



COLOMBIA

# “Building The Great Maloca”

“We Indian people want the National Organization of Indians in Colombia (ONIC) to be like a great *Maloca* (the traditional communal house), a *Maloca* built with the hands and effort of everybody, where we can all fit, without leaving anyone out.”

In February ONIC held the Second National Indian Congress in Colombia. More than 900 people representing about 500,000 Indians got together to evaluate the activities of the organization and to discuss the present situation of Indian communities in relation to organization, land tenure, economic life, health, education, ownership and use of natural resources, study and use of Indian legislation, and relations with non-Indian popular movements. Conclusions of the meeting, according to *Unidad Indígena*, the newspaper published by ONIC, included:

—“In relation to land, we marshaled our strength to pursue the enlargement of the reserves until we get the minimum land necessary to guarantee our existence.

—“In relation to communications, we want the newspaper *Unidad Indígena* to become a voice for all the communities in the country by training people in the regional organizations to do journalistic work.

—“In relation to legislation, we must study the laws that exist and compel the government to comply with the laws which protect us.

—“In the field of education, we have formed a special committee within ONIC to ensure the enforcement of decree 1142, which assures the autonomy of Indian communities.

—“In relation to economy, we call for Indian communities to take upon ourselves the responsibility of directing our own development projects so that resources are dedicated to programs of communal interests.

—“In relation to health, we encourage the pursuit of ways to combine western medicine and traditional Indian medicine.

—“In relation to other organizations, we propose that our interactions not be utilitarian and that we trade materials and share experiences more frequently in order to enrich our relationships.”

Indian youth joined the Congress, formed their own commission, and proposed that youth meetings in the regional organizations should also be held because “only in this way can we improve our education and recuperate our cultural values.”

Despite the difficult situation that Indian people face in Colombia—including invasion of their lands, the presence of non-Indian religious organizations, and the danger of being caught in confrontations between government military forces and guerrilla groups—the Second National Indian Congress reinforced the unity of Indian people and the goal “to live off our land, from our own hands, with our parents and our children, in peace which has always been present in our communities.

