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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sub-Commission on Prevention  
of Discrimination and  
Protection of Minorities  
Thirty-fifth session  
Agenda item 12

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIGENOUS  
POPULATIONS

Written statement submitted by the International Indian  
Treaty Council, a non-governmental organization in  
consultative status, Category II

The International Indian Treaty Council is a Non-Governmental Organization in Consultative II Status with the Economic and Social Council (since 1977), and is made up of 98 Indian Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

A situation of urgent concern to the International Indian Treaty Council at this moment is the repression being carried out against the Indigenous Population of Guatemala.

The total Indigenous population of Guatemala is approximately 4,171,000, as a minimum estimate, out of a total population in Guatemala of approximately 8 million. Indian people make up some 80 per cent of the rural population.

Indians are present in all provinces (Departments) of Guatemala, but the greatest numbers appear in 11 of the provinces: Alta Verapaz with over 600,000 Kakchi and Pocomchi peoples; San Marcos with more than 600,000 Mam people; the Department of El Quiché is populated with nearly 600,000 Quiché, Ixil, and Uspanteco peoples; Huehuetanango is inhabited by nearly 600,000 Mam, Kanjobal, Jacalteca, Chuj, and Aguacateca Indians; in the Department of Quezaltenango, there are 500,000 Mam and Quiché peoples; there are 250,000 Quiché Indians in each of the Departments of Totonicapan and Suchitepequez; in the Department of Guatemala, where the Capital is located, there are over 200,000 Cakchiquel Indians; in Solola, there is a combined number of over 200,000 Quiché, Cakchiquel, and Tzutujil peoples; and over 100,000 Quiché Indians live in the Department of Baja Verapaz.

Indian communities exist by the side of poor Ladino (Mestizo) communities, but are separated under the legacy of the Spanish colonial caste system which even required specific and distinct costumes to be worn in each Indian village. Each of the 22 Indian peoples speak distinct languages and few speak Spanish, the official language of Guatemala. Literacy in Spanish is practically unknown. Military governments have

ruled Guatemala since independence with a brief interlude of a civilian reform government, 1944-1954, which was crushed by a foreign-directed coup which overthrew the only democratically elected government in Guatemala's history, and installed a military dictatorship, which has been followed by successive military rulers. The reform period was the only time since the Spanish conquest during which some possibilities for land reform and vindication for the Indian peoples began to take shape.

Since the 1954 coup, two generations of resistance movements have surged and waned with some of the most sophisticated programmes of counter-insurgency and anti-personnel weaponry known being used to crush them.

Indian communities responded cautiously to the calls of these movements to participate, not for lack of realizing the need to do so, but because of the long justified mistrust for non-Indian programmes. However, numerous Indian leaders were involved in various peasant and trade union movements, and one organization, the CUC (Committee for Campesino Unity) was almost entirely Indian in composition, the majority Indian peasant women, and was founded in 1971.

In January, 1982, the four liberation organizations united under one umbrella Front, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The component organizations are the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), and the Guatemalan Labour Party (PGT). Though Indians are involved at every level in all the organizations and in the umbrella co-ordination, Indians make up the majority of the numbers and leadership of the EGP and ORPA. When the URNG Front formed, it called for the formation of a "National Patriotic Unity Front, which will be the expression of the broadest alliance of all our people." In response to this call, 26 prominent Guatemalans in exile, representing mass organizations, organized such a committee, the CGUP (Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity), which includes four officials of the 1944-54 Reform period, including Guillermo Toriello Garrido and Carlos Paz Tejada. CGUP includes labour and political leaders, priests, poets, professors, journalists, peasants, and the Indian leaders, Pablo Ceto, Gabriel Ixmata, Cupertino Sumuc, and Rigoberta Menchu Tum, who is representing the International Indian Treaty Council in the thirty-fifth session of the Sub-Commission.

This unity, unprecedented in Guatemalan history, is a response to the escalation of violence by the Guatemalan military, with death rates reaching 1000 civilian non-combatants per month in mid-1981.

The horrible forms of death reported to be carried out by the Guatemalan armed forces, sometimes dressed in civilian clothing or Indian costume, and sometimes pretending to be guerrilla units, have worsened considerably.

Thousands of Government troops are reported to have been mobilized in the regions with the largest Indian populations in the Departments of Verapaces, Huehuetenango, El Quiché, San Marcos, Solola, Chimaltenango and Sacatepequez. The apparent objective is to destroy the organizational basis of the population and to destroy the social system of the Indian population which is their basis for organization against repression. This is a period of the greatest threat to the cultures and survival of the Indigenous Populations of Guatemala since the Spanish conquest. Increasingly, villages are being bombed, including the use of napalm.

Death tolls compiled by the Guatemalan Commission on Human Rights in exile are taken only from the Guatemalan Press and only up to the declaration of the State of Siege on 1 July which halted such reporting. However, the streams of tens of thousands of Indian refugees flooding into the State of Chiapas in Mexico from Guatemala during July and August, 1982, indicate that there has been no change.

The Guatemalan refugees in Mexico are living under the harshest and least secure conditions of any refugees. Their plight is relatively unknown to the international community, and there is little media attention focused on the Guatemalan military's war of extermination. International relief has been limited since the refugees are scattered deep in the roadless jungle country of Chiapas.

Members of the Sub-Commission have received from the International Indian Treaty Council copies of several documents verifying the situation of Human Rights violations against the Indigenous Population of Guatemala, including a recent report from Amnesty International, and a document compiled by two North American attorneys containing testimony from Guatemalan refugees in Mexico.

The Indigenous representatives participating in the first meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which met 9-13 August 1982, drew up and endorsed a resolution which they requested the Working Group to transmit to the Sub-Commission for consideration, and this has been done. The International Indian Treaty Council, on behalf of all those Indigenous representatives who made this request, and on behalf of our entire constituency, urges the Sub-Commission to adopt this resolution, which contains the following elements:

Guided by the Principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Conventions on Human Rights, and the International Convention against Genocide;

Noting General Assembly decision 36/435 of 16 December 1981, Commission on Human Rights resolution 1982/31, and the work of the Special Rapporteur appointed by the Commission to make a thorough study of the human rights situation in Guatemala;

Bearing in mind changes in the Government of Guatemala which occurred in March, 1982, and the declaration by that Government of a State of Siege on 1 July, 1982;

Disturbed by continuing reports of gross violations of human rights in Guatemala and in particular reports of mass killings of Indigenous Peoples and destruction of their villages and crops;

Convinced that urgent action is necessary in order to establish the facts of the current human rights situation in Guatemala and to protect the human rights of all peoples therein;

The Sub-Commission:

Expresses its deep concern at reports of military acts carried out by members of the Guatemalan security forces against Indigenous Indian Peoples;

Expresses its concern of the reported massacres of thousands of Indians by Guatemalan Military forces since March, 1982, and the expulsion of more than 1 million Indians from their indigenous communities, and hundreds of thousands from the country itself;

Requests the Secretary-General to forward all information received by the Sub-Commission relating to the situation of human rights in Guatemala to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission;

Further requests the Secretary-General to transmit relevant information received by the Sub-Commission to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross;

Invites the attention of the Government of Guatemala to these issues as raised in discussions during ~~the~~ thirty-fifth session of the Sub-Commission and its Working Group on Indigenous Populations;

Further invites the attention of all Governments concerned to the use being made of military arms and materials that may be transmitted to the Government of Guatemala;

Further invites all Governments and International Organs to consider that the peoples of Guatemala are organized and struggling for their human rights at all levels in their search for justice.