

reasons are the same—expansionism, dominance of one group over another, land, natural resources, greed.

And, our country, the United States, is not an innocent bystander. It was no doubt U.S. bullets that fired that night on the river for that area is full of anti-Sandinista rebels, often all lumped together under the name “contras.” The war in Nicaragua is complex. It is not simple like our country would like us to believe. It’s not good guys versus bad guys.

That night on the river when my foremost thoughts were of my homeland, that identity is not dissimilar to that of the Miskitus, Sumos, and Ramas of the Atlantic Coast. They are fighting for their homeland—their identity.

*Since returning from Central America, Angela, who is a social worker, has looked for ways to lend support to Indians in Central America. She writes, “In October, 1985, the National Indian Social Workers meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, passed a resolution condemning the genocidal policies against the Indian peoples in Guatemala and calling for a forum to discuss the situation in an effort to seek ways to end this oppression, and to raise the issue in the United States.” For more information on the Guatemalan forum, contact Angela Russell, Box 333, Lodge Grass, MT 59050.*



## COLOMBIA

# Indians Caught Up In Climate Of War

In Colombia, with a population of 28 million people, there are 1.2 million Indians who speak more than 130 different languages. In the 1970s, as was occurring in many indigenous areas in South America, an organization was founded in the Cauca Valley called the Cauca Regional Indian Council (CRIC). CRIC was born out of the need for indigenous people to confront the continuous repression placed on them by large landowners who take indigenous lands and force Indian people to pay rent.

Inspired by Manuel Quintin Lame, an Indian leader who was killed at the turn of the century for defending Indian land, CRIC began to take back land and stop paying rent. This was very successful, but the large landowners responded by employing mercenaries (called *pájaros* or birds) who have killed over 100 Indians. At the same time, with anti-government guerrilla activities increasing in Colombia, especially in the Cauca area, which is mountainous, the Colombian army has become very repressive toward Indian people. Many have been jailed, some for as long as one year, as they await trial. Usually there is no case against them and, under international pressure, most are eventually set free.



(Reproduced from *Como Nos Organizamos*, published by CRIC, Nov. 1983.)



At the end of the 1970's, President Turbay Ayala tried to do away with collective ownership of Indian communities by proclaiming the Indian Statute, which dissolved the *cabildos*, the traditional Indian community organizations. All the communities rejected this decree and decided to hold the First National Indian Gathering in October, 1980. During this meeting the National Indigenous Coordinator was founded with the goal of planning the first national Indian congress. This congress was held in Bogota in February of 1982. There were over 2,000 Indian delegates present who represented 20 regional councils from all around the country. During the congress the National Indian Organization of Colombia (ONIC) was founded with headquarters in Bogota.

ONIC's program is:

1. The defense of Indian autonomy and history.
2. The defense of culture and Indian traditions.
3. Bilingual/bicultural education under direct control of Indian organizations.
4. Promotion of health and traditional medicine.
5. Support of community economic organizations and return of Indian lands that have been seized.

At present in Colombia there is a climate of war between the government and guerrilla forces. The army has occupied the Cauca region and the air force is continuously bombing. Animals have been killed, crops have been destroyed, and numerous Indians have fled to the cities, where they are homeless.

Various guerrilla groups control different areas of Colombia and force Indians to join them. Javier Delgado, one of the ex-chiefs of the guerrilla group Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, ordered the death of dozens of indigenous small farmers in the Cauca region during the first week of February, 1986. He accused them of collaborating with the government armed forces. The killings were witnessed by reporters from French television who had

been invited by Delegado. The French cameramen refused to film and returned to Bogota to denounce the massacre.



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### ONIC Publication Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

The second ONIC congress in February of this year coincided with the tenth anniversary of the magazine *Unidad Indígena (Indian Unity)*, the official publication of ONIC and CRIC. In its anniversary issue, *Unidad Indígena* states, "We see the need to have our own paper because often articles and books appear about us, but it is not our voice that speaks. In our paper, we see ourselves as we really are, men, women, and children with our own dignity, our own languages, and our own beliefs."