



Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations

The Only Multi-Racial Worldwide Indigenous Confederacy In Existence

GOVERNMENTS IN THE AMERICAS CRACK DOWN ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WHILE WORLD DISTRACTED

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

Gunshot Wounds and Evictions: Taking advantage of the Wikileaks Whiteout

The international Cry

<http://www.Internationalcry.org>

With the world's media focused on Wikileaks--and activists still working though the COP16 Summit in Cancun--governments have been seizing the opportunity to lash out at Indigenous Peoples, carrying out mass evictions and violent police offensives without anybody even noticing.

Leading up to the COP16 Summit in Cancun, on November 23, 2010, the Toba Qom indigenous community of La Primavera was brutally repressed by more than 100 heavily armed police officers in northeastern Argentina, leaving three people dead, one person in a coma and nearly two dozen injured. The Toba were holding a protest over the government's plans to build a new University on their ancestral territory without their consent.

Six days after the Toba were attacked, according to Kichwa leaders from the Amazon province of Napo, Ecuadorian soldiers entered the Kichwa Tzawata community "to evacuate them" for a new a mining project. Modesto Alvarado, a representative from the community, recently said that 63 soldiers entered the community to make way for the return of the Merendon Mining Corporation, which exited the region in 2007. The government claims that it had no knowledge of the eviction.

Since the company left, said Alvarado, the Kichwa have been carrying out a "resistance struggle" to make sure the company never returns, because, he said, it dumped "cyanide, mercury and chemicals like that in the rivers." Alvarado added that, "children and women got sores on their bodies, they got burns on their bodies."

Then, on December 3, Chilean troops opened fire on the unarmed RapaNui People with pellets and tear gas, injuring 21 people. Two people had to be taken to the hospital because of the severity of their injuries.

The unexpected attack came after months of relative peace on the island of Rapanui (Easter Island) where several families have been attempting to reclaim some of their ancestral territory. The following video was uploaded to YouTube the same day of the attack.

Three days later, the Peruvian National Police opened fire on Campesinos near the Andean city of Huaraz in the Department of Ancash, Peru. After allegedly being attacked with "sticks and stones" the PNP began firing at the Campesinos with tear gas and live ammunition. A total of five people were seriously injured in the attack. One person, a student named Willy Cadillo Vergara, later died from his injuries.

The PNP's decision to open fire sparked major local protests with the Campesinos demanding a full investigation into the death of Vergara. They also demanded formal talks with the government over a new local mining project which the earlier, peaceful protest was aimed at. After the second set of protests began, the government sent 140 members of DINOES to the area. You may recall, DINOES, Peru's National Police special forces, was at the center of the Bagua conflict in June 2009. Fortunately, on Sunday, Dec 12, the leaders of the protest agreed to call things off for 5 days to give the government a chance to respond to their demands.

Amidst this ongoing turmoil, on December 9, Radio Free Asia reported that the Chinese Government is preparing to displace up to 4,000 Tibetans from their lands for a new hydro dam in Lhundrub county, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). In recent months, China has become increasingly belligerent towards the Tibetan people, which means it may be just a matter of time before they make their move. According to local sources, "The Chinese have already built houses exclusively for the Chinese soldiers who have arrived to work on the dam."

The following day, December 10, it was reported that the Anuak, Indigenous Peoples of the Gambella region in Ethiopia, are themselves being evicted from their lands to make way for foreign investors. Though it has been barely noticed in the west, the evictions have already been taking place for several months. And with fertile agricultural land now a "favoured commodity" for investors, there's little chance that the evictions will abate any time soon.

The next day, a Nukak Leader from the Guaviare Department of Colombia reported that FARC, the so-called "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," evicted the Nukak from their territories in the Amazon. Speaking at a Senate commission for human rights and international observers in San José, the Nukak Leader, Nuka Joaquin, explained that FARC simply invaded their lands for no apparent reason. The Nukak, are now living in a field near San Jose del Guaviare.

Unlike the other governments in this briefing, the Colombian government has actually been supporting the Nukak, even though it's like salt on the wound. The Nukak want to go back home, but the government only seems willing to provide them city food, which is completely foreign to the Nukak.

Finally, in the Sarawak region of Borneo, the Penan just discovered that the rainforest to which they were planning to relocate, is being actively cleared for oil palm plantations. As reported by Aliran, "[1,000] Penan are being forced to move by the Sarawak state government to allow the billion-dollar Murum dam project to go ahead."

Discussing the situation, Alung Ju, headman of Long Singu, said, "This is the most difficult time, the most challenging. Before the timber company came to our land life was much better. We lived peacefully in our land. Now we're going to be moved off our land and we are really worried what will happen to us if the government is successful."

Throughout the course of 2010, governments and paramilitary groups have routinely assaulted indigenous peoples, but never with such an alarming frequency as what's taken place in the last few weeks. There has undoubtedly been more incidents, but they have not been made public. Of all the incidents listed here, only one--the Chilean government's attack on the RapaNui--has received any serious amount of media coverage.

It's a telling fact that speaks well to the abysmal state of the world's media. Whether it's Reuters and CNN, the dreaded Fox News, or the Utne reader and Common Dreams, there is a consistent failure of journalists and editors to provide "actually fair and balanced" news. It's a failure that we shouldn't take lightly given that media has such an obvious effect on politics--that is, on the issues it reports on and the issues it does not.

Sometimes that effect makes all the difference in the world, as we saw in June 2009, when DINOES opened fire on the Awajun and Wampis Peoples. "Bagua" quickly became one of the most widely-reported government-led attacks on an indigenous population in the history of mass media.

Leading up to that conflict, thousands of indigenous peoples across the Peruvian Amazon were leading a "general strike" to demand the repeal of legislative decrees that threatened to strip away their land rights. After 56 days of protest, on June 5, DINOES staged a violent raid on the Awajun and Wampis on a road outside of Bagua. When the dust settled, 34 people were dead.

Because of the incredible amount of media coverage this attack received, there was a massive public outcry; in fact, it's safe to say that there was more international solidarity for Indigenous Peoples in Peru than there was for the rest of the world's Indigenous population combined in 2008 or 2009 and beyond. As a direct result of that pressure, the Peruvian government had no choice but to concede to the essential demands of the Awajun and Wampis.

It's certainly not realistic to expect the same kind of critical outpour for every single incident that arises. But at the same time, roughly 90% of what's happening to Indigenous Peoples isn't getting any coverage at all, beyond a few mentions on a few more websites. All of the incidents listed here speak to this, but there are others.

It's as if these attacks just slip into a black hole, leaving the population that is being displaced, kidnapped, raped, shot and/or murdered to carry the burden on their own. Perhaps that's way it's supposed to be, in this increasingly-colonized world? That the innocent should suffer for the privileged few that couldn't care less, while the majority spends their time trying to make ends meet and avoiding what's really happening?

In any case, it's interesting to note that Wikileaks once found itself in that same black hole. It wasn't until Julian Assange and friends made a strategic alliance with several key news agencies did they manage to get serious coverage on what sources had revealed to them. And now? For a better or worse, the black hole has been turned inside out.

It's doubtful Indigenous Peoples will ever get to make the same alliances as Wikileaks. We'll just have to find our own way to turn things inside out. Nevertheless, Wikileaks has set a mighty example for bloggers and journalists, like the Bagua conflict in 2009, about the importance of transparency, the responsibilities of media and the value of being informed.

A fair and responsible media can make the difference between life and death--just as a distracted media can make room for governments and paramilitary groups to carry out barbarous acts without anybody noticing.