

Drug Trafficking and Strip Searches Place Wayú Women in Peril

The following statement regarding "La Requisa Intima"—The Strip Search, was made by Dalla Durán of the Indigenous Movement for National Identity (MOIIN), and appeared in IWGIA.

The Wayú people have lived on Guajira Peninsula between Colombia and Venezuela since before the Spanish arrived on this continent. This coastal and semi-desert territory of vast planes is the home of our matrilineally organized society. Wayú women are the axis of this society; inheritance and the last name follow the mother's line. Women's presence and participation are fundamental in the development and continuity of each clan. Nonetheless, in the last few years, the menace of drug trafficking has begun to shake the foundation of our community and the position of women within it.

In contrast to many other regions of South America, drugs are neither grown, nor processed in Guajira. However, our location, which for years kept us isolated from European influences and the missions, has today become our biggest problem. Over the last twenty years, the Guajira has been converted into a giant landing strip and a port of transit for ships. Drugs are launched from here to the drug consuming countries of the world.

Drug trafficking has had more than a transitory presence. Huge quantities of money have attracted cheap labor to the region: men, women and children act as guards for the landing strips and illicit ports which appear and disappear as if by magic on the savannas and coasts. Drugs are stored in the workers' houses, involving entire families in this activity.

The quantities of money paid to the workers transforms our communities' traditional values. Our society's measured balance with the environment, based on taking only what is necessary from our habitat, is evaporating. At the same time, violence has grown, as has the number of arms—which are required in the functioning of the drug trade. Thus, the model of life based on respect for women and on strong community solidarity is at risk. For five centuries, women have exercised a fundamental role in the defense of our traditions along the long road of European colonization, and the place of women emerged strengthened by this process. Despite the Spanish conquistadors' plundering of our society, it never uprooted the status of women in Wayú society.

Throughout the world, drug traffickers use "mules" to transport small quantities of drugs from one spot to another. Here, drugs need only be carried the few kilometers from Colombia to the frontier cities of Venezuela. In this activity, Wayú women are in demand for their stamina, audacity and capacity to overcome fear.

Nonetheless, the government's actions to arrest violence generated by the drug trade have put Indigenous people at the center of a conflict which, in many cases, jeopardizes women the most. Even though we understand that the authorities' reaction is logical, and that the

"mules" work should be stopped, we cannot accept the treatment that our women receive daily on crossing the border check points. The searches that are carried out are inhuman and undignified. The national guard, police and customs officials assume that every woman dressed in traditional clothing or having our features is a "mule." During these searches, even women's genitals are examined in small

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cubicles in front of the other traveling companions and without any kind of sanitary control. Only the poor and humble Wayú women who travel by truck or bus are searched in this way. Those who travel in private cars are not affected.

It is no exaggeration to call these strip searches a violation of our fundamental rights. The searches violate our dignity as human beings, it is not only an assault on our morality, but only exposes the population to venereal diseases and contributes to the deteriorating physical, emotional and mental health of the Wayú women. We hope that this statement causes reflection on this issue, as our people are living under inhuman conditions under the indifferent glances of the authorities. 🐾

Indigenous People's Alliance (IPA) Update

Indigenous People's Alliance (IPA) members attended the Tohono O'odham Human Rights Conference in Sells, Arizona, on July 29-30 in the Tohono O'odham Nation, extending alliances across the Mexico/U.S./Canada borders. Following the conference in Sells, the IPA convened in Phoenix for a strategy and planning meeting on Aug. 1. Representatives from Tonantzin, Indigenous Environmental Network, En'owkin Center, and Peace and Dignity Project attended. The draft principles for the CONIC constitutional convention were distributed for comment and discussion on recruitment strategy undertaken. Members were updated on the situation in Chiapas by Marcos Perez Gomez from ORIACH (Organizacion Regional de los Altos de Chiapas).

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First Encounter of Maya Elders and Spiritual Guides in Guatemala

Maya elders and spiritual guides met on March 13-22, 1994, at the different cardinal points in Tecpa'n, Guatemala. This gathering was a chance for an exchange of information on Maya astrology with an emphasis on predicting cycles which can aid elders in their healing rituals. The Maya Calendar was a major point of discussion. Some people believe that the prophecies of the calendar will have a great impact over the next 20 years.

A council of elders and spiritual guides formed at this encounter with the intention of unifying Indigenous communities. The participants also decided to invite elders from other

countries to partake in the next encounter. Those present envisioned the promotion and encouragement of elders around the world to practice, exchange, and impart their traditional teachings and healing practices.

First Congress of Maya Education

"The time has come that we re-initiate the circle of light..." was the theme of this congress sponsored by the CEM-G (Council of May Education of Guatemala), Aug. 8-11, 1994, in Quetzaltenango attended by approximately 350 Maya teachers.

In discussing the needs of the Maya, their reality and cosmology, spirituality and philosophy, the teachers recommended the initiation of Maya curriculum in both rural and urban areas, including: Mayan mathematics, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, arts, philosophy, productivity and culture. They also called for the opening of more schools for training bilingual Maya-Spanish teachers, and the institutionalization of 21 languages by the Academy of Maya Languages.

Workshops to Train Indigenous Journalists Planned in Norway

SAIIC-Norway representative Sebastian Lara and Sami journalist Unni Wenche Gronvold are establishing an Indigenous Journalists Project in Oslo, Norway. The project will organize training workshops for Indigenous journalists from throughout the continent. These workshops will strengthen the International Association of Indigenous Press (AIPIN) which is currently broadcasting from Mexico City. SAIIC-Norway is seeking economic assistance from governments who are sponsoring to the U.N. Decade for Indigenous Peoples, as well as from the Spanish News Agency EFE. The Foreign Relations Office of the Norwegian government is now studying SAIIC-Norway's proposal. This project will enable more Indigenous journalists to report on their own struggles.

For more information and to send assistance:

SAIIC-Norge, Torgatta 34, 0183 Oslo, Norway

Free Workshops For the Women of La Quebrada de Humahuaca, Argentina

The women of Quebrada de Humahuaca Province, in the Republic of Jujuy, Argentina, have been organizing. Recently, this work included designing new practical components for the state's educational system, including the practice of preserving fruits and vegetables, weaving, health education, ceramics, music and dance, and especially the recuperation of their native language Kechua. This project results from free workshops organized independently by women in various localities. Also the educational authorities, DIGEMAS, and the Ministry of Culture



Photo: Wara Alderete

Indigenous women's committee meets below the wiphala

and Education all included the women's proposals into the state system.

The workshops' primary objectives have been to achieve incentives for participation through collective organization, incentives for production based on a subsistence economy, incorporation of modern techniques, re-valuation and advancement of the culture, recovery of the native tongue, Kechua, and improving the standard of living.

For more information:

José de la Iglesia/ 2238-Cuyaya-San Salvador de Jujuy República Argentina/ Tel: 29605

Ecuadorian Indigenous Women's Forum

The forum was held between July and Sept. in preparation for the Fourth Women's Conference. Women from the Quichua, Shuar, Achuar, Siona, Cofán, Secoya, Hoao, Awa, Chachi, Tsachi and Huancavilcas prepared the document "Women of Yesterday, Women of Today, Always Women, We weave the Future of Our People" which analyzes their situation within the communities and within Ecuadorian society in general. They demand recognition of the different Indigenous nationalities within a Plurinational state, demarcation of Indigenous territories, and the granting of communal ownership over them.

At the same time, they requested government attention to improving agricultural and artisan production and commercialization, better infrastructure, education and health services. They also demanded respect for Indigenous peoples human rights and the participation of women in the processes that affect them.

For more information, or to obtain the meeting's final document:

Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI), Casilla 17-12-877, Quito, Ecuador, Av. 12 de octubre 622 y Patria, Edificio Bossano, Of. 503, Tel: (593) 2 505 074 Fax: (593) 2 505 073

First Regional Encounter of Mapuche Women in Chile

The Mapuche Zomo Ñi Unel Xawyn (First Regional Encounter of Mapuche Women) was

organized by the Coordinating Committee of Mapuche Women's Institutions of the IX Region on Sept. 5. Participants worked to analyze a number of fundamental cultural concepts in order to understand and implement them from an Indigenous perspective. Concepts like Mapuche identity; health and its relation to the sacred; education, and its relation to wisdom; the exercise of memory and precision; were central themes of the discussion. Finally they addressed the situation of Indigenous women who continue to live in the communities as well as those who have migrated.

