



## Ecuador

# MARCH ON QUITO

## AMAZON INDIANS DEMAND TO BE HEARD

*We come to speak in the name of all the lives of the jungle, especially for those which are disappearing.*

*They are the water spirits:  
the Yacurunas.*

*They are the jungle spirits:  
the Sacharunas.*

*They are the fertility spirits.*

*They are the sowing spirits.*

*They are the harvesting spirits.*

*They are the gods of abundance.*

*Allpamanda! Causaimanda!*

*Jatarishum!*

*(For land! For life! We all rise up!)*

— from a flyer distributed by the marchers

In the last three years the Ecuadorian government has been intensifying the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources in the Amazon region, especially in the Pastaza Province, homeland of the Quichua, Shiwiar and Achuar Indians. As a way to defend their territory the Indian People, led by OPIP, have been trying to persuade the government and oil companies to recognize Indian territories and conduct rational exploitation of the resources in these territories. After exhausting the possibility of a negotiated settlement, the Indians felt their only recourse was to march on the capitol.

Thus on April 21, 1992 10,000 marchers arrived in Quito, led by 2,000 Indians from the

Pastaza Province, to demand that the Indian voices be heard.

The marchers called on the government to legally recognize their territories, and reform the National Constitution to protect the different nationalities and cultures of Ecuador. The Indians are demanding control over the largest remaining Amazon rainforest lands. Under very heavy military guard, the government of President Rodrigo Borja partially met their demands by officially recognizing over two and a half million of the almost five million acres of lands they occupy. The government also called for a special session of Congress to review Indigenous Peoples' demand for constitutional reform.



Photo OPIP

Woman with bouquet at the march

The Amazon march was coordinated by the Organization of Indigenous People of Pastaza (OPIP) as a response to nearly three years of fruitless dialogue between the government and the national Indian federations, culminating in the government's refusal to legalize the Indian territories and its acquiescence to pressure from trans-national oil, timber, mining and tourism industries to exploit the Amazon rainforest.

The Quichua, Shiwiar, Zaparo and Achuar marchers were following in the footsteps of their ancestors. Ninety years ago, led by the legendary chief Palati, leaders of these groups marched from their communities in Pastaza to the capitol of Quito to meet with the government over the rights to the territory which they have occupied for a millennium. The leaders returned to their communities with a title to all the lands of the Pastaza Province. This title to seven-million acres was buried and forgotten when the chief died.

On April 23, President Borja warmly greeted and thanked the Indians for their courage and agreed to negotiate the first of their demands of the legalization of their traditional territories. Despite the warm welcome and promises, the peaceful marchers were met by a massive contingent of police and military in riot gear and army tanks. Tito Merino, the communications coordinator of OPIP commented wryly that he did not realize that Ecuador was at war.

One hundred of the Indian leaders were allowed to pass through the military blockade to present their demands to President Borja. Indian leaders, from Luis Macas, the President of the National Indian Confederation of Ecuador (CONAIE), to a traditional midwife urging the President to legally recognize Indian rights.

The negotiations with the Indian People of Pastaza reached a deadlock over the government's refusal to legally recognize Indian territory which falls within a 25 by 120 mile swath of land along the Peruvian border. The main force blocking the legalization of these lands is the Ecuadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC).

IERAC claims that this border area is necessary for "national security" and has re-

ders." Citing the loss of nearly half its territory to Peru this century, the Ecuadorian government claims it is encouraging development along its borders to prevent further incursions.

The Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza are not asking for areas already colonized, but only land which they currently use. Close to 35 percent of the Pastaza Indian communities are located within the border region slated for colonization. They are demanding that this security zone be reduced considerably.

On May 13th, the Borja administration formally handed over title to over one-half of the Indian-occupied lands. The Indians claim that all of their territory must be legalized and that these lands be contiguous so as not to separate communities of the same nation. Instead, the government is recognizing 19 separate blocks of lands as the properties of individual communities.

The military charges that the Indians are attempting to divide the country by claiming their "nation-hood." CONAIE disagrees. "In no way are we calling for dissolution of the Ecuadorian State. We only want our country to legally recognize the fact that we Ecuadorians are made up of different nations and cultures," stated one member of CONAIE.

The Indians suspect that oil interests are at the root of the government's reluctance to formally recognize all their territory. PetroEcuador, the pow-



Photo OPIP

Ecuadorian March

cently begun a campaign to colonize the region under a program known as "Living bor-



Photo OPIP

Rally in a town after the march

erful branch of the Ecuadorian government which oversees oil concessions to trans-national oil companies, announced the day before the marchers arrived in Quito that the US based oil company, ARCO, had discovered a huge reserve of oil within the territories being claimed by the marchers.

OPIP organized the march to prevent the ecological and cultural devastation which they witnessed in the Northern and Southern Ecuadorian Amazon regions. Due mostly to oil development, Ecuador has the highest deforestation rate of any South American country. The Pastaza province contains the largest remaining pristine rainforest in Ecuador.

Since Ecuador's oil boom began in the early 1970s, over twelve million acres of Amazon rainforest have been turned over to trans-national oil corporations. Millions of gallons of oil and toxic waste by-products have been spilled or dumped into the rainforest, contaminating the soil, air and water. Oil development has brought deforestation, colonization, militarization, prostitution, alcoholism, violence, poverty, malnutrition and disease to the Indigenous Peoples.

"They treat it [the Amazon] like a box full of resources," says Tito Merino on the government's attitude toward the Amazon, "They turn it upside down and shake it out and leave nothing for those who live there."

"We marched along with the men to Quito to demand the recognition of our ancestral territories," said Patricia Gualinga, a Quichu women from the Sarayacu commu-

nity. "The women in Amazonia are fighting together to defend our people from the oil companies' threats to our territories. The oil companies come in and they bring disruptive ideas. They are trying to change the way our men act. One example is that they are trying to prostitute our women. So, we have to be strong. Some women get pregnant. This is very bad for the community. The women feel embarrassed, and they move to the cities."

Along with their demands, OPIP presented a natural resource management plan in which they explained their traditional, non-destructive use of the forest, "not only for short-term benefit, but for the benefit of the children of our grandchildren."

The concept of indigenous territoriality is a fairly new one for the Ecuadorians. The only lands currently recognized as Indian territories in the country are those occupied by the Huaorani—also located in Pastaza—and the Awa on the Colombian border. These territories were legalized in the 1980s due to international pressure placed on the government. Over the last decade, environmental and human rights activists have become increasingly aware that territorial rights are necessary for the survival of Indigenous Peoples and for the protection of rainforests.

OPIP now wants to extend these territories to include the rest of the Pastaza Indian lands. They claim that territorial rights are necessary in order to guarantee the survival of their cultures and their communities.

The Organization of Indigenous People

of Pastaza is calling on the government to change Article I of the Constitution to read, "Ecuador is a pluri-national, sovereign, independent, democratic and unified state which recognizes, protects and respects cultural diversity."

Most South American countries have either reformed or are in the process of reforming their constitutions to recognize and protect the rights of Indigenous People. However, the popular concept in Ecuador is still that Indians belong to the past, part of what is known as "folklore," to be commercially exploited.

In an attempt to contrive a single and uniform cultural identity, the government has been actively promoting the "integration" and "civilization" of Indian people since its formation in 1830. This strategy has led to the social, economic, and political exclusion or exploitation of Indian people who comprise 40-45% of the total population of Ecuador.

After three weeks of camping in a public park in Quito, the Indians left with less than they came for. They gained the titles to little more than one-half of the lands they use and Congress called a special session in June to review the Indians' demand for constitutional reform. Another important achievement was winning the hearts of the Ecuadorian people. Long thought of as "invisible savages," the Indians are now recognized as courageous and articulate people.

The marchers met in Puyo, the capitol of Pastaza, on April 10th, many of them having

## Argentina

# HISTORICAL REUNION OF THE MAPUCHE NATION

After one hundred years, the first reunion of the Mapuche nation took place in Neuquen, Argentina. Over a hundred lonkos, spiritual leaders of Nagmapu, Chile, and over 200 traditional leaders of different communities in Argentina met to analyze the situation of marginalization and oppression that the national states of Chile and Argentina are imposing on the Mapuche people. They also reaffirmed their historical rights of existence as a nation, the rights to exercise their traditional law and speak their own language, and

agreed on the creation of a Mapuche flag. The reunion ended with a ceremony with the participation of more than a thousand people.

A complete report will be published in the next SAIC newsletter.

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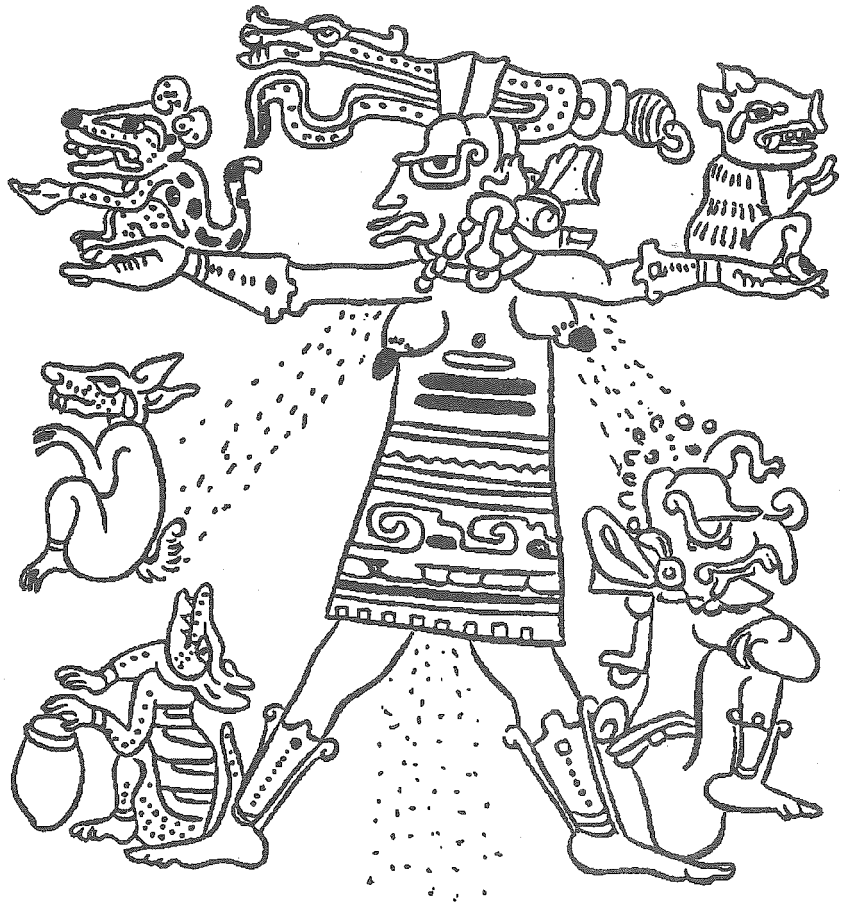
walked and canoed there from their communities 150 miles away on the Peruvian border. Men, women and children nervously set out from Puyo on the 11th in the pouring rain, holding leaves and plastic over their heads to keep dry. When they entered a community, throngs of people met them, offering donations and support.

On their fourth day out, they were greeted by musicians and a fiesta in the Indian village of Salasaca. The community had built bamboo huts in the center of town for the marchers to rest. The "Salasacas" opened all public facilities to them and greeted them with speeches of solidarity.

Over one-half of the marchers' enormous needs for firewood, food, drink, blankets, clothing, shelter and medicine were met by donations from communities along their route. In a press release, the Indians stated, "Our historic walk has definitively changed the relations between Indian people and the white/mestizo society: the demonstrations of solidarity with our objectives are a clear sign that it is possible for us to live side-by-side, respectful of unity within our diversity."

Many of the marchers came down with severe colds and were treated by one of the doctors and/or shamans accompanying the march. The people of the Pastaza rainforest are accustomed to a very warm climate at near sea-level. During the march, they had to climb to altitudes of up to 14,000 feet where the nights were sometimes below freezing.

In reaction to the gala jubilee celebra-



tions being planned by governments and corporate interests throughout the Americas and Europe to mark the 500 years since Columbus began the process of colonization of Indian

lands, leaders of the march declared, "Now is the time for de-colonization, the time to recognize our rich cultures and build a new Ecuador."