



Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations

The Only Multi-Racial Worldwide Indigenous Confederacy In Existence

Peru moves to ease Amazon crisis

Wednesday, June 17

BBC NEWS

Peru's government is set to send a bill to Congress revoking land laws that led to deadly clashes between police and indigenous protesters in the Amazon.

The move follows talks between the government and indigenous leaders on ways of easing tensions after more than 30 people died earlier this month. Amazon Indians say the laws will open their lands to drilling and logging. Peru's Prime [Minister] Yehude Simon, who has led the talks, has said he will step down once the dispute is settled. "I will leave as soon as everything has calmed down, which should be in the coming weeks," Mr Simon told Peruvian radio on Tuesday after meeting indigenous leaders. He said the government would send a bill to Congress on Wednesday asking for a repeal of the laws which would have allowed mining, oil and gas exploration and other economic development in the Amazon rainforest. The government had to know how to listen, Mr Simon said, insisting that the reversal of policy would not put at risk Peru's free trade agreement with the US. Mr Simon offered to end a state of emergency and curfew in the region, while Amazon leaders indicated they would end their blockade of a main road if the decrees were overturned. Thousands of indigenous people have been blocking roads, rivers and fuel pipelines since April to force the government to repeal the laws which they say were introduced without consultation and would open their lands to foreign exploitation. Violence erupted on 5 June when security forces moved to end the blockades near the town of Bagua, more than 1,000km (600 miles) north of the capital, Lima. At least 34 people, both police and protesters, died in the clashes, officials have said, although indigenous leaders say more than 50 people were killed.

Safe passage

Peruvian President Alan Garcia has said that developing parts of the Amazon are part of his investment programme to tackle widespread poverty. He has repeatedly argued that all Peruvians should benefit from the country's natural resources not just the people who happened to live in the areas concerned. "We have to open up a space for reconciliation, peace and hope," Mr Garcia said in a statement on Tuesday. But he indicated that he intended to move ahead with his development policies based on free trade and foreign investment. "Time will show that those who reject something today will be the first to ask for it in the future because they need development, investment and a better life," he said. The government has meanwhile granted safe passage to an indigenous leader to travel to Nicaragua, which has granted him political asylum. Alberto Pizango took refuge in the Nicaraguan embassy after being accused of sedition, conspiracy and rebellion.

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/8104787.stm>

RIGHTS-PERU: Activists Urge Obama to Use Trade Pact as Leverage

By Haider Rizvi

NEW YORK, Jun 16 (IPS) - The United States government is coming under intense pressure from rights organisations and environmental groups to redefine its trade pact with Peru, a tool that they charge the government in Lima is using to justify oppression against the indigenous population.

"Whether or not the U.S. intended it, the reality is that the U.S.-Peru Trade Agreement gave license to the [Alan] Garcia administration to roll back indigenous rights and has contributed to increasing social conflict and human rights abuses in Peru," said Andrew Miller of Amazon Watch.

On Monday, Miller's group joined a broad coalition of 14 other organisations in sending a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other high-level officials calling for immediate U.S. action regarding the ongoing political conflict in Peru between the state authorities and indigenous rights movement.

Last year the Garcia administration issued several decrees to implement the U.S.-Peru free trade agreement. The decrees are controversial because they are designed to regulate investment in the Amazon, which is a source of concern for environmental organisations as well as the indigenous population.

On Jun. 5, the police opened fire on indigenous activists at a roadblock near the northern Peruvian town of Bagua. The demonstrators were blockading traffic to protest the government's policy to let foreign investors use indigenous lands in the Amazon. In the clashes, an as yet uncertain number of protesters were killed, along with a number of police.

Analysts of U.S. policy towards Latin America describe the bloody incident in Bagua as the latest rendition of the discord that exists between the United States, Latin American governments and the indigenous people of the region.

"The increase in foreign direct investment since the 1980s has ignited countless humanitarian and environmental crises throughout Latin America as the leaders of developing world are being forced to choose between the perceived economic benefits of free trade," note researchers Arienna Grody and Lincoln Wheeler.

In a report for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a Washington-based think tank, they describe Garcia as "a robust ally of foreign investors and multinational corporations" who has strongly defended Peru's development initiatives by claiming that it was in the benefit of the poor.

But, to Grody and Wheeler, such an assertion is highly questionable.

"This grand scheme to uplift the poor, cynical it may seem, has significantly increased the disenfranchisement of the already underrepresented native people who have now seen themselves [of having been] stripped of basic ownership rights of their traditional lands," they wrote.

The ownership rights to traditional lands are fully recognised by the majority of the international community. The U.N. General Assembly endorsed that principle in a resolution approving the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The resolution was passed in September 2007.

Since the adoption of the declaration, which is not legally binding, indigenous peoples all over the world have been joining hands with environmental organisations and calling upon governments to respect their way of life and protect their resources from commercial concerns.

Since Peru is rich in copper, silver, lead, zinc, oil and gold, many foreign corporations are keen to explore and exploit such commodities for profit. The indigenous communities have been resisting such attempts for decades and have often had violent clashes with the authorities who support the use of indigenous lands for private use.

On Tuesday, the Peruvian government promised to introduce a draft law to get Congress to repeal the two decrees that sparked the protests.

The U.N. declaration demands that government and corporations must seek the "informed consent" of indigenous communities before embarking on any kind of commercial venture on indigenous territories.

A multi-party parliamentary committee had declared the decrees unconstitutional in December.

Critics note that the legislative decrees were passed without transparency or genuine consultation with indigenous communities. According to Oxfam International, a British anti-poverty organisation, the decrees are not only in contradiction to the U.S.-Peru pact, but also violate ILO Convention 169, which Peru ratified in 1993.

The ILO Convention grants indigenous communities the right to be consulted on issues affecting them.

"The Peruvian Congress has taken an important first step by suspending these decrees, but much more needs to be done to bring an end to this conflict," said Raymond C Offenheiser of Oxfam America.

He thinks that the U.S. government "can help by fostering a solution through dialogue, not force."

Concerned about the fact that the Peruvian government intends to clear protesters in other areas of the Amazon, he said the U.S. government must act quickly to work with Peru to address the issue of legislative decrees, and to clarify what relation, if any, these decrees have to compliance with the trade pact.

"We strongly urge the U.S. government to help bring an end to this crisis by supporting a dialogue that includes views of indigenous communities and protects the human rights of these citizens as guaranteed by national and international law," said Offenheiser.

*Copyright © 2009 IPS-Inter Press Service. All rights reserved.
<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47247>*