

### Expanding Indigenous Journalism in Central America

Indigenous leaders met in El Salvador from Nov. 11-13 for the second Central American planning meeting for the International Indigenous Decade. According to the IPS news service, representatives focused on plans to boost Indian news media in the region. Nicaraguan Indigenous leader Mirna Cunningham pointed to a pilot project being carried out in Nicaragua with radio and the press which could be beneficial for the development of Indigenous media in Central America. She informed IPS that the training of Indigenous journalists and professionals "is already happening in the region, although at modest levels," and added that the upgrading of existing programs is being sought.

Adrian Esquino Lisco, head of the National Indigenous Association, stated that they were thinking of starting an Indigenous radio station, although they lacked information on the current situation. Rigoberta Menchu, who was also present at the meeting, pledged the support of the Vicente Menchu Foundation in undertaking a study of the actual situation and needs of Indigenous communities in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

### Zuni Conservation Project Pushes Sustainable Development

The Zuni Tribe located in west-central New Mexico formed the Zuni Conservation Project in 1991 to serve as their department of natural resources. The Zuni community has approximately 9,000 people. In 1990, passage of the the Zuni Conservation Act enabled launching of the project. The Act was passed to end many years of litigation against the US Government for damage to Zuni lands and from mismanagement

of trust responsibilities. It established a \$17 million trust fund to set up a system of land management to rehabilitate and conserve Zuni's land and natural resources. Also included in the Act are provisions to provide training of Zunis to fill professional positions, the building of geographic information systems, and elaboration of a resource development plan.

Intellectual Property Rights is one of the project's principal concerns. Zuni are in the process of defining for themselves what Zuni intellectual property is and what type of "protection" they would like to see for this property. Traditional seeds, for example, need to be protected, but cannot be used—even by Zunis—for commercial purposes. Sacred sites, religious artifacts, traditional art styles, language, religious ceremonies, songs, and medicinal plants are other types of "property" considered for protection.

A related yet separate issue is that of cultural preservation. Many of Zuni's traditions have endured the past 500 years. Zuni continue to practice religious and cultural traditions that originated thousands of years ago. The past 50 years, however, have brought about rapid changes in demographics and lifestyle. The Conservation project holds that much of the damage to Zuni lands resulted from the breaking of traditional forms of land management, and knows that traditional methods are much more sustainable, and strives to incorporate and rejuvenate the use of traditional technologies and practices into natural resource use planning.

By the end of 1993, the Zuni Conservation Project completed a plan of action for sustainable development—the Zuni Resource Development Plan. This plan follows the format of the UN's Agenda 21 document, in setting guidelines, goals, and action objectives for

Zuni on issues concerning natural resources. Significantly, the plan uses Zuni religious and cultural values as the basis for decision-making.

This approach to development has already brought a great deal of success to the project and to Zuni. The project now employs 60 people, 59 of which are Zuni. Implementation of the plan is in its first year and watershed rehabilitation has already begun. Traditional agriculture is making a comeback and traditional technology for erosion control is being incorporated into the rehabilitation work. Indigenous communities internationally have shown interest in the project's approach to community-based development.

### Tribal Sovereignty: Back to the Future?

This symposium on the rights and status of Indigenous people was sponsored by the St. Thomas University, its Human Rights Institute, its law school, and the Oklahoma City University Native American Legal Resource Center. It took place in Miami, Florida on Dec. 1 and 2. The conference, addressed issues of Indian culture and spirituality as well as claims of tribal sovereignty and critical issues of federal Indian law, and was designed to create a launching pad for ongoing research and analysis.

The conference featured a broad array of subject matter and expert speakers from Brazil to Alaska. Papers from the conference and highlights of the discussions will be published in a special Spring 1995 issue of the *St. Thomas Law Review*.

*For more information:*

Professor Siegfried Wiessner, Chair, Steering Committee Tribal Sovereignty Symposium, St. Thomas University School of Law, 16400 N.W. 32nd Ave. Miami, Florida 33054, Tel: (305) 623-2305, Fax: (305) 623-2390