

WHY WE ABANDONED OUR GUNS

Quintin Lame Speaks

(Colombia) Last April 9th, Alfonso Peña Chepe, Indian representative of the Armed Movement "Manuel Quintin Lame," took an oath before the plenary session of the National Constitutional Assembly. In this way, he became the 74th member of this governmental body.

The Indian people of Quintin Lame in the Department of Cauca are negotiating with the Colombian government in order to come to a peaceful solution to the armed conflict there.

After seven years of armed struggle, they abandoned their arms on May 31st. The following ten reasons were given as to why they decided to change their strategy:

1. The indigenous struggle of Colombia is a result of the injustices within Colombian society. We have decided to compromise with the people of Colombia in order to search for a political solution to the social, judicial, cultural and economic conflicts and in order to achieve social justice.

2. We want to contribute to democracy in a civil society, by working towards the elimination of the roots of violence.

3. The historic opening of the National Constitutional Assembly serves as a starting point in the reconstruction of a new country which recognizes the existence of different cultures.

4. After 500 years of cultural resistance, the presence of Francisco Rojas Birry, Lorenzo Muelas and Alfonso Peñas Chepe in the National Constitutional Assembly demonstrates that Indian people have strong support from their communities as well as from other sectors of the population.

5. The presence of indigenous representation in national politics is one more step in the defense of our identity, due to the struggles of our ancestors such as Caciqua Gaitana, Quintin Lame, and Alvaro Ulcué.



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6. The Colombian guerrilla movement has decided to follow the path of dialogue and political negotiation rather than the armed struggle of the past.

7. We want to encourage dialogue, political negotiation and a peaceful solution instead of the conflictive one which has kept us out of the political arena.

8. In Colombia, we are building a democratic system where it is our duty to contribute our solidarity to an alternative to the system which consisted solely of liberals and conservatives for many years.

9. After 500 years of being massacred and plundered, we Indian peoples of the Americas will continue our struggle in a new way to prevent new forms of colonization.

10. Indigenous communities, peasants and other popular sectors will establish a civil society, with great socio-political strength, which will offer an alternative, and seriously deal with the roots of violence.

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