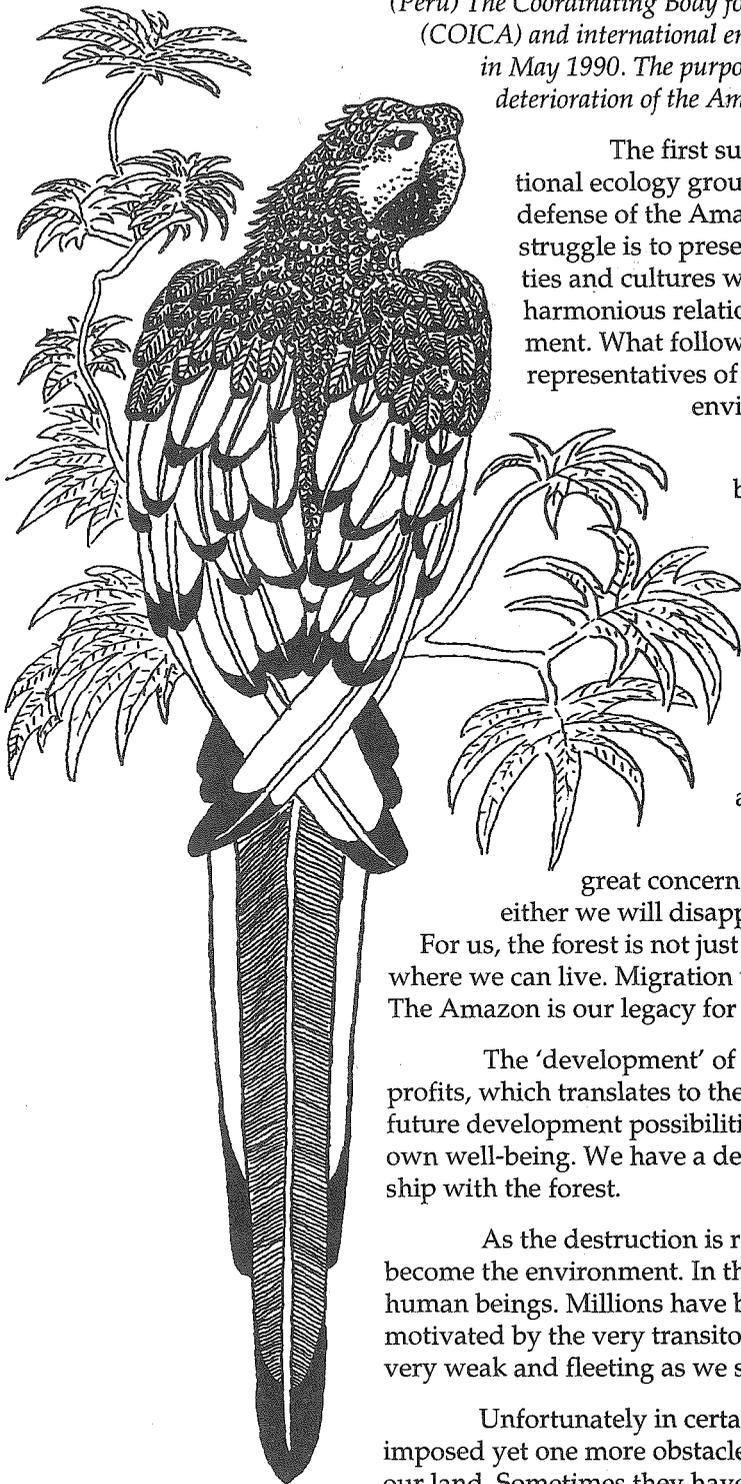


# First Summit Held Between Indian Peoples and Environmentalists

*(Perú) The Coordinating Body for Indigenous Peoples Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) and international environmental and conservation groups met in Iquitos, Peru in May 1990. The purpose of this historic summit was to analyze the serious deterioration of the Amazon biosphere and search for joint alternative solutions.*



The first summit between Indigenous organizations and international ecology groups holds great promise for future joint actions in the defense of the Amazon basin. COICA has advanced the idea that the struggle is to preserve not only the land, but also Indigenous communities and cultures which have always recognized the importance of a harmonious relationship between humans and their natural environment. What follows are excerpts from the Iquitos Declaration, signed by representatives of 14 Indigenous organizations and 24 international environmental organizations.

We, Indian people and ecologists are here because we share a common concern: respect for the world that we are destined to live in and the conservation of that world for a better life for all of humanity. We Indigenous peoples and our lands are one and the same. To destroy one is to destroy the other.

Now we have again become strong through our organizations; we have again become the main actors in the defense of our environment as well as its primary guardians.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, conservation is of great concern to us. We are at a historical and decisive crossroads: either we will disappear along with the forest or we will survive together. For us, the forest is not just another resource, it is life itself. It is the only place where we can live. Migration would mean the death of our people and our culture. The Amazon is our legacy for our children.

The 'development' of the forest has been undertaken, seeking short-term profits, which translates to the overuse of certain resources and the elimination of future development possibilities. We think as much of the forest as we do of our own well-being. We have a deep need for diversity and wholeness in our relationship with the forest.

As the destruction is reaching alarming proportions, the main concern has become the environment. In this way, we are disregarded and being destroyed as human beings. Millions have been invested in parks whose only guarantees are motivated by the very transitory interests of governments. These guarantees are very weak and fleeting as we see it.

Unfortunately in certain cases, the parks and other conservation areas have imposed yet one more obstacle for us, another reduction in our ability to control our land. Sometimes they have only turned out to be reserves for future oil and gold exploration, timber concessions, etc... Parks are not a reality in the same way that a community is. A park is a law and therefore subject to violation, change and dependent on the goodwill of the state.

Technical considerations and scientific interests alone represent a less effective deterrent than the human defense of communities fighting for our futures. However, joint action could have the most effective results.

Our proposal for conservation is nothing more than giving priority to the recognition and recomposition of Indigenous territories through all of the legal mechanisms possible. The Amazon is not under the reign of technicians or isolated bureaucrats, but of a single People which stands firmly behind its conservation because the forest is our only home, our only future. Our life itself is at stake. We think of our land as a continuity, without breaks or divisions, integrated and diverse whose legal guarantees do not differentiate between its diverse elements. It must be as broad as possible to insure a suitable life for each community. It must correspond to community's traditional or current perception of territoriality. This territory should be cared for according to the guidelines set down by that particular community's culture. This community should also have broad control over its resources; the same prerogatives that are granted to any community. Indigenous territory, as an area simultaneously diversified and whole, is conservation at its best. It is not the false conservation of a museum. It is a complete, integrated use of the resources; one where all is used rationally. The greatest criticism we have received as Indigenous Peoples has been that we don't use or exploit the jungle enough. For us, that is both the highest praise and proof of our inherited wisdom because we do use the whole forest in an integrated fashion, but with such care that our critics don't even realize it.

So, we don't have a manual, but rather an ancient culture. It is this culture where a mutually beneficial relationship exists with our forests, which should guide environmental action in the Amazon. Our concept of territoriality presupposes another way of understanding land rights and the generation of new rights. It is not only the rights of those who have been here for centuries, it is also the rights of the water, the plants, the animals and of all living things. An Ashaninka leader expressed it clearly when he complained because the government tried to restrict his community to a small area claiming that they were very few people. "Don't the monkeys, the birds and the *huanganas* also need land to live on?" This is our idea.

Furthermore, Indigenous people's land and conservation rights are not just shallow, passing fancies. It is the right of each community to share its life and culture with the land for all generations to come. It is a permanent and profound commitment. All legal and social guarantees regarding the survival of the Amazonian jungle must be tied to our life and survival as Indigenous peoples of this planet.

Indigenous land rights will gradually become an effective instrument for conservation as we come to be recognized as communities with rights to self-determina-

tion and to use our resources according to the mandates of our tradition and culture, instead of mere demographic groups. This follows the mandates of the United Nations.

To make use of these rights means that we must demand to have direct representation as communities in any discussion or decision, be it national or international, scientific or political, regarding the fate of the Amazon in such a way that assures respect for our initiatives.

If these criteria are applied justly, people will realize that the extent of our presence in the Amazon is much greater than official policy, which tries to dissolve us and wipe us out in order to present us as minorities on the way to extinction (as they would like to believe). Our presence in the Amazon is real and our ability to project ourselves into the future will become more evident as we continue to receive the necessary ideological and fraternal support in order to open the path to **Indigenous Territorial and Conservation Rights** together with all of its implications for the future of humanity.

For all of the above reasons, we propose that the ecology groups of the world ally themselves with Indigenous communities in order to defend the Amazon Basin through collaborative efforts. Achieving the recognition and conservation of Indigenous territories is our common goal: **Give Humanity and the Amazon Basin a Future.** We invite you to take that step with us here and now.

*The Iquitos Declaration was signed by representatives from the following Indigenous, international and environmental organizations: COICA, AIDSEP (Perú), CIDOB, CPIB (Bolivia), CONAIE, CONFENIAE (Ecuador), ONIC (Colombia), UNI (Brazil), Indian Law Resource Center, etc..., Conservation International, The Peruvian Foundation Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, National Wildlife Federation, Probe International, Rainforest Action Network, The Rainforest Alliance, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, World Resources Institute, World Wildlife Fund, Cultural Survival, Ford Foundation, Gessellschaft Für Bedrohte Völker (Austria), Inter-American Foundation, OXFAM America, Campaign for Life in the Amazon, and Survival International etc...*

*As a follow-up to the Iquitos meeting, COICA and environmental organizations met in Washington, DC in August, to further discuss the alliance and strategize for the future.*

**For more information, you can contact COICA at:**

**1011 Orleans St.**

**New Orleans, LA. 70116**

**FAX: (504) 522-7815 Tel: (504) 522-7185**

**or:**

**Jirón Almagro 614**

**Lima 11, Perú**

**Tel. 51-14-631983 FAX 51-14-631983**