



photo: Orin Starn

The Quechua work collectively in a "minga", which is a traditional communal system of work.

International Week of the Disappeared

The Latin American Federation of Relatives of the Disappeared—FEDEFAM—called the seventh annual **Week of the Disappeared** on May 24-31, 1988. FEDEFAM is a Latin American organization comprised of national associations of family members of victims of disappearances. Over 90,000 people have disappeared in Latin America. The majority of these are Indians—usually male, young, and extremely poor. Every disappeared human being represents a tragedy for friends and loved ones. Disappearances leave children orphaned and parents childless. Activities surrounding the **Week of the Disappeared** were directed at the need for the United Nations to formalize a convention which defines the practice of forced disappearances as a **CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY**. We urge all of our readers to write to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr.

Javier Perez de Cuellar, telling him that a Covenant on Forced Disappearance is needed. Letters may be sent to him at the following address:

Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar
Secretary General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017

(Source: *Eco-Andes*, May 1988.)

Micaela Bastidas Feminine Community by Elizabeth Bobsy Draper

On a corner in Lima, Peru, stands a small and simple restaurant, like any other except that its menu features traditional high protein native foods of the Andes—a quinoa grain in the soup, chochos beans in the stew. The difference is proclaimed in the sign of ownership—"Micaela Bastidas Feminine Community."

"We are committed to re-introducing our authentic foods," says Adela Principe, founding member and coordinator of the women's community, "but the people still have prejudices. That's the food of the Indians," they say."

The Micaela Bastidas Feminine Community has united over 50 Quechua and Aymara Indian women who have come to the cities to make a better life for themselves. With a renewed respect for their own roots, they have transformed their own possibilities.

Adela Principe was 11 years old when she came to Lima. "There was no money for school materials and I was interested in studying. We could learn what our parents knew but this was treated with indifference and racism. They called us stupid, ignorant Indians, so when the subprefect of my community suggested I go to Lima to work for his fianc, I didn't think twice. I threw myself into the adventure in spite of the opposition of my family." Adela worked for six years in the same family with an atmosphere of discrimination and racism and no personal freedom.

From 1968 to 1976, Peru was governed by a "benevolent" military dictator, Juan Velasco Alvarado, who carried out sweeping land, education and economic reforms. The political atmosphere was dynamic. At 17, Adela found a new job with a progressive family. Her isolation was broken with night school. She met many other Indian women with similar experiences and tales of repressed and depreciated lives and spirits. Now, they were not alone and began to live together. A nun rented them a church property. It was a "time of unity, of good communal life and shared experiences," Adela recounts. The biggest problem was alienation from their own people and customs. "We began, little by little, to create mechanisms to break the alienation" with traditional dances, music and dress."

Many people were experimenting with different ideologies. The young women's community came in contact with an emerging Indian movement and "began to find something very much ours, very identified with our reality, a philosophy of our own."

They named their group after Micaela Bastidas to "honor the ancestors, customs and people and redeem a great Indian woman who fought until death for the liberation of our peoples." Micaela Bastidas, together with her husband Tupac Amaru, had led the last major uprising against the Spanish in the late 1700's.

By the late 1980's, the community had a list of projects, all based on a philosophy of Indianity. To the "Micaelas," the task was two-fold: to re-integrate the communal and to "help our compañeras to develop individually." In addition, they wanted to create compatible sources of work. The community received a grant from NORAD, a Norwegian government organization, to begin their first business venture, an employment agency to provide jobs and better working conditions for their people. 3,000 signed up in the first few months, and in two years over 350 were placed in good jobs. The agency provided monthly training meetings covering the specific demands of the jobs as well as health, organizing activities, political, personal and civic themes, and legal rights.

With the success of the employment agency, they opened the restaurant and acquired another office and a printing press. In a municipal lottery of sections of dry desert land, they won nine adjoining lots. "We want to give an example of a communitarian life lived within the Indian point of view. When our neighbors joke about us being Indian, we say that it is a state of consciousness, where we live in the communitarian way with mutual help and respect for Mother Earth. We don't have complexes."

And they are planning a *guaguahuasi* (Quechua for children's house). "Our children are growing up. The state schools don't guarantee anything for us."

Many of the Indian movements are struggling to stay together and to fulfill their original objectives. "What is the point of being an Indian leader if you are not moral?" Adela asks. "Some have ambitions of power, money and travel and many don't do anything with the money that they receive."

"There is more international interest in and support for the Indian movements," she adds, "and the organizations that exist are stronger, more sophisticated and surer. We have some problems, but we'll overcome them. Our experience is rich enough."

Yanesha Leader Disappears in the Peruvian Forest

Pedro Joaquin Berna, general secretary of FECONAYA, Federación de Comunidades Nativas Yaneshas in the Central Forest of Peru, disappeared on May 4th of this year. Pedro was leaving on a trip to Lima, the country's capital, to organize a union meeting.

According to FECONAYA, Pedro's disappearance may have been caused by conflicting interests in the area. "The Yanesha people are continuously being hassled by farmers, timber

companies, businesses, government officials, and recently by a new religious sect—the Israelian Church of the New Universal Pact, accusing the Indian leaders of drug dealing and terrorism."

"We feel the Peruvian authorities must investigate the case, for this aggression is not only against Pedro Berna, but also against the rights of all Indian communities, its organizations and representatives. We ask your support by writing to the following officials:

Dr. Alan García Pérez

Presidente del Perú
Palacio de Gobierno
Lima, Perú

Dr. Enrique Lozada E.
Presidente de la Cámara de Senadores
Congreso de la República de Perú
Palacio Legislativo
Lima, Perú

The Yanesha and other Native people of the forests of Peru struggle against the threats of Amazonian destruction.

