

Guatemalan Government Blocks Bishop and Indigenous Leaders From IDB Meet

Date: March 20, 2007

Source: Bank Information Center

Guatemalan Government Blocks Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini and Indigenous Leaders From IDB Annual Meeting

IDB Debate on Social Inclusion Excludes Critics

Distributed by the alliance of NGOs of Latin America, Europe and United States during the Annual Meeting of the IDB in Guatemala City

Guatemala City, March 19, 2007 - The IDB has banned a prominent Guatemalan Bishop and a group of indigenous leaders from participating in its annual meeting in Guatemala City today.

The bank cited security concerns for preventing Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini and three leaders from two Maya federations, Waq'ib Kej and CONIC, and the human rights legal group CALDH, from participating in a press conference organized by US and Guatemalan human rights and environmental groups and due to be held at 3pm today at the Westin Camino Real Hotel.

Bishop Ramazzini and the other leaders were expected to highlight the IDB's failure in Guatemala to ensure inclusive, sustainable and equitable development. Over the last 10 years, the IDB has lent Guatemala US\$1.5 billion, money destined for economic and social development.

Reacting to the news that he would not be permitted to enter the hotel, which the IDB has taken over for the five days of its annual meeting, Monsignor Ramazzini, Bishop of San Marcos, said: This reflects extremely poorly on the IDB. What does this say about the IDB's commitment to social inclusion? This decision was taken by the Guatemalan government but I am profoundly disappointed that the IDB appears to have condoned it.

The other people prevented from participating in the press conference were Rodolfo Pocop, Principal Coordinator of the Convergencia Nacional Maya Waq'ib Kej, Juana Mulul, Technical Secretary of Waq'ib Kej, Juana Batzibal, Director of Indigenous Issues CALDH, Oscar Cabrera of CONIC.

Monsignor Ramazzini is known internationally for his work on behalf of Guatemala's poor, particularly his human rights advocacy. Pocop, Mulul and Batzibal are prominent indigenous leaders in Guatemala and the primary organizers of the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nations of ABYA YALA, to advance a common indigenous agenda for social justice across the continent, slated to open in a week.

The decision by the Guatemalan authorities to exclude the three leaders calls into question its commitment to social inclusion, a principal theme of the IDB annual meeting this year.

For standing up to the government, corporate investors and financial institutions such as the IDB in face of rights threatening infrastructure and extractives projects, various activists have been labeled t errorists by Guatemalan authorities. Other critics from these movements have been assassinated or driven into exile.

We have political leaders in Guatemala that share the same neoliberal vision as the IDB, said Ramazzini, and together they don't realize the extent of the poverty and marginalization in Guatemala. To talk of social inclusion without inviting the views of people closer to this reality is highly misleading and unethical.

The actions by the Guatemalan government simply reinforce our belief that this is not the social inclusion that we Guatemalans want, Juana Mulul was quoted as saying. We invite the IDB, the Guatemalan government and others to the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Peoples to witness and participate the social inclusion that we all want.

Contacts:

Monsignor Alvaro Ramazzini, Obispo de la Paroquia de San Marcos, 77601206

Rodolfo Pocop, Coordinador Principal de la Convergencia Nacional Maya Waq'ib Kej
57230316, 22324617

Juana Mulul, Secretaria Tecnica de Waq'ib Kej, 53260259, 56837393

Juana Batzibal, Directora Area Indigena CALDH

Oscar Cabrera, Coordinador Proyecto Cultura, CONIC

Distribuido por: Distributed by:
**'AMAZON ALLIANCE' FOR INDIGENOUS AND
TRADITIONAL PEOPLES OF THE AMAZON BASIN**
1367 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036-1860
tel (202)785-3334
fax (202)785-3335
am-@amazonalliance.org
<http://www.amazonalliance.org>

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