

Massive Coca-grower's March on La Paz, Bolivia

Bolivian security forces unsuccessfully tried to turn away a protest march of several thousand *campesinos* headed for the capital city of La Paz in early September. Over fifty leaders were arrested, police confiscated baggage and even sandals in an attempt to prevent *campesinos* from joining the march.

The coca-growers were headed for La Paz to demand fair treatment for those who make their living growing coca. Coca leaf has long been important in the Andes because of its cultural and medicinal elements, but in recent years it has acquired significance as a cash crop which is used in the production of cocaine. Protesters are demanding the demilitarization of the Chapare region, protection of the coca-growing industry, compliance with agreements previously signed with the government, and the release of arrested activists.

After three attacks by security forces, marchers chose to stay off the main roads to avoid further confrontation. *Campesinos* have been subjected to increased arbitrary arrests and seizures, intimidation and harassment, sexual abuse of women, and torture. Religious workers in the coca-growing Chapare region, say that the area has been completely militarized, and that the government has also been cracking down on non-governmental organizations who are supportive of the Indigenous *campesinos*.

The country's most powerful labor union, the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), held a 48-hour strike in La Paz on Sept. 15 and 16 to pressure the government on the coca-growers' behalf. In response, President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada called a national dialogue to discuss the "coca-cocaine" problem and to seek consensus solutions. The coca-growers emerged from this dialogue with a preliminary agreement which meets several of their key demands.

Letters demanding respect for the human rights of campesinos and NGO workers in the coca regions can be sent to Bolivian President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, Fax: 591-2-391216

Adapted from:

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Argentina: Constitution Finally Recognizes Indigenous Rights

Argentina's constitutional revision on Aug. 11 this year recognized Indigenous peoples' rights after a series of postponements by the drafting commission. After much debate, Article 67 of the constitution was modified to read:

[the state] recognizes concurrently with the provinces, the pre-existence of the Indigenous peoples that make up the Argentinian nation, guaranteeing respect for their ethnic and cultural identity, the legal status of their communities; the possession and communal

ownership of lands that they traditionally occupy; making available sufficient and suitable lands for their human development, which will be inalienable and not subject to seizure; assure their access to bilingual and intercultural education; and their participation in decisions regarding the rational use, administration and conservation of natural resources; in the development of their interests; and in national life.

Nonetheless, the final text relating to communal ownership of traditionally-occupied lands ended up only partially satisfactory. The original Indian proposal used the word "guaranteed" in respect to ownership of these lands. The governing Justicialista Party, alarmed by the supposed legal and economic consequences of this proposal, pushed the drafting commission to rephrase this with the word "regulate"—which obviously has different implications. In the final compromise, the commission settled on the word "recognize" which implies at least that communities will be able to secure ownership of lands for which they already have titles.

Settlement Between Texaco and Ecuadorian Government Sidesteps Indigenous People

U.S.-based multinational oil company, Texaco Inc. and the Ecuadorian government have reached a tentative agreement—subject to Ecuadorian President Sixto Durán Ballen's approval—on clean-up and restoration of former oil production sites in Ecuador's remote Oriente region.

The populations, particularly Indigenous peoples, whose communities have been devastated by twenty years of accumulated toxic dumping and oil spills, were never consulted in the process of negotiating this settlement. Indigenous and colonist organizations have been fighting for years, in alliance with environmental groups and lawyers, to force Texaco to carry-out a thorough clean-up and restoration of the areas it polluted and to provide health services and monitoring of oil related ailments within affected communities.

Texaco's oil operations have spilled some 16.8 million gallons of crude oil into the Oriente. The company also voluntarily dumped 20 billion gallons of water containing toxic hydrocarbons, chemicals and heavy metals, into the region's waterways. Roads built by Texaco have blazed the way for deforestation of over 2.5 million acres of rainforest by opening previously isolated Indian territories to colonization by farmers and ranchers. On terminating its operations in 1990, Texaco made no effort to clean up the toxic mess it left behind.

Indigenous umbrella organizations including COICA, CONAIE and CONFENAIE as well as the environmental coalitions CEDENMA and Amazon For Life will not accept this exclusive bilateral settlement between Texaco and the Ecuadorian government. The government's interests and the

communities' interests are not congruent. The state-owned oil company CEPE (now Petroecuador) worked in consortium with Texaco as a co-polluter and will have to pick up the tab for 65.5% of any remediation bill. Given the Ecuadorian government's financial liability in this situation, organizations fear that their government will not adequately meet the needs of the communities that have been impacted. For this reason, Indigenous organizations must be fully involved in negotiating any settlement if a truly effective plan for environmental restoration and human health care is to be designed, financed and implemented.

Please write or fax Texaco and the Ecuadorian government immediately expressing your concern.

Presidente Sixto Durán Ballen, Presidente de la República del Ecuador, Palacio Presidencial, Calle García Moreno, Quito, Ecuador.
Fax: 593-2-580-735

Alfred C. DeCrane Jr., CEO and Chairman of the Board, Texaco, Inc., 2000 Westchester Ave., White Plains, NY 10650.
Fax: 914-253-7753

Information supplied by the Rainforest Action Network.

Paraguay-Parana Waterway Threatens Largest Wetlands in the Americas

More than forty scientific, environmental and Indigenous organizations launched an international campaign in early Sept. to protect the vast Pantanal wetlands from a "mega-project" known as the Parana-Paraguay Hidrovia (or waterway). Organizations met in Chapada dos Guimarães in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso to discuss the Pantanal's current situation and the proposed waterway. According to these diverse organizations, the Pantanal already suffer tremendous impacts caused by gold and diamond mining, logging, urban sewerage, industrial pollution, pesticide and herbicide run-off and over-fishing.

The proposed waterway would include several massive engineering projects to straighten, deepen and "regulate" the channel of the Paraguay River. The governments of Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay hope that the waterway will open the river's upper sections to year-round industrial shipping, and have applied to the Inter-American Development Bank and other sources for funding. International funders are wary, however, until an environmental impact statement (EIS) has been completed.

The groups meeting in Chapada dos Guimarães are therefore demanding full participation in the EIS process. They also demand that it take into account all social and environ-

mental costs, and comprehensively evaluate the waterway's impacts, including those to all 2,000 miles of river that will be affected.

Information supplied by the International Rivers Network.

Venezuelan Indians Seek Constitutional Rights

Representatives of Venezuela's twenty-seven Indigenous peoples began a series of meetings at the Latin American Indigenous Parliament Center in Caracas to demand that their rights be included in the national constitution, which congress is currently attempting to reform.

Jesús Jiménez, Venezuela's only Indigenous congressman, explained that the 350,000 Indigenous people living in this country seek inclusion for their rights to land, use of their languages and recognition of dual citizenship for those peoples living along the Colombian and Brazilian borders. Jiménez pointed out that Colombia's Indigenous legislation guarantees dual citizenship in such cases, including for the 10,000 Wayu who inhabit the Colombian-Venezuela border area. The Indigenous representatives will also try to secure guarantees for participation in legislative powers at the national, regional, municipal, and local levels.

Information courtesy of Ansa News Agency Inc.

