



Playing homemade violins, Tarahumara men celebrate a bountiful harvest of corn.

Photo by Kit Hedman

TARAHUMARA DEMAND RESPECT FOR THEIR AGRARIAN RIGHTS

(Mexico) A group of about 200 Tarahumara, from the community of San Ignacio de Arareco, municipality of Bocoyna, marched through the streets of downtown Chihuahua to protest the violation of their agrarian rights. Their walk led to the government office, where they met with some officials, who arranged a meeting with the representative of the Agrarian Reform Department. Meanwhile, another group of Tarahumara walked into the Congress demanding that action is taken on this matter.

The Tarahumara live in communal societies (*ejidos* - a legal entity which is communally owned and operated, and recognized by the state). On October 3rd, 1991, Manuel Muela Mendoza, an official from the Agrarian Commission, was given a document dated August 19th, 1991, and signed by Hector Jaime Terrazas S., designated representative of the Agrarian Commission. The document cited the names of several *ejido* leaders, requiring them to appear at a court hearing on October 15, thus initiating a trial to separate the Tarahumara from their ancestral, communal lands. The document alleged that the Tarahumara had abandoned these lands.

Apparently the document was signed by four of the *ejido* leaders, who claimed Manuel Muelas Mendoza explained to them that the document would protect them from any possible violation of their rights to the lands. With this in mind, they signed the document which resulted in an Act of Dislocation. The document actually indicated that 144 Tarahumara had abandoned these lands two years ago. It turns out that the official stamp of the *ejido* was stolen by a delegate from the Ministry of Agrarian Reform.

At the Congress the Indians sat with the representatives and conversed in Raramuri and in Spanish. They claimed that the actions of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform had the sole purpose of stealing the land from the Tarahumara in order to use them for tourism. In one of their speeches to the Congress, they stated, "The Agrarian Reform is taking advantage of the fact that we are unfamiliar with the laws, procedures and bureaucratic language, and seeks to dispossess us of our lands. As we know, these lands are coveted for tourism." Members of Congress declared that this House did not have the power to solve the problem however, they promised their support in all the procedures and referred the Tarahumara delegates to the appropriate office.