



"How women weave."

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ARGENTINA

Argentina has a population of 29 million people, including a large percentage of European ancestry, primarily Italian and Spanish. Following the "Independence from Spain" in 1816, the people of European ancestry took control of the government and took over the major part of Indian land. The last large armed Indian resistance ended in 1879 when the Argentine military defeated the Mapuche Confederation with the support of the United States, which sent Remington rifles to Argentina following the U.S. Civil War. Since that time Indian people in Argentina have faced a government campaign of annihilation and the destruction of their culture.

In spite of genocide and ethnocide, today there remain 13 Indian nations with a population of approximately 1.5 million people. There are at least nine Indian organizations at the national level that petitioned the government of President Raúl Alfonsín and the Congress to pass a law to validate the historic rights of Indian people vis-à-vis the national government. This past October 23, Congress approved the law regarding "Indian policies and support to aboriginal communities," in which, for the first time, Indian rights to constitute and live within communities are recognized. The issues of lands that have been taken and the need for bi-lingual and bi-cultural education are also addressed. The law's objectives include the statement, "It is declared in the national interest, as an act of historic reparation and of patrimonial restitution, that aboriginal communities demand attention and support for their defense and development as full participants in the socioeconomic and cultural process of the nation."

It is worth adding that large segments of the general public, such as the rural and urban unions, as well as progressive artists and intellectuals who previously denied or gave no importance to Indian political participation, supported passage of the law.

However, simply passing this law does not solve the problems faced by Indian people. Long-standing institutions of oppression remain intact, allowing large enterprises such as mining, lumbering and large landowning to continue to violate the human rights of Indians and poor campesinos. One Mapuche leader declared, "Unity of all affected segments of the society is necessary in order to oblige the government to comply with its promises."