SUGGESTED GUIDELINES BY THE EASTERN PACIFIC HAWKSBILL INITIATIVE (ICAPO) FOR THE INVESTIGATION, PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF HAWKSBILL TURTLES IN THE GULF OF FONSECA AND ITS AREAS OF INFLUENCE IN RELATION TO THE MAREA PROJECT (USAID)

CONSIDERING that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has categorized the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) as a globally Critically Endangered species.

CONSIDERING that the hawksbill turtle is a migratory species, which in its distribution in the Eastern Pacific is shared by all countries in the region, from Mexico to Peru.

RECOGNIZING the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence (which include the Pacific coast of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua) host the most important nesting sites for the hawksbill turtle in the entire Eastern Pacific identified to date, consisting of more than 75% of their reproductive activity in the region.

RECOGNIZING that the waters of the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence are critical feeding habitats for hawksbill turtles, particularly the Bay of Jiquilisco and Los Cobanos Reef Marine Protected Area (MPA) in El Salvador, the mangrove areas of Honduras, and the Padre Ramos Estuary Natural Reserve (RN) and rocky coasts of southern Nicaragua.

RECOGNIZING that the coastline and waters of the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence host habitats (mangroves, reefs and beaches) that ensure the survival of all life-stages of hawksbills.

RECOGNIZING that a great amount of research is still needed in the area of the Gulf of Fonseca to understand the importance of this area for the diverse populations of hawksbill turtles in the region.

RECOGNIZING the commitment demonstrated by the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua to protect their natural resources, as indicated by their adhesion to important international conventions such as *the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species* (CITES), the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, among others.

RECOGNIZING that El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua form part of the regional effort of the *Central American Integration System*.

CONCERNED by the multiple threats facing hawksbills and their habitats in the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence, including the collection of eggs, fisheries bycatch, the sale of hawksbill subproducts and habitat destruction.

ADMITING that, according the IUCN's Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG), the conservation need of hawksbill turtles is the most critical of all sea turtle species in the Eastern Pacific and one of the most pressing in the world.

RECOGNIZING that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided invaluable support for conservation of sea turtles in El Salvador, identifying this country and the Gulf of Fonseca as important regions for the conservation of hawksbill turtles.

NOTING that the processes of hawksbill conservation initiated by USAID should be strengthened in order to obtain continuity and assure that the local communities obtain benefits from conservation of the species.

CONSIDERING that USAID will soon initiate the program *Management of Aquatic Resources and Economic Alternatives* (MAREA), whose aim is the management of coastal marine resources, and that this program includes the hawksbill turtle as a flagship species and provides opportunities to continue efforts already initiated with the species.

RECOGNIZING that the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence form part of the geographic region influenced by MAREA.

the members of the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO), consisting of international experts in the conservation of hawksbill turtles in the Eastern Pacific

URGE the MAREA program include the conservation of hawksbills as a strategic element in its Work Plan for the Gulf of Fonseca and its areas of influence.

URGE the MAREA program take into consideration for their Work Plan the following conservation guidelines for hawksbill turtles and their critical habitat:

1. Continue and strengthen hawksbill nesting beach conservation programs at the beaches of;

- Los Cóbanos Reef MPA (ES)
- Bay of Jiquilisco (ES)
- Amapala Point (ES)
- Padre Ramos Estuary NR (NI)
- El Ostional (NI)

2. Support the eradication of:

- Fishing with explosives
- The sale of hawksbill products and byproducts, including eggs, meat and tortoiseshell

3. Evaluate and eliminate:

- Mortality of hawksbills as a result of bycatch in artisanal fisheries, particularly the lobster fishery

4. Identify new hawksbill nesting and feeding areas in:

- The Gulf of Fonseca
- The Pacific coast of Nicaragua

5. Protect critical hawksbill habitats, specifically:

- Mangroves
- Coral reefs
- Reefs of hard substrates
- Nesting beaches

6. Foment the collaboration and coordination between agencies and organizations responsible for the conservation of sea turtles and their habitats in the three countries that share the Gulf of Fonseca

Considering the aforementioned, we sign this document on the 28th day of March 2010.

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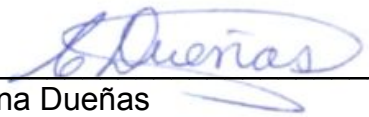

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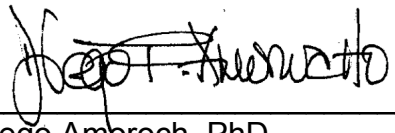

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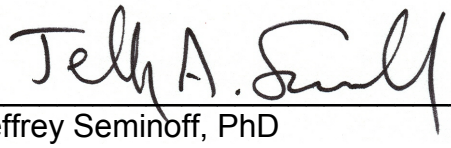

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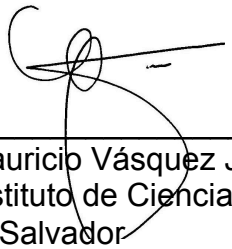

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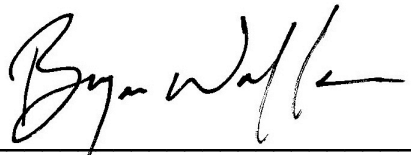

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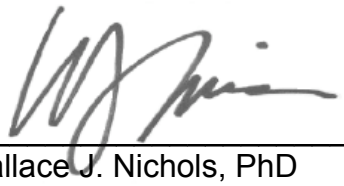

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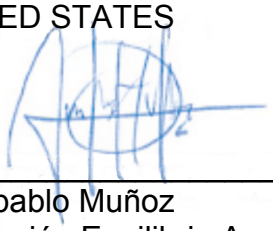

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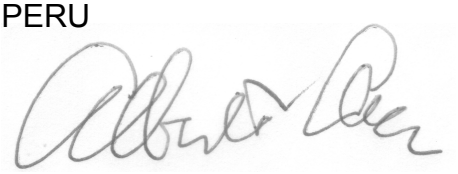

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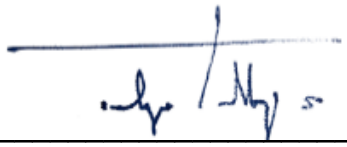

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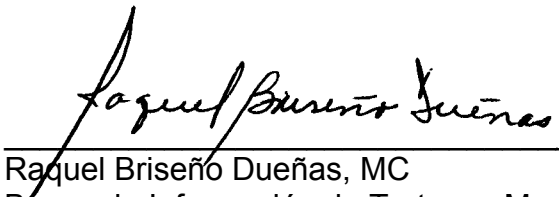

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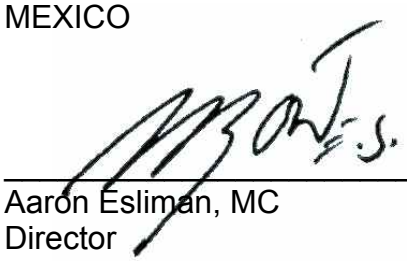

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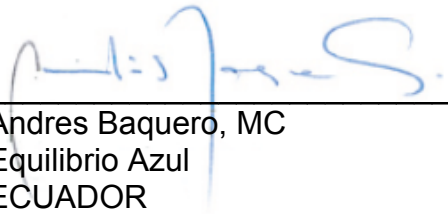

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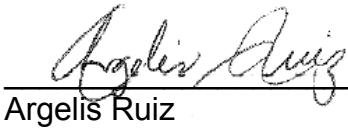

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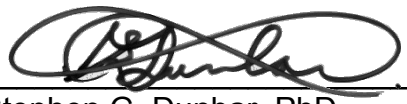

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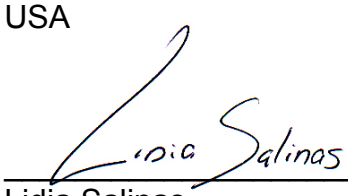

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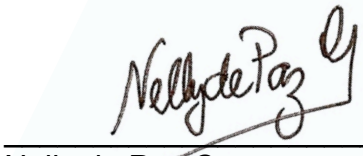

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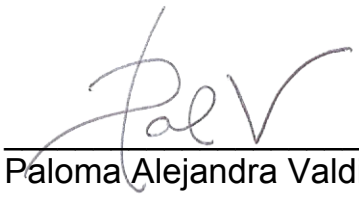

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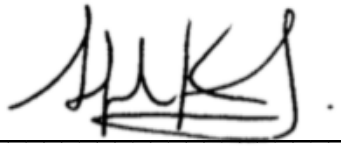

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