



EDITORIAL

The commemoration of the 500 years of European invasion is now behind us. The wide-spread resistance to the officially planned events and the "official" version of history was very successful, increasing public awareness of the existence of the 45 million Indigenous people that live on the continent of Abya Yala. But even more importantly, native communities mobilized throughout the continent, not only to demonstrate their presence, but also to make concrete proposals presenting alternative solutions to the problems faced by Indigenous communities everywhere. Demarcation of Indigenous territories, Indigenous control over educational systems, sustainable economic development, and the right to self-determination are all demands that will not go away until they are fulfilled.

Indigenous communities are increasingly taking their destiny in their own hands, beginning by decolonizing themselves on an ideological level. The exploitative right-wing parties, paternalistic liberal parties, and dogmatic and manipulative sectors of the left wing — all arising from a Europeanized, Western perspective — have sought to prevent the autonomous development of the Indigenous Movement in South and Meso America. In spite of their diversionary tactics and attempts at control which continue to this day, Indigenous communities have strengthened themselves by affirming their distinct identity, and shaping their own political philosophies which reflect their traditional spiritual and cultural heritages.

The search for unity amongst Indigenous peoples — a unity which respects our diversity — is manifested in the many representative organizations which have been created on regional and national levels, organizations that seek to affirm our mutual solidarity and strengthen our common positions. Many of us share the vision of a strong movement of Indigenous Unity on a Continental level. The formation of the Continental Commission of Indigenous Nations and Organizations (CONIC) can be an instrument for developing and strengthening that unity. The Second Continental Encounter of Indigenous Nations and Organizations, to be held in Mexico from the 8th to the 13th of October, will be a significant step towards this vision.

It being 1993, it is important to examine the role of the United Nations as it affects the Indigenous struggle. Many years ago, Indigenous delegates to the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Populations proposed that 1992 be declared the Year of Indigenous Peoples as a gesture of reparation for 500 years of colonization. Governmental representatives at the UN refused, supporting instead Spain's proposal to commemorate 1992 as the "Encounter of Two Worlds", while agreeing to declare 1993 as the Year of Indigenous Peoples.

The inauguration of the Year of Indigenous Peoples took place on December 10, 1992 (see article page 4). It was the first time that Indigenous representatives were invited to speak to the UN's General Assembly. Indigenous delegations from all over the world made great efforts to travel to New York for this event at their own expense, since no UN funds were provided for this purpose. After the UN officials and government representatives addressed the General Assembly in the morning, the meeting was to continue in the afternoon with the speeches of the Indigenous representatives. Yet when the General Assembly reconvened, the Indigenous representatives witnessed, with great surprise and disillusionment, that almost all of the government representatives and many of the UN officials had left. Many took this as a bad augury for the "International Year of Indigenous Peoples", as well as a sign of great disrespect.

These inauspicious beginnings have yet to be overcome. Five months after the inauguration in New York, the many promises of "working in partnership" with Indigenous peoples have still not been fulfilled. For example, the Center for Human Rights in Geneva has announced that they have obtained several hundreds of thousands of dollars for Indigenous Peoples' Projects, but they have not yet consulted with any Indigenous organizations in order to decide what projects will be funded. Indigenous peoples have not been granted official participation at the upcoming World Conference of Human Rights in Vienna. The ILO's Convention 169 has not yet been ratified by the majority of the world's nation-states. While the Draft Declaration of Principles and Rights of Indigenous Peoples may be approved after 10 years of development (see page 5), it will then still need to be approved by the Human Rights Commission and ratified by the many governments represented in the UN before being adopted by the General Assembly.

While it is certainly both worthwhile and necessary to struggle for the establishment of these international accords — and then to ensure that governments act in compliance with them — it is important that this not replace the energy and attention that we need to give to strengthening our communities and organizations. Our vision is that, through organizing for self-determination, building alliances with each other, and consolidating our Indigenous unity on a continental level, we can ensure the well-being of all Indigenous peoples and of our Mother Earth.