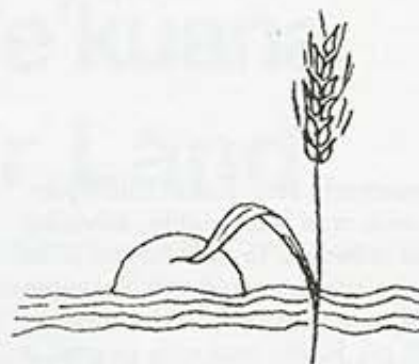


Salta, Argentina:

Electoral Politics Delay Granting of Land Title



The 4,500 Indigenous people of the Wichi, Chorote, Nivakle, Toba, and Tapiete communities in the northern Argentinean Salta region are still waiting for an official land title for the area where they traditionally live. They require a joint title for the five communities in order to continue living according to their traditional customs of hunting and gathering over a wide area, a way of life that does not allow land privatization.

In 1984, when they first demanded a land title, they were only offered separate titles for each family, which they refused. In 1991, the 27 communities of the "Asociación de Comunidades Aborígenes Thakas Honat" - ACATH (Association of Aboriginal Communities Thakas Honat) submitted a proposal (including maps) for the legalization of their land to the provincial government. This led the provincial government to pronounce the decree 2609/91 and give clearance to the redistribution of "a piece of land without subdivision and with only one land title,...and big enough for the development of their traditional way of life" to the Indigenous communities of districts 14 and 55. However, the redistribution of land has not happened yet and land conflicts are developing between the Indigenous communities and the local *criollo* smallholders, who have been increasingly using part of the traditional Indigenous area for the pasture of their cattle. Such conflicts

are not unusual in situations which lack agrarian reform. Instead of struggling for the implementation of agrarian reform, some smallholders tend to move into marginal or Indigenous areas.

Governments are duty-bound under the Right to Food to protect access to food for both marginalized smallholders and Indigenous people. This means that the implementation of agrarian reform and the protection of the Indigenous people promote conflicts among the very poor by encouraging the smallholders to move into marginal and Indigenous areas. The Indigenous communities' right to feed themselves is at stake as long as no legalization of their traditional territories occurs. According to recent information, the government is reluctant to implement the above mentioned decree before the forthcoming election. Furthermore, the government seems to plan to provide the Indigenous communities with a land title concerning only a small part of the original territory. This would mean a breach of article 75 and 17 of the Argentinean constitution and the ratified ILO convention 169, both guaranteeing the property of the traditional land where they live to Indigenous communities. As a State party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Argentina, is also duty-bound to protect and respect the Indigenous communities' right to feed themselves.

Until a satisfactory solution is reached, and while the struggle continues, the Wichi, Chorote, Nivakle, Toba, and Tapiete people also face harassment and violence from those who oppose the redistribution of land in the area. In a formal declaration issued by ACATH, Indigenous leaders express deep concerns regarding the "threats that are continually being directed to our brothers and sisters, the wire fences that the *criollos* continue to put up on our land, the wood that continues to be taken illicitly and the burning of three houses by a policeman named Morón. All of these crimes go unpunished by the authorities. This makes us feel unprotected and neglected by the government." ☺

Support the Indigenous communities in the Salta region by writing letters encouraging the government to support the right to feed oneself and to provide a land title for districts 55 and 14. Send letters to:

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de Salta, Roberto A. Ulloa, Casa de Gobierno, Gran Burg 622, 4400 Salta, Argentina, Fax: 54 87 360 400.

Sr. Presidente de la Republica, Dr. Carlos S. Menem, Casa Rosada, Capital Federal, Argentina, Fax: 54 87 343 2249/331 7976.

Information provided by FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN).