

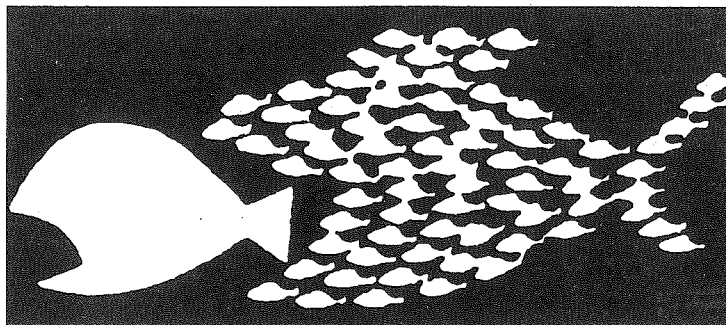
# Mennonites Invade Mbya Lands

Marilyn Rehnfeldt of the Center for Humanitarian Studies in Paraguay writes:

*Enormous tracts of Indigenous lands are currently being occupied for raising livestock and for agricultural purposes as part of a quasi-official government policy carried out in the name of progress. The forests, hunting and gathering grounds, sacred sites burial grounds have become the private property of livestock owners and non-Indian farmers. The entire process of leaving the Indigenous people destitute and marginalized leads irrevocably to ethnocide. In other words, this process leads to the elimination of Indigenous culture and values and, most importantly, the destruction of the collective identity associated with the land/territory. The 'place of Indigenous culture' or Tekoha, disappears.*

(Paraguay) Several families from the *Civil Society of the Sommerfeld Kommittee* have invaded lands which were recently reclaimed by the Mbya people. A total of 1,430 hectares were expropriated on November 21, 1989 and designated for use by 90 Mbya families from Cheiro Arapoty, as stipulated in Paraguay Law 23/89. Nevertheless, the Mennonites began erecting prefabricated houses, building roads and cultivating the land without regard for the law.

According to Mbya leader Máximo Gonzalez, "...the Mennonites entered our community. They entered 'Mbaratepe' by force, threatening us and ignoring our protests. They told us the law meant nothing to them, that the expropriation papers were pure garbage. A Mennonite named Abraham laughed at General Rodriguez' signature and said all the papers were false. I can't do anything. The Mennonites don't respect the law. We are afraid of the Mennonites. They say they will take us prisoners, punish us and throw us off our land. All of the land you see in front of my house was cultivated by the Mennonites in violation of the law. They arrived in the evening, worked into the night and planted wheat in front of my house."



Approximately 7,000 Mbya live in Eastern Paraguay and the forested regions of Northern Argentina, Southern Brazil and Uruguay.

Threats to the cultural, spiritual and social integrity of the Mbya have intensified

since the 1950's when rapid capitalist development reached their lands. In more recent years, the Indigenous people of Eastern Paraguay have lost much of their forested land to a colonization project (Proyecto Caazapá) financed by the Paraguayan government and the World Bank. The need for demarcating and legalizing Mbya territory has been voiced since the beginning of the project in 1983, and as of today, only a small minority has seen their lands legalized. Even that small group has had their lands shrunken by the government.

The area affected by the Mennonite invasion is known as Mbaragui 14 and is located within the limits of the Caazapá Project, which poses another serious threat to the Mbya people and was the focus of a campaign launched on June 7 by: the National Team of Misiones from the CEP, the UC Defense of Indigenous Heritage, Socio-Anthropologic and Judicial Professional Services, the UC Center for Anthropological Studies and the Indigenous Support Services.

One of the educational panels held during the campaign focused on the issue of ethnocide. The United Nations definition of ethnocide established in 1948 states:

*Ethnocide means that an ethnic group, either collectively or individually, has been denied the right to enjoy, develop and transmit its own culture and language: We declare that cultural ethnocide is a violation of international law, as is genocide, and is condemned by the UN Convention for the Prevention and Sanction of Genocidal Abuses of 1948.*

**To contact the Mbya Guarani Bulletin, you can write to:**  
**Mbya Guarani Bulletin**  
**Azara 3267 C/Kubischek**  
**Asuncion, Paraguay**  
**Telephone: 203-618**

