

# Barbados III: On Democracy and Diversity



*We print below excerpts from the third declaration by the Barbados group of social scientists. The Barbados I declaration was an early and extremely influential document written by an international group of academics in support of Indigenous people's struggles. It is accompanied by an introduction by Stefano Varese, one of the group's founding members.*

In 1971, on the Isle of Barbados, a group of Latin American anthropologists met under the auspices of the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and the World Council of Churches. The meeting took place at a time when the expansion of development in Amazonian Indigenous territories was escalating and when dependent capitalism's modernization project met with strong resistance from the Indigenous and peasant peoples of the Andes and Meso-America.

Simplistic political interpretations which employed an analytical framework overly concerned with economic issues hid the reality of ethnic conflicts during that neocolonial period. Leftists argued that only the triumph of a socialist revolution would solve the problems which Indigenous groups faced.

The Barbados I Declaration which resulted from that meeting, and the long book documenting it, had strong repercussions among academics, the indigenist sectors of the State bureaucracies, Catholic and Protestant missionaries, and, most of all, among organized Indigenous groups. Barbados I took on a life of its own among some Indian organizations in Latin America, who adopted it and used it as an instrument of struggle.

*Stefano Varese is Professor of Native American and Chicano Studies at the University of California in Davis*

Six years later, in 1977, the group met again in Barbados, this time accompanied by a matching number of Indigenous leaders and intellectuals. By this time, the Latin American political context had suffered a radical change. The national political projects for reform in Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Panama had been defeated and the most violent forms of State repression and terrorism had been instituted in a great number of countries in the region. An armed revolutionary struggle seemed a real possibility to many of the continental Indigenous movements. The Barbados II Declaration reflected this new reality. Unfortunately its impact on national societies and the organized Indigenous movement was not of the same magnitude as the previous one.

Finally, in December 1993, the Barbados Group met again in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to assess the situation of the Indigenous populations in the context of the sudden attack of Neo-Liberalism and renewed forms of Neo-Imperialism. The new conditions facing the Indigenous movement at the end of the second millennium include the collapse of the socialist "utopia," the vertiginous expansion of drug trafficking, the involvement of the United States in the promotion and repression of drug trafficking, and the rise and urgency of environmental issues.

The Barbados III Declaration, and the book that accompanies it (to be published

by Abya Yala Press in Quito) attempt to clarify some of these problems and contribute to the construction of a more just and dignified future for the Indigenous people.

## **Barbados III Declaration: Articulation of Diversity**

More than two decades after our first declaration (1971), the members of the Barbados Group gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to reflect on the situation of the Indigenous peoples in Latin America and to document the persistence of secular forms of domination and exploitation that affect them. The development of new forms of colonization have aggravated this situation. We are witnesses in each of our countries to the repeated violations of their right to life, their dignity, and to the cultural and human universe of their local expressions.

At the same time we confirm the Indian peoples' will to resist and to live, expressed through the multiplication of their ethno-political organizations, and of the daily affirmation of cultural specificities that manifest the resilience of their civilizations.

The above stated, together with Indigenous peoples' demographic growth, defies the current project of globalization, which leads us towards a worldwide homogenization that is enforced by the expansion of and domination by a

western-oriented integrationist market system, whose technical, economic and ideological projects receive multi-national financing. The uniformity being pursued has generated profound political, economic and social asymmetry, even in the dominant countries.

The individualist and competitive Neo-Liberal discourse masks the real make-up of the growing inequality and of the conflict between nations, ethnic groups, classes and other social groups, creating an illusory equality, when in reality it confronts nation against nation, people against people, community against community. This is contrary to the spirit of solidarity of communities which is more conducive to human kinship. A world without alternate communities, without differentiated social groups, would be a world condemned to a lack of creativity and fraternal loyalties.

Just as for centuries each ethnic group was forced to integrate and incorporate itself into the ineffable virtues of an ill-defined national life, the same compulsive proposition is currently made to Latin American countries, with the intent of cementing their integration and incorporation into a planetary order controlled by a type of transnational oligopoly.

Simultaneously, the scientific knowledge brought by ecology, together with the well-founded warnings of environmentalism, have been misinterpreted and redefined by a tendency within this social movement. It seeks to impose the theory of the global management of natural resources but it ignores or minimizes the vernacular wisdom and knowledge, considering them incapable of creating a global environmental solution. However, this knowledge constitutes the social bases that maintain the bases of biodiversity in the world.

Today, the forces that dominate the regions with the greatest biodiversity have grown. Territories that were before the exclusive lands of Indigenous peoples

have been opened to colonizing expansion with the purpose of expropriating the tropical regions' enormous natural reserves like oil, minerals, timber and hydroelectric sources. This distorting tendency presents obstacles to the alliance of the diverse human communities that defend the ownership and usage of the natural resources under a socio-environmentalist current, which constitutes one of the most accurate and effective criticisms of the Neo-liberal premises of unlimited growth.

We observe the existence of processes for ethnic reaffirmation, conducive not only to cultural reproduction but also to the recovery of loyalties and patrimonies which were apparently lost. In the face of this the dominant society responds with new forms for the destruction of diversity, with obstacles and repressive political and judicial changes. Furthermore, the persistence of multiple forms of racism that disqualify and destroy experiences of alternative civilizations is generating processes of "de-Indianization," which ignores the fact that each culture destroyed or terminated is an irretrievable loss for the whole of humanity.

Democracy, as the philosophy of a Western social system, is centered on the individual and excludes collectives like Indigenous peoples. In this way an objectively viable plurality has been denied at the linguistic, social, economic and cultural levels. The deferred democratization of Latin America will continue to be an empty discourse and favorable only to the groups with hegemonic power if it does not take into account the necessary redefinition of the current States' territorial, political, social and cultural spaces. Building future democracy will require an increase in the presence and representation of different cultural communities and the respect for their political logic, which will contribute to the formation of plural-

istic, united, and complementarily-articulated societies.

The fragile Latin American Democracies, still monopolized by the interests of conservative sectors who in their majority descend from old European and colonial elites, have failed to generate the political spaces or legislative and administrative mechanisms necessary to allow Indigenous people to progress in building their own future. In particular, military ideologies which frequently degenerate into geo-political paranoia, see Indigenous societies as potentially subversive groups which threaten national unity, rather than as different peoples. Indigenous peoples demands for territor-

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ial reorganization and more cultural and linguistic autonomy are thus seen as separatist efforts.

We exhort the presidents of the republics of Latin America to comply with the promise made to the Indigenous peoples in the Declaration of Guadalajara (Mexico, July 1991), in which they solemnly promised to ensure their economic and social well being, as well as to the obligation of respecting their rights and cultural identity. We also believe it necessary to approve the Charter of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which the UN promoted as well as the International labor Organization's Convention 169.

We likewise demand that legislative and judicial powers and political parties frame their laws, resolutions and activities with respect for ethnic pluralism and the inalienable rights to life, land, freedom and democracy. And especially, for them to carry through an effective effort to guarantee the respect for these rights at

the level of the regions or territories where Indigenous peoples live.

We recognize the initiatives formulated in recent years by international organizations (United Nations, UNESCO, Organization of American States, UNICEF, OIT and others) in favor of the Indigenous peoples of the continent and the world. Nonetheless the results have been limited. More pressure and vigilance regarding Indigenous peoples' current situation is necessary. The international organizations must pressure the Latin American heads-of-state to ratify and comply with international conventions on Indigenous peoples...

There is a simplistic and erroneous vision of what Indigenous participation should be in the actions and elaboration of Indigenist policies, in the formulation of community programs and of aid, and in the political process of mobilization of the civilian society itself. Such perspective assumes

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that Indigenous peoples simply copy models of organization from unions or other sectors of the population. The ethnic continuity of Indigenous peoples cannot be solely understood as territorial control, but it requires the incorporation of political conceptions that are part of the diversity of their cultures.

Indigenous organizations have fulfilled a fundamental role in the revindication of the rights of the peoples they represent and in the construction of spaces for dialogue with each other and national and international powers. We cannot omit that some of their leaders have abused the mandate they received from their peoples and communities to embark upon a career of personal accumulation and power. When they assume the Criollo model of Clientelismo, and, more than a few times, of corruption, these leaders not only discredit themselves but they threaten the continuity and poten-

tial of political projects upon which Indigenous organizations embark.

We believe that the Indigenous organizations should reflect on these problems and rectify the individualist and competitive behaviors of those leaders who have distanced themselves from the spirit of solidarity in which their organizations were formed. This is the only guarantee for progress toward the crystallization of a just society, not only for the Indigenous people but for all of the oppressed sectors of humanity.

Many of Latin America's intellectuals continue to produce speeches referring to supposedly homogeneous national communities, devaluing or lending a folk stigma to alternate cultural presences. It is equally necessary to mention the historical responsibility that belongs to the right wing in the formulation of the ideological paradigms that guide the cultural and physical repression of Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, some dogmatic sectors -guided by theoretical mistakes- produced political practices that have contributed to the repression of ethnicity by considering it counterproductive to the class struggle...

It is also necessary to realize a radical questioning of some currents in the social sciences and in certain anthropology which is oriented more toward the aesthetic and sterile critique of its own disciplines than to political thought and action. This is also the case of a sector of linguistics that does not cooperate with ethnic communities, as well as not favoring the most appropriate methodologies for codifying, recovering and consolidating autochthonous languages.

There have been advances in the formulation of bilingual and intercultural educational policies, but these are far from being implemented. Education often places children against the family environment—even from the pre-school level—at critical times of primary socialization and learning of their mother tongue. This results in a subsequent deculturation in which languages

are converted into crutches for the acquisition of the dominant language and their own culture is lost to the hegemonic society. Whereas until now the State as well as private and religious groups has used the formal educational system to undermine ethnic identity, the school can eventually become a factor for cultural reproduction if Indigenous people effectively appropriate it for their own historical and cultural interests...

Indigenous people have an undeniable right to their history and cultural heritage. It is the obligation of the State and of secular society to promote an orderly and effective process for returning the knowledge collected on such peoples.

A process of Latin American democratization that effectively includes Indigenous peoples will not be viable if it does not take into account the necessity for geopolitical re-ordering that contemplates the specificities of Indigenous peoples' territoriality. In this sense, the concept of "peoples" corresponds to socially-organized human populations which are ethnically defined and endowed with a spacial dimension that is their territory. This is conceived as the confluence defined by the total and structured set of ecological, social and symbolic relations between a society and the geographical continuous or discontinuous space upon which it acts. This should include the numerous cases in which Indigenous peoples have been divided by State borders, where it is their right to aspire to circulate freely in the territory of these bordering nations, in accordance with their situations.

In any case, territorial autonomy will imply not only decision-making in the case of natural and economic resource use but also in political and cultural self-determination, in the framework of a self-determination compatible with and complementary to the sovereignty of national States. ♣

Rio de Janeiro, December 10, 1993.

*The full text of this declaration is available upon request from SAIC, or can be found in the SAIC conference (SAIC.indio) on Peacenet.*