

# Genocide in Colombia

*"There is convincing evidence that the Colombian armed forces have adopted a policy of terror, designed to intimidate and eliminate opponents without recourse to law. . . Whole sectors of society are at risk of being considered 'subversive,' and in Colombia, that is tantamount to a death sentence."*

*Amnesty International*



*Indians protest against violations of human rights in the Cauca region, organized by the Regional Indian Council, Corinto, late 1987.*

photo: Joe Fish—Amnesty International

Incidents of human rights violations, including political assassinations and "disappearances," have increased dramatically in Colombia over the last year. Most killings have been attributed to police and military personnel, or to "death squads" which are an integral part of the Colombian security forces (often military personnel in civilian clothes). No one has been convicted for any of these crimes.

The National Organization of Colombian Indians (ONIC) has called the new government's reign of terror "genocide for the Indian people, who continue to struggle for justice and social reform."

In less than three months in 1988, two important Indian leaders were killed—Gilberto Motato, an Embera Katio Indian from Caldas, and Oswaldo Teheran, a Zenu Indian from Cordoba. Motato was a mayoral candidate in the March, 1988 elections. He had a broad base of support which included Indians, peasants, and urban laborers. More than 20,000 people attended his funeral. Teheran was a leader in his community, and worked with ONIC as well. After his burial, his body was secretly exhumed and then burned. This act was then publicized by the press as a traditional Zenu ceremony.

The outraged community claimed that they do not now, nor have they ever, burned their dead. On the other hand, bodies of those who have been tortured and killed are sometimes burned by landowners.

ONIC has said that these acts "reaffirm our decision to continue reclaiming our rights and our firm desire for unity with popular sectors, and with those who, just as we do, repudiate the terror and violence and wish profound change for Colombia."

In addition to political assassinations, many human rights violations suffered by Indians occur over land disputes, or during the military's counter-insurgency operations. Indians have been killed when would-be landowners decided to evict them from land they have farmed for centuries. Some have even been imprisoned on charges of "land invasion." More recently, the army has been abducting Indian men to use as porters or guides during their counter-insurgency operations. Some are later released; many more are executed or "disappeared." Authorities tell families that these men are helping voluntarily, or deny having seized them.

## OREWA Demands Participation in Development Plans

In the Rio Pato region of the Choco, new development projects have been undertaken without consulting the communities affected. These include new roads and a hydroelectric plant. The government has turned a deaf ear to requests by OREWA, the regional Indian organization, to discuss problems these projects will present for Indian communities. Among these, according to OREWA, are an increase in colonization of Indian territories and reservations, the defiling of sacred sites such as cemeteries, damage to the ecology of the region, and the loss to Indians of land and resources. OREWA is asking for a guarantee of protection from colonization on reservations adjacent to new roads, reimbursement for damage to land and crops caused by construction, and that the government consult with Indian communities about these projects, and that it respect Indian cultural values and autonomy.

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## EL SALVADOR

### ANIS: There is No Justice for Indian People in El Salvador

On July 1st, approximately 100 armed soldiers from the Cuartel Atonal Army Garrison entered the Indian community of Canton Las Cruces (near Santa Elena in Usulután Province), disrupting the crucial corn harvest. The soldiers arrested five members of that community who are also members of A.N.I.S. (the National Association of Salvadorean Indians), which unites 45,000 Lenca, Maya and Nahuat people. (See SAIIC "Urgent Action Bulletin" of July 7, 1988). The five are accused of being supporters of the FMLN (Furabundo Martí Liberation Front) which has been waging an armed struggle during nine years of civil war in El Salvador.

On July 7th they were released from custody and, according to ANIS members in Sonsonate Province, the five had been tortured. Two of them, including Jesus Mondragon, a very active member of ANIS, returned in serious condition and are currently undergoing medical treatment.

On the week of July 23rd, another two members of ANIS were taken by the army from their homes at night and murdered. This signals a worsening of conditions for Indian people in El Salvador who have continually suffered harassment, repression, and disappearance.

In addition, the Supreme Court in El Salvador again dismissed charges under the Amnesty Law against the military officers and informers