

Mapuche at Summit of the Americas:

"We Oppose the Free Trade Agreement"

We alert the Indigenous peoples of America that the multilateral economic agreements which are being adopted by the Latin American governments compromise the future of the continent, in which the Indigenous peoples are a reality that possess historical legitimacy over the territories in which the governing states have been established.

—*Consejo de Todas las Tierras, Declaration of Temuco, Dec. 2, 1994*

During the Summit of the Americas, President Clinton announced the future entry of Chile into the North American Free Trade Agreement. Aucán Huilcamán and José Naín, two representatives of the Mapuche Indian organization in Chile, Consejo de Todas las Tierras (Council of All the Lands), presented a formal declaration to those at the Summit, denouncing the multilateral agreement as illegitimate, since the states have no authority over their people. The declaration affirms that the states can legitimately meet to discuss the free-trade agreement, but cannot unilaterally make decisions that affect Indigenous peoples. "The Indigenous people are a reality. We predate the states. We pre-date the governments that today make decisions for us and for the continent...at the same time, those agreements are foreign, unilateral, and lack our consent."

Huilcamán and Naín came to the Summit representing hundreds of thousands of Mapuche who fear that NAFTA will increase the exploitation of their territories and the violation of their human rights. NAFTA, they point out, was signed in the US, Canada and Mexico without taking the Indigenous peoples into account. According to the Mapuche representatives, the economic agenda proposed at the Summit, will have terrible repercussions for Indigenous peoples. "They say that the cold war has

ended," Huilcamán noted, "but this war of economic competition is more dangerous, more harmful, more effective, more destabilizing."

"We participated in the Summit—stated Huilcamán—in order to make our physical and cultural existence known, even when the States and in particular the Chilean state say that there are only Chileans here. We demonstrated that in Chile there is another reality, apart from the uniformity that the State is trying to impose. Chile has twelve million inhabitants, according to the government four million live in poverty.

One million of these are Mapuche. In the long term, the people most affected by the trade agreement with Chile, as in all of America will be the Indigenous peoples. In this sense, we are concerned for the future of the continent. We have found that there is no information—there is little understanding of the implications of these multilateral agreements.

Today for example, people are patenting food products, but they are also patenting Indigenous knowledge, even human genes. When we lose control of these things, it will be a global catastrophe." Under NAFTA, the declaration states, "the intellectual property of the Indigenous peoples will continue to be usurped with greater efficiency, in light of that fact that biotechnology has become the mechanism and tool of usurpation and extraction of our knowl-

edge at the service of the northern country's transnationals."

This declaration sprung from a conference held in November in Temuco, Chile. It begins, "In this declaration, we establish a political position before NAFTA. In March, we will hold another meeting to elaborate a set of proposals to guarantee Indigenous rights in relation to the free-trade agreements. We are holding a series of consultations, because we want everyone to be fully aware of any plan, program or project derived from the free trade agreement and applied in Mapuche territory. But in addition, we want guarantees for our rights. This may cause conflicts with the state, and of course, the communities are going to defend themselves. This conflict may have unpredictable results."

Other States Will Soon Follow

In the Summit, the states announced development of an action plan to review and improve the laws that protect the rights of minorities and the Indigenous peoples, but according to Huilcamán and Naín, this is "just a way to make the public believe that the states will respect our rights."

Following the Summit, Huilcamán and Naín spoke at a number of events, emphasizing that while Chile may be the next signatory to NAFTA, many other Latin American states are lined up to follow. Sooner or later, all Indigenous peoples will be faced with the same circumstances. Thus, the Consejo de Todas las Tierras hopes to establish alliances with other Indian organizations to promote action now—before the agreements are signed and it is too late. Huilcamán notes that the Indigenous movement has been too often on the defensive, reacting to events after the fact. NAFTA, he urges, should be met with an Indigenous offensive.

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