

NINTH CONGRESS OF THE INTER-AMERICAN INDIAN INSTITUTE Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 28-November 2, 1985

The Inter-American Indian Institute was founded in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, in 1940 and now functions under the auspices of the Organization of American States. The Institute convenes a congress every four years to discuss Indian issues; the Ninth Congress was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, from October 28 to November 2. In addition to the government-appointed delegations which attended the Congress, there were many representatives of Indian organizations and organizations with interests in indigenous rights, community development, and the environment. SAIIC sent four representatives.

One very important aspect of the Congress was that it demonstrated how strongly Indian people in North, Central, and South America desire to establish ongoing communication with one another and to gain a deeper understanding of the connections among all indigenous people of the Americas.

Events during the Congress also made clear the relationship between resources sought by national governments and multinational interests and Indian control of the land where these resources are often located. Indian people from South and Central America at the Congress expressed their concern about their land and water, the issues of sovereignty and exploitation, forced relocation, and the genocide of their people. Particularly strong statements from community representatives from Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, among others, sounded like a loud chorus repeating what we have heard from Indians in the United States. The complex issues addressed at the Congress regarding Big Mountain were parallel in many respects to the problems discussed by those attending from Central and South America.

During the Congress, some of the complexities of the Nicaraguan situation were also aired as the Sandinistas, Miskitus, Sumus, and Ramas try to work out an accommodation in the face of intervention by the United States.

The issue of Indian refugees from Guatemala and other Central American countries was addressed at the Congress, both in official sessions and informally. Many of the problems these refugees face every day are only too familiar to Indians in the United States: daily survival in terms of food, housing, and medical care, and the maintenance of cultural integrity and continuity. Among Guatemalans there was a strong expression of the need to preserve the spiritual foundation both in Guatemala and at refugee centers.

While not addressed directly, the relationship between Indians and industrial technology came up again and again: How might technology be

Victoria Bombarry (left), Muskogee Creek and editor of Native Self Sufficiency, and Rosa Isolde Reuque, of the Mapuche Community Organization from Chile, speaking together in Santa Fe.



Photo: S. Lobbo



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Tarcisio Kuja (center), representing CONACNIE from Ecuador, speaking at a meeting in Santa Fe. Seated at the table on Tarcisio's left: Jorge Valiente, Kolla from Argentina. On Jorge's left: Nicanor Atirillo, of the Association of Indian Parties from Paraguay. At the opposite end of the table (in white hat): Adrian Aquino, of the National Association of Salvadorian Indians. Between Tarcisio and Jorge in the row behind them: Armando Rojas, Miskitu from Nicaragua.

used as a tool by Indians rather than as a weapon against them? For example, there were those at the Congress who spoke of the resurgence of the use of native non-hybrid seeds.

Communication among Indians was a major issue. Many spoke of community-based radio programs and the possibility of exchanging taped shows. People passed out newsletters and other literature from their organizations. Indian writers and journalists made contact at the Congress. There was talk of the use of video in communities. How can this be facilitated; where are resources to be found; and can an exchange network be developed? Also Indian people spoke of using computers.

Indian Forum

In the past, congresses of the Inter-American Indian Institute have emphasized participation by government representatives of the member nation states, with minimal attention to the involvement of Indian people. At the Ninth Congress, representatives of indigenous organizations in the Americas as well as Australia and India were present in substantial numbers for the first time. As non-delegates holding observer status, indigenous participants decided to hold parallel sessions that were called the Indian Forum.

South and Central American Indians involved in the Indian Forum included representatives from the National Indian Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the Regional Indian Council of Cauca (CRIC) from Colombia, the South American Indian Council (CISA), the Inter-Ethnic Development Association of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSESEP), the Kolla Center from Argentina, the Mapuche Community Organization from Chile, the Union of Indian Nations (UNI) from Brazil, the Association of Indian Campesinos of Eastern Bolivia, the National Indian Confederation of Ecuador (CONACNIE), the Confederation of Indian Nations in the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), the Shuar Federation from Ecuador, the Movement of Indian Refugees in Mexico, Corn Maya from Guatemala, MISURASATA and



Nilo Cayuqueo (left) interviewing Biraci Brasil, Yawanawá from Acre, Brazil, who represented the Union of Indian Nations at the Santa Fe meeting.



other Miskitu delegates from Nicaragua, the Guaymi Congress from Panama, and the Zapotec/Chinantec Assembly from Mexico.

Representatives from organizations in the United States included those from the American Indian Youth Council, the International Indian Treaty Council, the Iroquois Confederation, Navajos from Big Mountain, Pueblo representatives, the Seventh Generation Fund, the Congress of American Indians, the Indigenous Peoples' Network, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Committee for Hawaiian Sovereignty, and many more.

From Canada there were representatives from the World Council of Indigenous People and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Assembly of First Nations. The National Federation of Land Councils from Australia was also represented.

The final declaration of the Indian Forum states: "Given that the Inter-American Indian Institute has always made decisions about Indian people without consulting authentic Indian organizations, the Indian Forum proposes that all decisions should be made in close consultation with the representative Indian organizations and that at the same time a human rights section be formed with the participation of representatives of Indian organizations." These proposals were not recognized by the official Congress.

The statement by the Indian forum also included a strong denouncement of the oppression suffered by many indigenous people. Ample cases were cited from each country to demonstrate that multinational corporations and large landholders continue to exploit Indian lands and people and that such exploitation involves the complicity of national governments that oppress Indian people.

Through the pressure of Indian representatives, a proposal by a representative from Spain (who participated in the Congress as a "special guest") which suggested a 1992 celebration of the arrival of the Spanish to be called "Meeting of Two Worlds" was tabled.

The next Congress is to be held in 1988 in Argentina. SAIIC looks forward to the active participation of many Indian delegates.

—Nilo Cayuqueo

—Susan Lobo