

unites all Kuna people and organizations. Every six months the problems of our people are reviewed in this congress. During the rest of the year our communities and organizations work independently. Distinct political and even ideological positions are respected. What unites us is the defense of our region, our Mother Earth, and our culture.

The Kuna Region of Madungandi is being threatened by the invasion of non-indigenous colonists. Those who live in the jungle region are on mountainous lands which are less productive, the result of a forced relocation in 1974 and 1975 by the former government of General Omar Torrijos. The government decided to build a hydroelectric dam in the region in order to supply electricity to the republic. Ironically, today, our brothers still do not have electricity. They do not enjoy any of the benefits of this so-called "technological development."

They live in the province of Panama, under the direct administration of the authorities of that province. Their situation worsened in 1974 and 1975 when the government of Omar Torrijos flooded their territories and turned them into an artificial lake. Now the lake generates approximately 45% of the country's electricity. The cultivated lands of the Kuna were flooded, the people were displaced to inhospitable and less productive areas, and they received little compensation for their losses. In contrast, the colonists or invaders were relocated to better parts and given compensation for the loss of land and cultivated areas. Since the origins of this problem nearly 20 years ago, the stealing of lands from the Kuna has continued. Today, it is led by wealthy landowners and cattle ranchers who manipulate disputes between poor people and our brothers in order to eventually take over the land themselves. These invasions have increased since the US invasion of Panama, as a result of the confusion and lack of applied justice.

On the 10th of July, 1991, the Kuna of Madungandi began a series of peaceful protests, an uprising. The Panamanian authorities immediately stated that the "Kuna indigenous people, using heavy weapons, have risen up... to destabilize the present government." This became the pretext for the governor of the province to request the police intervention in order to repress the Kuna. Fortunately, their false claims were disregarded and confronted with courage by our brothers, with the support of the Kuna Yala.

The Kuna who live on the islands engage in subsistence production. The men generally work in fishing the seas and agricultural production, in particular the production of coconut, which is our main source of cash income. We sell coconuts to Colombian ships, and many of us exchange it for food products. The Panamanian government has done little or nothing to purchase coconut from us and to look for a solution to the deep economic crisis affecting our regions. Amongst our people, we continue to barter for food products, which contributes slightly toward alleviating the crisis. The women, in turn, dedicate themselves primarily to the home and to the care of children.

(See Atencio, p. 45)



The Kuna Speak about 500 Years of Resistance

(Panama) Our organization, along with other indigenous organizations in Panama have coordinated the 500 years campaign in a united way. We see 1992 as a time to commemorate not only 500 years of resistance, but also to reinforce ties of unity amongst ourselves. This will enable us to better confront our enemies who try to divide us and deny our existence. It is for this reason that we recognize the struggle of other poor and marginalized sectors of our country. Like us, they fight for their survival and for respect of their rights. However, we do not tolerate those non-indigenous organizations that want to capitalize on the 500 years campaign for political purposes. They want to use indigenous peoples without understanding and recognizing the nature of our struggles.

We do not deny the struggle of other sectors of Abya Yala (continent, in the Kuna language). On the contrary, our continent will be free only when all sectors... are free. However, there are attempts to undermine the unity among indigenous peoples by using us when we are in the limelight, and simultaneously giving priority to other struggles.

I believe that 1992 should not be seen as the end of the indigenous struggle. Instead, we must realize that our struggle will continue beyond 1992, until there is recognition of all of our rights of self-determination for our territories. This must be understood by those popular groups who support us. They should not see in the struggle of indigenous people, the opportunity to achieve their own aspirations. We are in solidarity with them, and we thank them for their solidarity. And we recognize that there are divisions amongst indigenous peoples, but in spite of all of these, 1992 should be a year for monumental unity, in order to challenge our enemies. Our Mother Earth is being beaten, and her children should be united to defend her.

In Panama we have a 500 Years National Committee composed of indigenous and non-indigenous groups. The indigenous peoples include the Kuna, Guaymie, and Embera. We want the Committee to be composed not solely of people from the capital and big cities, but rather people from the communities of our regions. We are proposing a National Gathering to deal with many issues, including that of greater unity in order to defend our rights and demands to the national government.

I would like to call on all of our brothers and sisters of the continent to keep our fists high - together we will advance along a path of unity and liberation of our peoples.