state environmental assessment at the end of April, 2009. As far as known, the construction of this road will begin shortly.

Despite this, no documents state that the road will intersect World Heritage Site

territories. This is done in order to misinform experts and the public.

Construction of the road along this route is actively lobbied by Gazprom, since the gas company is hoping to redirect the Psekhako-bound transportation flow so that it goes around its elite resort Grand Hotel Polyana. In this way, the company wants to use the territory of the nature reserve for fixing the miscalculations made during planning the resort's location.

This is not the first time Gazprom is threatening the Caucasus Reserve and the World Heritage Site "Western Caucasus".

In 2000-2001, the company radically altered the course of the Laura River in violation of Russian laws and without notifying the World Heritage Committee. The alteration of the river, which falls in its entirety into the Caucasus Reserve, led to a reduction of the Reserve's territory, and, therefore, the territory of the World Heritage Site.

As was made clear during the UNESCO monitoring mission done last year, Gazprom plans to expand its skiing complex by developing territories inside "Western Caucasus" Property reaching as far as the Kholodny Glacier. What we are seeing now is another attempt to use World Heritage territories in needs of the gas company. Unfortunately, the company's project is de-facto supported by various state agencies despite the fact that constructing roads in protected areas is prohibited by Russian national legislation.

The said road project proves that the situation concerning "Western Caucasus" is still an acute one, and that the Decision 32COM 7B.25 made during the 32nd session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee regarding "Western Caucasus" could not radically change the situation. This decision's point #5, which calls upon Russia to "halt all activities affecting the values and integrity of the property, in particular, the extensive risks to the property from the current plans for the developments for 2014 Winter Olympic Games, and road plans", is not being fulfilled.

The project is also indicative of the fact that the preparations for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi are still being carried out while ignoring basic environmental norms, leading to irrevocable damage to unique natural ecosystems of Western Caucasus. All of this flagrantly contradicts the principles of the Olympic movement.

Yesterday EWNC addressed to RF President Dmitry Medvedev and RF Premier-minister Vladimir Putin with request to make the decision about inadmissibility of construction given roads.

However, as removing this threat without participation of international organization seems unlikely, therefore, we are forced to address you on the matter.

Given the above situation, we ask you to address the Russian authorities and ask them to abandon the harmful road project to Psekhako Ridge through the World Heritage Site "Western Caucasus" as well as its protected buffer zone.

Andrey Rudomakha

Coordinator of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus

Valery Brinikh

*Board Member of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus,
Co-chairman of the International Socio-Environmental Union*

Aleksey Yablokov

*Board Member of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus,
Vice-Chairman of the Scientific Council
of Russian Academy of the Sciences
for issues of the ecologies and emergency situations,
Former Vice-President of IUCN (2000-2004)*

