



## CLORINDA GUALMES: ONE WOMAN AGAINST THE MILITARY



Following the military coup of 1976, Indian people in Argentina were subjected to widespread oppression, with large landowners conspiring with the military to displace Indians from their ancestral territories.

In Neuquén province, many families were evicted by the military so that they could extend their *estancias* (landholdings) and headquarters. One such *estancia*, called Pulmari, already consisted of 125,000 acres, yet the military wanted to further extend their lands, so they evicted one-third of the Mapuches from the community of Lonco Luan.

Clorinda Gualmes, like her ancestors, lives with her family in El Faldeo del Cerro Otto, close to the army base and ten kilometers from Bariloche. The military tried to chase her off her land on several occasions, but she and her family always returned.

Now, the Argentine army is trying to sue Clorinda and take away her land by judicial means, accusing the Gualmes family of illegally occupying the land. Elogio Frites, a Kolla Indian lawyer working in legal defense, says that "514 hectares (1,270 acres) belong to the Gualmes family forever, and laws 23302 and 14932 protect their rights."

### "Only with my Courage and my Will"

Elizabeth Draper recorded the following statement by Clorinda Gualmes:

"My family has lived on my land for 100 years. I have a photo of my grandfather and his animals there taken in 1907. My father was the first wood and coal seller, my mother the first to make local cheese.

But now, I have been evicted three times. First, by the National Parks and then by the army. They say they need the land for maneuvers.

The last time was in 1983, on the 29th of July, at a quarter to 11 in the morning. It was snowing, when 40 soldiers came in and tore everything down. They left me without anything. Even my furniture was taken by the rain.

For over a month that winter, I had nowhere to go with my animals. I lived in a tent. I have pictures of it covered with snow. I hid my cows in the hills. The soldiers had wanted to take them to the market.

Now, I am on the same land. I came back by myself without anyone's help. Only with my courage and my will. I know that it is mine. Since then, soldiers have come two or three times to tell me they are going to practice on the shooting range. In all the years since I was born there, they have never shot around my house as they have in the last four or five years. The bullets would hit my house, or pass beside the corral. Now, they are bothering me so that I will get tired and I will leave. They haven't achieved this, yet.

I have filed three or four complaints against them, so they have stopped bothering me in this way. I have a big file of the notes I have written to the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and other officials. But I never know when I leave my home what I will find when I get back.

The Centro Mapuche came to find me when I was in the tent and I have been working with them ever since, as Treasurer of the organization."

