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Hemisphere's Indigenous Take The Offensive On Terms Of Development

by Mike Leffert

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"We don't want to be, we are not interested in being, a colony of North America," said one of the placards in a mass demonstration of indigenous people from 26 countries. Thousands marched through the streets of Guatemala City at the close of the III Cumbre de Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indigenas de Abya Yala. Abya Yala means America. The summit was a four-day affair held at the ancient indigenous site of Iximche, Tecpan, Chimaltenango. Other signs read, "Viva the coca leaf," and "Viva Evo Morales." The indigenous Bolivian president was expected to appear at the summit, but he did not. A spokesman, Deputy Undarico Pinto of Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), said the president could not attend because he was busy with issues related to the nationalization of Bolivia's oil reserves. Another Bolivian legislator read a message from Morales to the gathered delegates. Asterio Roman read, "Despite more than 500 years of oppression and domination, they have not been able to eliminate us. We are here alive in unity with nature, and today we elevate ourselves from resistance to the offensive, to recover, together, our sovereignty." Morales' message went on to say that the indigenous people must be the ones to decide how they would live, how they would think, and how they would make their living. No more defense. No more waiting for the hemisphere's dominant cultures to do the right thing. While Morales' failure to show at the meeting was a disappointment, there was a solid connection between the issues that kept him home and those at the center of the summit's discussions (see NotiSur 2007-03-30). The wanton extraction of natural resources, neoliberalism, and the privatizations it fosters, along with the unbridled irruption of free-trade agreements (FTAs), are all phenomena that, said the final document of the meetings, "foment poverty among the poorest." For most of the countries represented at the summit, poorest means indigenous. Changing the state, changing the vocabulary The theme of moving from resistance to power was treated in detail on several of the scheduled panels, where relations between indigenous peoples and states, territory and natural resources, and indigenous governments were discussed. Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj, from Guatemala, said there was a gap between indigenous political understandings and the technical skills needed to realize political visions. She said that leaders need better training in economics and international law but do not need to find their solutions in these. "There are no recipes for success, we need to make up our own alternatives," she said. Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca told his audience, "Our minds are colonized, but not our hearts. It is time to listen to our hearts, because this is what builds resistance." Choquehuanca said that new models of a state are needed that encourage a culture of life. He compared this formulation to the dominant conception of development that purports to seek improvement in the quality of life but results in inequality. Others challenged the lexicon of dominion. Rodolfo Pocop of Waqib' Kej in Guatemala called for a new term to replace the word resources. He said resources denotes a mercantilist concept foreign to indigenous cosmology. He opted for Madre Tierra (Mother Earth). Isaac Avalos, secretary general of the Confederacion Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), also recommended a linguistic change to reflect a holistic concept. He wanted to use the word territory instead of land because the former is inclusive, taking into account land, water, air, oil, gas, and everything else. There

could be no question as to the ideological territory the summit staked out. As Ecuadoran delegate Blanca Chancoso phrased it, "Our world is not for sale. [US President George W.] Bush is not welcome here. Instead, we want people who support life. Yes to life. Imperialism and capitalism have left us with a historic debt, and they owe us for that debt." The reference to the US president recalled that Bush had visited Iximche just weeks before, and his presence at the historic capital of the Kaqchiquel kingdom required a ritual cleansing in preparation for this event (see NotiCen, 2007-03-15). Organizers called for broadening the indigenous movement in the hemisphere with the creation of regional coordinating bodies in Central and North America. These would integrate with South America's Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indigena de la Cuenca Amazonica (COICA) and the Coordinadora Andina de las Organizaciones Indigenas (CAOI). Delegates also agreed to create a coordinating body for nationalities and indigenous peoples of the Americas. All these would tie together to solidify the indigenous movement. The creation of these entities was not easily approved. Analyst Marc Becker said, "Regional indigenous organizations in Latin America have a history of being subject to external co-optation and internal divisions, which naturally makes some activists hesitant to create another such [supranational] organization." Becker noted that, while there was not much enthusiasm for the idea of a continental organization, in the end, the motion passed with an overwhelming vote. The summit concluded with a document, the Declaracion de Iximche. The document recounted, "We have lived with centuries of colonization, and today [we live with] the imposition of neoliberal policies, called globalization, that continue spoiling and sacking our territories, taking over all the spaces and ways of life of indigenous peoples, causing the degradation of Mother Nature, poverty, and migration, by the systematic intervention in the sovereignty of the communities by transnational companies in complicity with governments." The document then goes on: "In preparation to face and confront the challenges of the new times upon us, we now determine: "To commit to the process of alliance among our indigenous nations, and between our indigenous nations and the movements for social justice of the continent that would allow us to collectively confront the policies of neoliberalism and all forms of oppression. "To make the government states accountable for the ongoing dispossession of our territories and the extinction of the indigenous peoples of the continent, because of impunity for the transnational corporations and their genocidal practices as well as the lack of political will by the United Nations in not advancing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and failing to guarantee the full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "To ratify the ancestral and historical rights to our territories and the common resources of Mother Nature, reaffirming the inalienable character of these rights as being non-negotiable, unquantifiable, without impediment, and unrenounceable even at the cost of our lives. "To consolidate the processes now in effect to strengthen the re-founding of the government states and the construction of plurinational states and pluricultural societies via Constituent Assemblies with direct representation of the indigenous pueblos and nations. "To advance in the exercise of our right to autonomy and self-determination as indigenous peoples, despite the lack of legal recognition by the government states. "To ratify our rejection of the FTAs that make vulnerable the sovereignty of our pueblos and to remain vigilant against similar intentions to implement new commercial agreements. "To reaffirm our decision to defend nutritional sovereignty and struggle against transgenetic invasion, convoking all peoples of the world to join this struggle to guarantee our future. "To ratify the struggle for democratizing communication and implementing public policies that contemplate specific applications for indigenous peoples and promote interculturality. "To alert the indigenous peoples regarding the policies of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and similar organizations that penetrate our communities with actions of assistance and cooptation

whose aim is the fragmentation of autonomous and legitimate indigenous organizations. "For the well-being of the indigenous peoples, we now decide: "To demand that the international financial institutions and the government states cancel policies that promote concessions for the extractive industries (mining, oil, forestry, natural gas, and water) from our indigenous territories. "To condemn the policies of exclusion that President Bush and the US government demonstrated in the act of constructing the wall along the border with Mexico while at the same time attempting to expropriate the common resources of our Mother Nature of all the peoples of Abya Yala by implementing expansionist plans and acts of war. "To condemn the intolerant attitude of the government states that do not recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular those that have not ratified nor guaranteed the application of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO). "To condemn the impostor and terrorist democracies implemented by the neoliberal governments, which results in the militarization of our indigenous territories and the criminalization of our legitimate indigenous struggle and the movements for social justice throughout Abya Yala. "To enact these words and fulfill our dreams from resistance to power: "We constitute ourselves as the Continental Coordinator of Indigenous Pueblos and Nations of Abya Yala, creating a permanent vehicle of linkage and interchange, to converge our experiences and proposals so that together we can confront the neoliberal policies of globalization and struggle for the definitive liberation of our indigenous pueblos and nations, of Mother Earth, of our territories, of the waters, and the entirety of our natural patrimony so that we may all live well. "In this process we delineated the following actions: "To fortify the organizational processes and struggles of the indigenous peoples with the full participation of our women, children, and young people. "To convene a Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala and a Continental Summit of the Children, Adolescents, and Youth of the Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala. "To convoke a continental mobilization of indigenous peoples to save Mother Nature from the disasters caused by capitalism, manifested by global warming, to be carried out on Oct. 12, 2007. "To actively engage the diplomatic mission of the indigenous peoples to defend and to guarantee the rights of our indigenous pueblos and nations. "To endorse the candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize of our brother Evo Morales Ayma, president of Bolivia. "To demand the decriminalization of the coca leaf. "We have dreamt our past and we remember our future. "Iximche, Guatemala, March 30, 2007."

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