

ECUADOR

## Earthquake Disrupts Many Indian Communities

On the night of March 5, an earthquake measuring between 6.8 and 7.2 on the Richter scale struck southeastern Ecuador. The epicenter of the earthquake was in the Amazonian province of Napo. The tremors caused mudslides and avalanches which dammed rivers with debris. When rising waters burst through the dams, floods devastated downstream areas. Entire communities disappeared as mudslides swept away houses, livestock, agricultural land, and people. Reports indicate that between 2,000 and 3,500 Indian people are missing and presumed dead from the earthquake and its aftermath.

In the mountains the worst damage occurred in the densely populated Indian regions of Imbabura and Pichincha. Although crops and roads remain intact, between 10,000 and 12,000 homes were destroyed, leaving at least 25,000 people homeless. People are now living in improvised shelters made of sticks, plastic sheeting, and cut grass.

Immediately after the earthquake, CONAIE, the Confederation of Indian Nations of Ecuador, which includes organizations from both the Amazonian and mountain regions, went into action. Indian leaders from all over Ecuador gathered in Quito to work through CONAIE to assess damage in isolated areas, handle public relations, and formulate proposals for relief and reconstruction.

In Amazonia CONAIE is concentrating



relief efforts to help Indians rebuild canoes, most of which were lost during the initial flooding, so people will be ready to navigate the rivers when the waters have subsided. In the mountain regions, CONAIE is working with local cooperative work teams called *mingas* to rebuild destroyed houses.

According to Cristobal Naikiai, general secretary of CONFENIAE, the organization of Amazonian Indians which forms part of CONAIE, "virtually none of the aid sent by the United States government is reaching Indian people. The North American and Ecuadoran governments are targeting their efforts at rebuilding roads for oil corporations and African palm plantations, while ignoring the needs of the people in the region. The attitude of the North American army reserve units which are doing relief work is to discredit the Indian confederation, thus causing more confusion and conflict."

At the request of CONFENIAE, SAIIC is soliciting funds for earthquake relief which will go directly to Indian communities through CONFENIAE. If you are interested in helping, please contact SAIIC at (415) 452-1235 or by mail. Checks for financial contributions should be made payable to Capp Street Foundation and sent to SAIIC at P.O. Box 7550, Berkeley, CA 94707. Oxfam America and Catholic Relief Services are also raising money in the United States to be sent directly to CONFENIAE in Ecuador.