

# President of Bolivia Meets with Indigenous Leaders in New York

*by Roger Atihuibancex Hernandez, UCTP Correspondent*

United Nations, NY - Evo Morales Aima, an Aymara indigenous leader who was recently elected to Bolivia's highest office as President met with a small group of indigenous leaders at the United Nations on Monday, September 18, 2006. The President, along with his country's Foreign Minister, David Choquehuanca, (Aymara), are in New York City for the first time attending the 61st Session of the General Assembly at the United Nations.

The meeting was hosted by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the American Indian Law Alliance (AILA), an Indigenous Peoples' non-governmental organization working in New York City.

A member of the President's delegation, Tom Kruse stated that the meeting was set up at the request of President Morales and "is meant to be a substantive exchange between Indigenous leaders from the North and the South to discuss the issues shared by Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere."

Representatives of the Haudenosaunee, Lakota, Cree, and Taino Nations participated in the historic meeting, which was described by Kent Lebstock of AILA as "another step in the undeniable presence of Indigenous Peoples in international advocacy, especially human rights."

A traditional welcome for President Morales was extended by Sid Hill, Tadodaho of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations, Iroquois Confederacy) from Onondaga in upstate New York. Other indigenous participants included Chief Oren Lyons, also from Onondaga; Chief Alex White Plume, Tribal Chairman of the Oglala Sioux Nation; Chief J. Wilton Littlechild, Ermineskin Cree Nation and member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; Tonya Gonnella Frichner (Onondaga), AILA Director; and Roberto Mucaro Borrero (Taino), Chairman of the Regional Coordinating Office of the United Confederation of Taino People. Several human rights advocates were also present including Esmeralda Brown of the United Methodist Church.

Substantive discussion among the participants took place and included issues such as lands, resources, the revitalization of traditional Indigenous processes in government, and conservation and environmental management. Advocacy toward the revocation of the 1493 Papal Bull and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the World's Indigenous Peoples were other specific items discussed. The meeting coincided with the beginning of the General Assembly session where the issue of the Declaration is expected to be addressed.

During the meeting President Morales recounted parts of his personal and political history as well as key events that galvanized the rise of his political party to power in Bolivia. He also expressed his view that his work and that of his party are a continuation of the "500 Years of Resistance" campaign. The President stressed however, that the goal now is to move "beyond resistance to power" so that the "people" can live well.

"President Morales is an inspiration for all our Peoples, especially our youth in that he exemplifies what can be accomplished when we accept and affirm the profound teachings of our ancestors" stated Boriken Taino leader Roberto Mucaro Borrero.

Borrero continued by noting "don't lie, don't steal and don't be lazy are basic laws that all Indigenous Peoples can relate to and it is a great honor to be present at time when these ancient ideals are once again being put into practice."

President Morales considered meeting a success and felt that such meetings are his obligation as a "defender of Mother Earth."

In a clear demonstration of his commitment President Morales not only invited the group to visit him in Bolivia but he also requested they draft comments about the Declaration, which he could consider incorporating in his speech to the UN General Assembly.

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