

## Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast Update: Logging Stopped!

**T**he 16th of February, Nicaragua's Environment and Natural Resources Ministry withheld permits to SOLCARSA, the Korean Lumber company, declaring their logging concession null and void. Two years ago, the Violeta Chamorro government granted a 153,000 acre concession to SOLCARSA, a subsidiary of the Korean transnational Kum Kyung (see *Abya Yala News*, Summer 1997, Vol. 10, No.3, Pg.34). The rainforest concession violated laws protecting the right of Indigenous communities of the North Atlantic Autonomous Zone (RAAN) to control their natural resources. The recent declaration has come after the Nicaraguan Supreme Court has ruled that the logging concession is unconstitutional for a second time. The Korean logging giant has already paid 1 million dollars in fines for violating logging regulations.

For the Miskito and Sumo people, the eviction of SOLCARSA is the first step towards recognizing their constitutional right to title their lands. Armstrong Wiggins, a Miskito lawyer at the Indian Law Resource Center said that "this was an important battle, hard fought...but to keep this from happening again, we have to press now for the demarcation of all Indigenous lands in Nicaragua."

*Information from: Resource Center of the Americas and Global Response: globresponse@igc.apc.org*

## United Nations Investigates Human Rights Abuses Against Indigenous Peoples in the United States

**I**n February 1-4, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, the UN Special Rapporteur of Religious Intolerance of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, met with traditional Dineh (Navajo) elders to investigate charges of human rights violations by the United States government. A contingent of various non-government organizations, most of them faith based, were invited by the Dineh to participate in the event. More than one hundred people sat on the dirt floor of a hogan listening to testimonies about religious violations. This was the first time that the United States has ever been formally investigated by the UN for violations of the right to freedom of religion.

Abdelfattah Amor came in response to a formal complaint filed by the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) on behalf of the Sovereign Dineh Nation of Big Mountain, Arizona focusing on forced relocation and its impacts on religious freedom. The religious rights of the Dineh Nation are threatened by the British-owned Peabody Coal Company (PCC), the world's largest privately-owned coal company, which operates the Black Mesa/Kayenta strip mine in the heart of Black Mesa. Over 4,000 burial and sacred sites have been destroyed as a result of strip mining. There is no protection given to Dineh burial grounds and sacred sites. Members of the community are barred access to certain sacred sites to pray, which interferes with their ability to practice their religion, which is land-based and site specific.

The Dineh community's long history of resistance reached a pivotal point in 1974, when the US Congress approved the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act. The previous arrangement of dual ownership of the lands by the Dineh and the Hopi complicated the mining companies ability to seek land leases for coal extraction. This new law, sponsored in part by the mining industry, resulted in the forced relocation of 12,000 traditional Dineh from their land. In 1996 the US government attempted another Dineh-Hopi settlement act that offered land leases to a few families while authorizing the forcible relocation of those who did not qualify for a lease permit. The Dineh are feeling the pressure to resettle to open more land for mining.

In addition to being the primary source of destruction for traditional Dineh burial and sacred sites, the coal strip-mine has created several environmental problems. The mine threatens the sole source of water for the communities in the region. The coal from the Black Mesa mine is mixed with water and transported 273 miles through a slurry line to the Mojave Generation Station in Laughlin, Nevada. To function properly, the slurry line must pump up to 1.4 billion gallons of water each year from the Dineh aquifer.

In his four-day visit, Mr. Amor heard from Indigenous nations in Arizona on other matters as well, including: the University of Arizona's placement of telescopes on top of Mount Graham, a place sacred to the Apache people; uranium mining on the high plateaus of the Grand Canyon, which is sacred to the Havasupai and many other Indigenous peoples native to Arizona. Nevertheless, Mr. Amor refused to validate or refute any allegations until he had time to digest the documentation and testimony he had received from more than one hundred and fifty people in his four day visit. Amor's report from his U.S. visit will likely be heard by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in March 1999. It is possible the UN may release the report to the public by the end of 1998.

The aides to the state's congressional delegation in Arizona said they had never heard of Amor nor had any idea why he had selected Arizona to investigate the subject of religious intolerance.

*For more information please contact: Marsha Monestersky, Consultant to Sovereign Dineh Nation, Co-Chair, NGO Human Rights Caucus at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (718) 349-1841  
e-mail: sdnation@earthlink.net*

## Roraima, Brazil: Forest Fires Reach Yanomami Territory

**T**he raging fires sweeping the Amazon have reached the Yanomami's dense jungle territory. For the past two months, fires set by subsistence farmers to clear their land have ravaged the savanna highlands of Roraima state. The devastating fires are coupled with one of the worst droughts the region has ever faced. Thousands of Macuxi, Wapixana, Taurepangi, Wai Wai, Pemon, Maiongong and Patamona peo-