

# Bolivia to launch first telecoms satellite—in China

December 19 2013

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Bolivian President Evo Morales (L) reacts as he attends a signing ceremony with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on December 19, 2013

Bolivia will on Friday launch a telecommunications satellite in China, an unprecedented event which the government in La Paz has encouraged citizens to follow via live broadcasts.

The director of Bolivia's National Space Agency, Ivan Zambrana, said on national television that the mission, which was conceived just over four years ago, would take off from Xichang, in Sichuan province, at 1642 GMT.

Bolivian President Evo Morales has traveled to China for the launch of the Tupac Katari satellite, named after an indigenous leader who fought against Spanish colonial rule.

The satellite, which is expected to be operational in March 2014, has cost \$300 million and has been 85 percent financed by a loan from the Chinese Development Bank.

According to the space agency, it will deliver telecoms services to 30 percent of the 10 million Bolivians who live in rural areas, though the satellite's cost has been criticized in light of the country's high poverty rate.

A giant screen has been installed at the Plaza de Armas in La Paz for people to watch the launch, which will also be beamed live on national television.

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