

EPIDEMIC HITS COMMUNITIES OF SAN LORENZO, PERU

In the Peruvian Indigenous communities of San Lorenzo, located close to the Ecuadorian border, an unidentified epidemic resembling the measles has spread voraciously, killing 5 and infecting 88 others. Symptoms include high fevers, skin eruptions, respiratory difficulties, hemorrhages, vomiting of blood, diarrhea, and bone pain. Representatives from the Ministry of Health have flown to the respective sites to collect samples which are currently being evaluated in the United States. In the meantime, a vaccine against measles has been discovered to diminish the intensity of the illness, resulting in a campaign to vaccinate 13,000 people.

The Ministry of Health made an official agreement with the Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSESEP) to develop an "Action for Health" program serving 150 Indigenous communities of the High Amazonas regions via the San Lorenzo Health Center. Each community elects Indigenous youth to be part of the "Promoters of Health" network that is trained to respond to the needs of the community during times of crisis. In addition, the Ministry of Health appoints an Indigenous representative to be in charge of the health needs of 8-10 communities. Previous cholera and malaria epidemics were effectively brought under control through

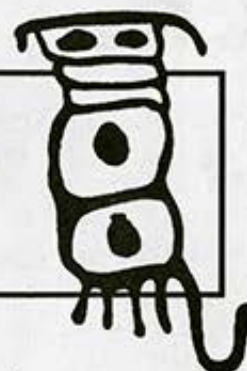
these networks.

This is the second epidemic to reach the San Lorenzo communities in recent years. Malaria Falsiparum, before coming into San Lorenzo, had spread in the border petroleum exploitation regions of the Ecuadorian rain forests with the arrival of obreros (oil workers) from other parts.

Despite these positive efforts, both the impacts of disease and severe water shortages are driving San Lorenzo into an increasingly alarming health crisis. As a result, AIDSESEP, its member organizations and the San Lorenzo Health Center are calling for a revamping of Peru's health care system for its Indigenous communities.

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PAHO ADOPTS INITIATIVE ON INDIGENOUS HEALTH

After reviewing the "Health of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas" initiative formulated at the Working Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Health, held in Canada, from April 13 to 17, the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), resolved to adopt Document CD37/20 during its Fourth Plenary Meeting held last September. The document which describes the initiative, was presented to PAHO by Colombian Senator Anatolio Quir, Juan Reategui of Aidesep, Peru, and Mirna Cuninham, Miskito from Nicaragua.

The resolution urges member governments to take steps in improving the deficient health and living conditions of the estimated 43



Juan Reategui of Aidesep

million Indigenous persons of the Americas as well as the participation of Indigenous leaders and representatives in this process.

The resolution further calls on governments to strengthen the technical, administrative, and managerial capacity of national and local institutions that are responsible for the health of Indigenous populations with a view to progressively overcoming the lack of information in this

area and ensuring greater access to health services and quality care, thus contributing to a higher degree of equity.

Member governments are further urged to work toward the transformation of health systems and the development of alternative models of care, including traditional medicine and disease prevention programs.

The directing council also calls for the participation of Indigenous persons and their communities in all aspects of PAHO's work.

For more info: Pan American Health Organization 525 23rd St. N.W. Washington DC 20037, USA