

Caught in the Crossfire!

Peruvian Prosecutor Denounces Massacre of Quechua Indians in Ayacucho

Fearing for his life after denouncing the Peruvian Army as being responsible for the "Cayara Massacre," Dr. Carlos Escobar fled Peru with the aid of Amnesty International. He was the appointed Prosecutor for the Ministry of Public Affairs whose jurisdiction included the zone of Ayacucho, Peru, from July 1987 to November 1988. SAIIC had the opportunity of interviewing Carlos Escobar in the end of June. What follows are excerpts of that interview.

SAIIC: Why are you now in the United States and what are you denouncing?

Carlos Escobar (CE): I was taken out of Peru by Amnesty International due to an investigation I conducted there about a massacre of peasants in the Cayara zone, Department of Ayacucho, in 1988. The military killed 31 persons and "disappeared" another 40. But the idea was to kill them so the massacre could be blamed on Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path guerrilla group). They killed them in front of their families with knives, axes and machetes.

The investigation established that 200 military personnel participated in the massacre. The order was given by a General, the Chief of the Political-Military Command of the zone. On October 14, 1988, I turned in the report and by the 18th, my office was shut down by the Attorney General. After that, there was a mandate to close the investigation. No accusation was made and as the days passed, the people who had already given witness in my presence, 41 in all, were detained by the army. In other words the office of the Attorney General gave out the names and addresses of the witnesses. In September, 1989, the most important witness, a nurse of campesino descent who was pressing charges against the General himself, was killed.

In our work, my office uncovered evidence of 200 "disappeared" people who were detained in army barracks. Almost all of them showed signs of physical torture. The army detains people for supposed participation in terrorist acts, but nothing is ever proven. The work of our office was to pressure the military headquarters into freeing these people and to obtain evidence of illegal activities by army personnel.

SAIIC: How can you be certain that members of the army committed the Cayara massacre?

CE: Two-hundred army personnel were recognized not only because of their uniforms, but because they arrived in army trucks and government helicopters. What happened was that the previous day, May 13, in a town called Erusco, ten minutes from Cayara, a platoon was ambushed and terrorists killed 4 military personnel. The next day, the army came and took over the town. They killed the people in front of the children and in front of their wives. They staged it to look as if Sendero committed the massacre.

SAIIC: Before, you mentioned to us an interesting contradiction. You were telling us that the soldiers who committed this heinous act are also Indigenous people. Is this true?

CE: The army administration is made up of middle class officials. This class is not Indigenous. Army officials reject the peasants, believing themselves to be superior. They treat peasants like animals. But the army's rank and file includes Indigenous people who are, themselves, manipulated to combat their Indigenous brothers. In Peru, the draft is mandatory at 18 years of age.

The Navy has a reputation for being very courageous in Peru. It was funny to see that in the jungle zones, they utilize Indigenous people for protection. From 6pm they are secluded in their barracks and they leave two or three people from a local village with whistles on a platform to alert them if terrorists arrive.

SAIIC: What is the status of the investigation now?

CE: In Peru it has been indefinitely closed. I was called to Washington on May 14th by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. This commission is conducting its own investigation of the massacre. If there is sufficient evidence, the case can be taken to the International Court.

SAIIC: What is the purpose for militarily organizing civilian patrols in Indian communities?

CE: To confront Sendero Luminoso. In the Ayacucho zone, these groups do not form at people's initiative. The army has tried to mandate the creation of these groups but it doesn't always work.

SAIIC: What is the relation between Sendero and the communities? There is information about massacres committed by Sendero in some communities, isn't there?

CE: For almost two years I have been investigating this and I have not seen even one community *voluntarily* collaborate with Sendero. People in the communities fear the army as well as Sendero. When the army or Sendero patrols arrive, people collaborate with them only out of fear.

SAIIC: But are the accusations about assassinations and massacres of supposed army collaborators by Sendero true?

CE: This happens. When an army patrol arrives in a community, the people collaborate out of fear of being beaten up or robbed. Afterwards, when a Sendero patrol arrives, there are people who denounce them so that they will not be beaten or robbed by Sendero. In other words, the Indian people are caught in the cross-fire.

SAIIC: Do you have any information of US military bases in the jungle, being used to train the Peruvian army to fight the narco-traffickers?

CE: I have learned that the North American government has given economic aid of approximately 36 million dollars. A big portion of this goes to the army. Nevertheless, the army in Peru has no legal jurisdiction to fight drug trafficking. This legally falls under the jurisdiction of Police forces. Possibly this money is being used to confront subversion, and that is a completely different situation.

SAIIC: Governments tend to mix the concepts of subversion and narco-trafficking. This provides a pretext to repress the population, and ultimately, to fully exploit human and natural resources.

CE: The government has publicised the fact that Sendero has links with drug traffickers, but I don't know if this is exactly true or simply a way to attract US monies. In the Huallaga Zone, drug-traffickers operate with small airplanes and it would be impossible for the Peruvian airforce not to detect them. In the same way that drugs leave the country, sophisticated weaponry enters, and Sendero has never attacked a community with sophisticated weaponry. The weapons confiscated from them are those stolen from the police or the army. If Sendero had some control over the drug-traffickers, if there were any sort of relationship there, they would have sophisticated weapons. The fact is that they don't.

SAIIC: What do you see in the future of the Indian population of Peru and how can solidarity organizations help?

CE: The government has never bothered about the poorest zones of the country: Ayacucho, Apurimac and Huancaveliva. That is why Sendero became active there. The population there doesn't have anything to lose. A good way to help them is by communicating directly with the organizations which are truly representative of them. These are organizations of farmers and peasants.

The organization of the families of the disappeared has headquarters in Ayacucho. This is where people from many different communities meet. They come with their children, prepare food in a soup kitchen for the orphans, and write down their testimonies to take to the prosecutor's office.

SAIIC: There is great concern about the number of orphans whose parents have been killed in the violence. Is there any support for the communities which have to take care of these children?

CE: The important thing is not only to help the orphans, but to prevent the killing of more people. In the Cayara case, a woman whose husband was killed, testified. She escaped with her six children. The military took her as a prisoner and because she was a prime witness, they killed her too, leaving the six children without protection.

SAIIC: Are traditions, like the *minka* [communal work] in the Quechua areas, being preserved?

CE: In the entire zones of Ayacucho, Apurimac and Cuzco, traditions are still strong. The *minka* is even being exploited by the army. They make people work for nothing, utilizing the *minka* system to build roads. And the people obey because they are used to it, the *minka* is part of their upbringing.

SAIIC: Peru has a new government now. Do you think that there will be changes in the human rights situation? Will the violations persist?

CE: The government is not confronting the guerrillas adequately. The political and military control of emergency zones is under the sole command of an army general who doesn't know what human rights are. If he does know, he disregards them. That is why there are so many disappeared people. The police are controlled by the Public Ministry. The Attorney General can enter all their stations, but he cannot enter any military headquarters.

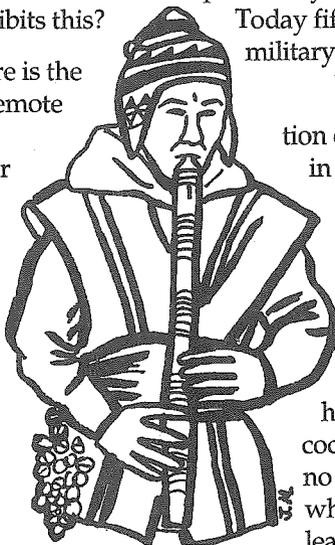


One of the witnesses recovering from bullet wounds in a nearby hospital.

SAIIC: Why can't the Attorney General enter military headquarters, is there a law that prohibits this?

CE: No. There is no such law, but there is the gun. The Attorney General is the law, but in remote zones such as Ayacucho where the military is omnipotent, the Attorney General cannot enter their headquarters. That is why, if we suspend emergency zones, we can solve the problem of the disappeared. The emergency zones are at the core of the problem.

In Peru the emergency zones include 40 percent of the country. It would be a radical change to send the military back to their barracks. In these zones, the army has created a kind of status quo. They are very entrenched in being there and extorting the people, etc... When [former President] Alan Garcia said the emergency zone status of Ayacucho would be lifted, car bombs immediately appeared in Ayacucho. The Attorney General's office investigated one of those car bombings and we came to the conclusion that it was



planted by the army. So the President revoked his order. Today fifty percent of the population of Ayacucho is military or police.

SAIIC: With the US promoting the militarization of the coca production zones, will the situation in the emergency zones be aggravated?

CE: I think the problem of drug-trafficking is wrongly emphasized. The problem is not the production, but the consumption. If there is nobody to consume cocaine, who is going to produce it? The consumption must be attacked and that must happen in the US. Peruvians have been using coca leaves for thousands of years and it's caused no problems, *ever!* It's part of the tradition. So why try to eradicate the production of coca leaves? For North Americans, it would be cheaper to control their borders, than to spend what they are spending in weaponry in South America, unless, of course, they have other goals...

How You Can Help!

Write to the Peruvian President 1) expressing your concern at the murders and tortures in the Ayacucho Province, 2) request that a prompt and independent investigation of the tortures and killings be carried out, that the results be made public and those responsible be brought to justice, 3) request that safety of the witnesses be ensured, 4) contact your local media to give publicity to these atrocities.

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For more information on human rights in Peru, contact:

Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos
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Last-Minute Communiqué

SAIIC was just informed by Amnesty International about more tortures and deaths of Quechua Indian people in the Department of Ayacucho.

At least 16 people were tortured by soldiers, as a result of which three of them died, in the province of Vilcashuamán, Department of Ayacucho.

On September 25, at 7am, a contingent of soldiers from the Accomarca military base, led by officials nicknamed "Moreno" and "Gitano," went to the community of Pucapaccana in the Province of Vilcashuamán. They reportedly called the community together and forced them to hand over cattle, money and belongings. The reports add that the names of Bernabé Baldeón García, Jesús Baldeón Zapata and Santos Baldeón Palacios were read from a list and they were ordered to accompany the soldiers to Pacchahuallhua, bringing the animals with them. Bernabé Baldeón García was among the confirmed dead. On their way three women who

were grazing their sheep were reportedly raped by five of the soldiers escorting the detainees.

When the group arrived at Pacchahuallhua, they were taken to a local government center where they were joined by other men, women and school children, who were being held by soldiers who had carried out similar raids in nearby areas.

Ill-treatment and torture reportedly took place in a nearby church. In a written denunciation made by the *Federation of Vilcashuamán Institutions (FIPV)*, its representatives describe the torture to which the peasants were subjected:

...they were tied up with wire and hung upside-down from a beam and whipped; afterwards they were made to lie on the floor, one on top of another, forming a pile of human bodies such that the person at the bottom carried the weight of all the others and the soldiers jumped on top of them; after this ill-treatment they were submerged in ...hot and ...cold water ...until they were dying...