

Peru: Ecological Protection Zone Plan Threatens Indigenous Lands

INRENA, the Peruvian National Institute of Natural Resources, in concordance with article 12 of the Ley de Tierras (Land Law), has put forth a proposal to create Ecological Protection Zones out of 40.5% of Peru's Amazon lands. Within these zones, concessions could still be granted. The rest would eventually become private property. This would be disastrous for Indigenous communities, most of which do not have legal title to their land.

The proposal, published in the Peruvian newspaper *El Peruano*, defines Protected Zones as natural areas already protected (national parks and reserves), swamps, fragile watersheds, and lands along rivers. More than 31 million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon would fall into this category. The rest, about 46 million hectares, would be classified as Areas Free of Ecological Protection and be administered by the Ley de Tierras, making it eligible for sale by public auction to private investors.

Indigenous groups have already reacted strongly against this project. The Aguaruna and Huambisa council forwarded its own amendments to the Ley de Tierras to the Ministry of Agriculture. Now, it only remains to see how the Minister of Agriculture, who stated that he was open to receiving the input of all sectors, will react to the national and international pressure.

Information received from El Comercio, Lima, and the Amazon Coalition

Women March in Chiapas to Commemorate International Women's Day

On international woman's day, March 8, 1996, between five and seven thousand people, mostly Indigenous women, gathered at the Plaza de San Diego and marched to the plaza of the main cathedral in the center of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. This march, which coincides with the dialogue at San Andrés Larráinzar between the Mexican Government and the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), was held to commemorate International Women's Day and was organized by the Comisión de Mujeres Por El 8 de Marzo (The Commission of Women for March 8th) and the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Front, or FZLN).

The participants came in caravans from Indigenous communities all over Chiapas, including the Lacandón jungle. It was an emotional and inspirational event as women,

some carrying babies on their backs, and many wearing ski masks, marched through the streets. Some banners denounced the unfair treatment of Indigenous women and demanded equal rights for women, and others announced support for the FZLN and the EZLN.

Compiled from reports from Global Exchange Volunteers

Honduras: Violence Flares Against Indigenous Communities

The Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America (CODEHUCA), has expressed grave concern over the safety and life of Chortís Indigenous members and leaders, a community residing in the departments of Copán and Ocotepeque.

Representatives of the Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras have reported a series of death threats made against the leaders of the Indigenous Chortís Council of Honduras (CONICHH) and members of their families. Particular mention was made of the following persons: Antonio Arias, María de Jesús Interiano, José Ernesto Suchite, José Domingo Mejía, Victoriano Pérez, Natividad Lopez, Juan Amador Méndez, Andrés Ramírez, Estanislao Ramírez and Cristóbal Pinía.

Members of the community have been subjected individually and collectively to several attacks including the destruction and burning of their houses, fields and other possessions. These acts have been attributed to cattle breeders and land owners in the region who are opposed to the reclaiming of land which the Indigenous population has occupied for over a century.

Within this context, on March 2 and 4, 1996, the houses and other possessions of seven Indigenous families were burnt and destroyed. One of the fires also caused the death of the child Ismael Arias Leon.

CODEHUCA remarks that in 1994 the Government of Honduras ratified ILO (International Labor Organization) Convention 169 and in July of the same year also signed a commitment, stipulated with 8 Indigenous and Black communities, in order to resolve conflicts over land possession. In spite of this, so far there has been no definitive distribution of land to the Chortís communities of Copán and Ocotepeque.

The International Secretariat of OMCT/SOS-Torture believes that the failure to comply with the obligations mentioned have encouraged the commission of acts constituting grave violations of the right to life and safety of people, as well as their economic and social rights.

Information from OMCT/SOS-Torture

Please send letters to the Honduran government expressing your concern: S.E. Carlos Roberto Reina, Presidente de la República, Casa Presidencial, 6a Avenida, 1a Calle, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Fax : (504) 34 35 73 Telex : 1129 MMRR HO/1429 HO

Guatemala: Government Approves, but Modifies, Convention 169

On March 5, 1996, the Guatemalan Congress unanimously approved Convention 169 on "Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries" of the International Labor Organization (ILO), revised from an earlier version in 1989. Ratification, however, occurred only after the ruling party modified the first article of the Convention. The night before the congressional session, hundreds of Mayan people had gathered in front of the Legislative Palace in a vigil for the "new dawning."

Convention 169 was first brought to the Guatemalan Congress in 1992. It wasn't until 1995 that, under the Presidency of General Efraín Ríos Montt, it was once again up for ratification. At that point it was taken to the Corte de Constitucionalidad (Court of Constitutionality) to determine if it contradicted the national constitution of Guatemala. Its constitutionality assured, Kaqchikel-Maya deputy Aura Marina Ozyoy of the Guatemalan Republican Front proposed to re-open the dialogue in February of this year.

The debates for and against the Convention were intense. Siglo XXI and Prensa Libre, both major Guatemalan national news publications, came out with headlines such as "Convention 169 to the Trash Bin!" and "Ratification of Convention 169 Creates Environment of Uncertainty." The reaction of the private sector was one of cautious apprehension. "[169] might be harmless to the country, nevertheless in no way does it benefit the interests of Indigenous people," says the president of the Agriculture Department and the Committee of Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations. "...it will only bring chaos to the country."

Indigenous organizations, on the other hand, did their best to ensure that this favorable piece of legislation get approved by the national government. COPMAGUA (Coordinator of Mayan Organizations of Guatemala) stated that "with the ratification of Convention 169, the Mayan people seek to build a solid and lasting peace in the country... We are calling out to you so that you may realize the necessity of change in this society, that it's no longer possible to go on accepting living conditions implanted during

500 years of sacrifice, pain, despair, indignation, and alienation."

Seventy-five deputies were initially present at the voting session. Seventy-two remained at the moment of decision, and voted unanimously for Convention 169. Nevertheless, the governing party (PAN - Party of National Advancement) managed to modify Article 1 of the document, ensuring that the ratification is being made with the understanding that the dispositions of the national constitution come before those of the Convention.

Information provided by Atencio Lopez

BRAZIL: Marcio Santilli Resigns from the Presidency of FUNAI

On March 8, 1996, Marcio Santilli, resigned from the presidency of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) after 5 months of service. This comes as the agency's fundamental aim of demarcating Indian lands has been undermined by the recent passing of Decree 1775 which allows outsiders to contest the process in a court of law.

After 10 years of documented FUNAI corruption, Santilli was in the midst of attempting a clean up the organization. Many high level decision-making FUNAI authorities have been accused of illegal logging and mining in Indigenous areas as well as having long-standing patronage ties with some local leaders. Where Santilli had identified blatant cases of corruption, he had replaced staff, combating powerful job security laws for the public sector. After the passing of Decree 1775, however, FUNAI's effectiveness seems to have completely plummeted. Faced with corruption scandals, an outbreak of invasions of Indigenous areas, and police inaction, Santilli resigned.

"We owe Marcio Santilli our thanks for his effort to clean up FUNAI, and put it in shape to effectively defend Indian rights in Brazil. But it is now clear that the National Indian Foundation needs radical surgery, not band-aids, if the defense of Indigenous rights in this government is to move from rhetoric to reality," said Carlos Alberto Ricardo, executive secretary of the *Instituto Socioambiental*.

On March 14, 1996, Julio Gaiger, a lawyer specializing in environmental, agrarian, and Indigenous rights, took office as the third president of FUNAI during Henrique Cardoso's term. Last year Gaiger worked as an auxiliary to the Justice Minister and is responsible for the final text of Decree 1775.

Information from Environmental Defense Fund and Amanaka'a, and the Instituto Socioambiental