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Panama: Indigenous Leaders Claim Ethnic Persecution

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Oct. 22, Indigenous Peoples Coordinator denounced the Panama City municipal government for issuing a US\$100 fine to indigenous leader David Binns for writing "anti-Christian graffiti." During an Oct. 12 (Columbus Day) demonstration, Binns wrote, "Down with 500 years of evangelicism" on the Panama City Cathedral. The 65-member Coordinator described the fine as evidence of "ethnic persecution." According to the Coordinator, Panamanian government officials have "always maintained indigenous populations in a state of absolute marginalization and inhumane economic conditions in clear violation of our rights." The indigenous leaders said they would rather join their colleague in jail than pay the fine. The Coordinator represents about 300,000 Panamanians, members of the Cuna, Guaymi and Embara tribes. The three indigenous groups account for 10% of the Panamanian population. (Basic data from AFP, 10/22/91)

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