Peru: Report Blames Amazonian Indians For Violence

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Peru: Report Blames Amazonian Indians For Violence

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Peru

Published: Friday, January 29, 2010

The report on the violence in the northeastern city of Bagua on June 5, 2009, which left 10 Indians and 23 police dead (see NotiSur, 2009-07-24), has succeeded only in angering the Amazonian peoples, who feel insulted. The report was released Jan. 12 by the Grupo de Coordinacion para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Amazonicos, created by the Peruvian government on June 22, 2009, and commissioned with developing a sustainable-development plan (Plan Integral de Desarrollo Sostenible) for the indigenous communities, including on education, health, property titles, land ownership, and other necessary matters. The Asociacion Interetnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP) and the Confederacion de Nacionalidades Amazonicas del Peru (CONAP), which group together the majority of native communities of the Peruvian Amazon, rejected the report on Bagua because they consider it incomplete and biased in blaming Indians for the events and not looking for reconciliation between the government and the indigenous peoples.

Report questioned

In four months of work, the Grupo de Coordinacion, headed by Agriculture Minister Adolfo de Cordoba with representatives of the executive and of regional and municipal governments and Amazonian communities, had four tasks: to investigate the events in Bagua; to debate and propose solutions for the controversies generated by the legislative decrees disputed by the Amazonian communities; to identify prior-consultation mechanisms with indigenous peoples in applying International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169; and to draft a national proposal for Amazonian development. The report of the working group on Bagua attributed the violence to members of the opposition Partido Nacionalista, ronderos (civilian patrols), teachers, Army reservists, and campesino defense groups "who, joining the just Amazonian claims, contributed to exacerbating the violent mindset and combative spirit of the indigenous in defending their territory." It added that "the indigenous movement was overwhelmed by its own members and could not control the excesses that set in motion violence and death," and it pointed to "the irresponsibility of informants who magnified and falsified events at the Curva del Diablo [where some of the deaths occurred], leading to reactions of revenge." The report held the executive responsible solely for "haste and poor judgment" in promulgating the legislative decrees, which the indigenous consider damaging to their ancestral lands (see NotiSur, 2009-06-09), without respecting "the delicate Amazonian sensitivity regarding land and consultation issues." The report placed some responsibility "on some religious who sided with the indigenous movement confusing their evangelizing role," and said that "they have accepted the use or threat of force as a normal and legitimate method." Luis Bambaren, retired bishop of Chambote in the department of Ancash, told the daily La Republica that the priests present during the 2009 Amazonian protests never incited violence. "On the contrary," he said, "the religious personnel kept the situation from deteriorating further during the demonstrations." Days after the events, hundreds of indigenous sought refuge in Catholic Church facilities in Bagua looking for protection. "If I had been there, I would have taken in the native people, giving them food and security. It's one thing to incite violence, but supporting them is not inciting violence," said Bambaren. "The priests prevented violence."

The nongovernmental Instituto de Defensa Legal (IDL) said that the report of the first task force presents "a totally one-sided, politicized, and ideological view" of the events, which is why it was not signed by group coordinator Jesus Manaces, an Awajun Indian, or by missioner Sister Mari.
Carmen Gomez, a commission member. The Coordinadora Politico Social (CPS), an umbrella group of Lima social movements, said in a press release in mid-January that the report "conceals those really responsible for the events" and that, with this report, the government "in bad faith accuses the Amazonian peoples of direct responsibility for the deaths and for having allowed themselves to be manipulated by 'outside' elements, such as opposition political parties, a sector of the church, and the independent press." The CPS says the report fails to point out "that there was political responsibility in the order to use violent repressive force to remove the protesters at the Curva del Diablo, where the Amazonian communities were protesting the trampling of their constitutional rights." Other recommendations Indigenous organizations would agree with recommendations of task forces 2, 3 and 4, which include improving the forestry law and prohibiting a change in forest- and protected-areas use to avoid other economic activities. The recommendations also call for implementing national land and forestry regulations that include the uses and customs of native peoples and prioritize maintaining the forest cover and soil and water resources before authorizing high-impact extractive activities. They also propose prior consultations with the indigenous regarding any activity that is conducted on their lands and finishing the process of providing land titles to the native communities. And they support the indigenous organizations' request to abolish the eight legislative decrees and the Ley de Recursos Hidricos (water-resource law). In statements to the press, AIDESEP national secretary Saul Puerta said they rejected the report because the executive decided to approve the work of all the working groups without any discussion. "We went to the formal negotiations with every intention of arriving at a solution with the government," said Puerta. "Perhaps of negotiating with the government to come to a real reconciliation, but we have not arrived at any agreement. We have submitted our proposals and not one has been accepted by the executive." The indigenous petitions include continuing the investigations of the June 5 events, abrogating legislative decrees 1090 and 1094, whose rejection led to the Amazonian strike, compensating the families of the Indians who died in the Bagua confrontations, as well as allowing indigenous leader Alberto Pizango, who has been in exile in Nicaragua since last June, to return. In a statement to the press, Deputy Jose Maslucan, who represents the Amazon region, said that the failure to overturn the legislative decrees that are damaging to indigenous lands risks a resumption of the protests. Defensora del Pueblo Beatriz Merino says the principal cause of the June 5 deaths was the government's failed attempts at dialogue with the indigenous peoples, and the first thing that the government should do is approve the Ley para el Derecho a la Consulta (right to consultation law), which would serve to avoid such events in the future. "We cannot live in a country where our indigenous brothers and sisters are not considered our fellow human beings. We must return to an inclusive state, since the peoples' demands were for inclusion, for their voices to be heard, for real possibilities to be opened so that they can attain their own development. The state's responsibility is to safeguard and resolve this intercultural conflict," said Merino on Jan. 18 to the congressional committee that is independently investigating the Bagua events. Daysi Zapata, acting president of AIDESEP, said on Jan. 21 that leaders Saul Puerta and his brother Cervando had gone underground after hearing that the Amazonas provincial prosecutor had called for their detention. The brothers were in exile in Nicaragua along with Pizango and returned to Peru in October after the judiciary changed the detention order to an order to appear. "The attempt to detain native leaders is a government provocation after their failure to sustain a dialogue to solve the problems of the natives," Zapata told La Republica. "We do not want more dialogues where the natives are not listened to; we cannot continue dialoguing while we have a gun to our heads."
-- End --