

CHILE

Benjamin Witte in Santiago

Hungry for justice

Police killing and hunger strike heat up country's Mapuche conflict.

In what appeared to be a turning point in the centuries-old conflict between the Chilean state and the Mapuche indigenous community last September, Chile joined 142 other nations in ratifying the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The declaration grants indigenous peoples the right to self-determination and self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs.

But four months after ratifying the declaration, aggression against the Mapuche community has worsened with the recent police killing of a Mapuche activist, bringing this social and political struggle once again to the national forefront.

In the early morning of Jan. 3, approximately 30 members of a southern Region IX Mapuche activist group attempted to occupy a farm located some 20 miles southwest of Temuco, the regional capital. There they were met by armed *carabineros* (uniformed police), who fired on the activists, killing 22-year-old university student Matías Valentín Catrileo Quezada. Police later confirmed he was shot in the back.

“Criminalized” movement

The incident sparked protests throughout southern Chile — home to a large percentage of the country's estimated 800,000 Mapuche — as well as in Santiago, where on Jan. 4 police arrested dozens of protesters and sprayed demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowd in the city center. Several days later *carabineros* arrested Catrileo's mother and sister during a demonstration in Temuco.

“This is sad situation, but one that's not really surprising given how the Mapuche social movement has been criminalized in recent years,” says José Aylwin, who co-heads an organization called the Observatory for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. “One manifestation of that has been the legal persecution of Mapuche leaders involved in protests to recover their lands. The result has been the jailing of those leaders under an anti-terrorism law that has been questioned by human rights organizations.”

During the Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) government, courts began applying an anti-terrorism law to cases involving Mapuche attacks on private property (*LP*, Nov. 17, 2004 and Sept. 20, 2006). The law, which dates back to 1984, was originally aimed at controlling armed political groups involved in kidnappings, attacks on police stations and assassinations. According to

the organization Human Rights Watch (HRW), the anti-terrorism law is the “harshes” of all Chilean statutes.

“It doubles the normal sentences for some offenses, makes pre-trial release more difficult, enables the prosecution to withhold evidence from the defense for up to six months, and allows defendants to be convicted on testimony given by anonymous witnesses. These witnesses appear in court behind screens so that the defendants and the public cannot see them,” notes a 2004 HRW report.

Property exempt

Following the election of President Michelle Bachelet in 2006 (*LP*, Jan. 25, 2006) the government shifted its posture, declaring it would only apply the anti-terror law to cases involving violence toward people — not property. Still, resentment continues



Mapuches protest police killing in the capital.

CHILE	1	to simmer over the dozen or so prisoners who are currently serving out prison sentences dictated under the Augusto Pinochet-era law.
Hungry for justice		
COLOMBIA	2	“The application of the anti-terrorism law in those previous cases was inappropriate and unjust, because they involved acts of resistance...The application of the anti-terrorism law was incorrect. It allows for certain Mapuche actions to be interpreted as domestic terrorism, and that's a serious thing, because that's not the nature of the resistance they've carried out,” says Sergio Laurenti, executive director of Amnesty International Chile.
“Our case is all about money”		
CARIBBEAN	3	One of those “domestic terrorists” is Patricia Troncoso Robles, also known as “La Chepa,” who was arrested in 2002 and — more than a year later — sentenced to 10 years and a day for her involvement in burning nearly 250 acres of pine plantations belonging to the powerful Matte conglomerate.
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SOUTH AMERICA

UNASUR advances. Foreign ministers and representatives from 12 South American countries that comprise the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) approved the body's draft charter on Jan. 27 in Cartagena, Colombia.

Initially called the South American Community of Nations, UNASUR was born on Dec. 8, 2004 during the Third South American Summit set in Cuzco, Peru (*LP*, Dec. 15, 2004), and in April 2007, the name UNASUR was adopted (*LP*, May 2, 2007).

At its next meeting on March 13 and 14 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, UNASUR's 2008-2009 action plan will be presented that will set guidelines for joint development and conflict resolution methods.

Foreign ministers from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela agreed to sign the final text by June.

"The consolidation of UNASUR requires going through a gradual convergence of the working areas of the CAN [Andean Community] and Mercosur [Southern Common Market]," said Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araújo, at the meeting's inauguration. "It is imperative that we expand each one's action and reach, advancing step by step and building from what is already there." —*LP*.

tor Llaitul — launched a hunger strike to draw attention to their plight. Arguing that the anti-terrorism law should never have been applied in their cases, the strikers demanded the release of all Mapuche political prisoners.

Huenchunao, Millalen and Marlieo ended their fast on Dec. 14. A few days later the two remaining strikers, who by that time had each lost more than 50 lbs., were transferred to a nearby hospital. Llaitul broke his fast in early January, after 81 days. But Troncoso refused to give up, insisting she would continue until her death, if need be.

As the strike stretched to 90, then 100 days, public concern over La Chepa's fate only raised the stakes in a dangerous face-off already exacerbated by Matías Valentín Catrileo's recent death. Demonstrations continued throughout the country and on Jan. 24, former presidential candidate Tomas Hirsch of the Humanist Party led a peaceful takeover of the International Workers Organization headquarters in Santiago. That same week doctors began force feeding Troncoso intravenously.

Four days later, with the Catholic Church acting as mediator, Troncoso finally agreed to end her 110-day hunger strike after government officials agreed to grant her and two of her fellow prisoners (Millalen and Marileo) weekend leaves and an opportunity to com-

plete their prison sentences in a special work and education center.

"It's just horrible. We repudiate the fact that our brothers, these political prisoners, must submit their bodies to this type of pressure in order to get the state to acknowledge our people's demands," says Raul Cariñe of the Mapuche group Meli Wixan Pau ("Of the Four Points of the Earth). "We, as Mapuches, are not going to just calm down. We've got a lot of rage to let out. We're very angry. The state, cowardly and at point blank, killed our brother, who was unarmed."

President Bachelet responded to the crisis by appointing an inter-ministerial committee headed by newly appointed Interior Minister Edmundo Pérez Yoma. The special committee, which also includes Bachelet's planning minister and secretary general, promises to study the situation and come up with a list of recommendations.

"It's an important advance. This multi-ministerial team is a good initiative. But there are a number of factors at play here. For starters there's the issue of the international instruments. Chile has to move forward and ratify them without any more delay. There's no way to justify, for example, the fact that after 18 years [Congress] still hasn't ratified ILO Convention 169," says Amnesty International's Laurenti. □

COLOMBIA

Jenny Manrique in Bogota

"Our case is all about money"

Ransom hostages excluded from hostage exchanges.

On Dec. 27, as the world awaited the freedom of political hostages Clara Rojas and Consuelo González de Perdomo — who were freed on Jan. 10 after being held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for six years — a group of soldiers along with lawyer Gustavo Muñoz, director of the New Hope for Kidnapped Persons Foundation, entered into the southern jungle of the Cauqueta department in order to rescue the bodies of six kidnapped persons who died at the hands of the FARC.

After a year of searching for the remains of the six Colombians, they were finally found in three mass graves with signs that they were punched and beaten to death with stick blows. They were kidnapped for ransom, so they were not included in any hostage exchange proposal.

According to Muñoz, 35 of the people kidnapped for ransom in 2006 were killed by the FARC while in captivity.

"At this time, those kidnapped for ransom

have a death sentence," confirmed Muñoz. "The FARC's *modus operandi* is to force hostages to record proofs of life for the FARC to use in the future, in order to keep demanding ransom even when they've already killed the hostage. When they run out of recordings, they charge up to [US\$10,000] to return the body."

More than 3,000 kidnapped

Since the year 2000, the New Hope Foundation has tried to help the plight of thousands of families who can only free their loved ones by paying millions of pesos to subversive groups. There are currently 750 people being held hostage by the FARC and 550 more in the hands of the National Liberation Army (ELN). Paramilitary groups demanded ransom from some 400 families over the past few years only for these families to later find out — through paramilitary commander Salvatore Mancuso's confession after the groups' demobilization at the end of 2004 (*LP*, Dec. 1, 2004) — that all the hostages were killed while in captivity.

The figures turned in by Muñoz mention 3,820 citizens who are still in the jungle and in the majority of these cases, the authors of the kidnaps are undetermined. The government institution National Fund for the Defense of Personal Freedom reports 3,134 kidnapped persons.

"For more than three years we have been asking for these cases to be included in humanitarian agreements. In 2005 we, along with former president [Julio César] Turbay

LATIN AMERICA/ CARIBBEAN

ALBA Summit. The sixth presidential summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), set in Caracas, Venezuela, on Jan. 26, concluded with the creation of the ALBA Bank, which will provide financing for social and economic development programs in its five member countries: Bolivia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The bank will be based in Caracas, and will begin operating with more than US\$1 billion. The institution will be led by a representative from a member country on a rotating basis.

Contributions from the members will be decided according to their capabilities, and it is hoped that the Bank will be ready to function in two months with the definition of human resources, legal, financial and technology platforms.

The presidents signed additional agreements that included the creation of a Cultural Fund — allowing for the development of projects like cultural and arts festivals, a traveling theater brigade, book workshops and an alternative editorial network, among others — as well as the formation of a “grand national” energy company that will work on oil exploration, exploitation and refinement. — PÚLSAR/LP.

[1978-82], handed in a proposal to [President Álvaro] Uribe's government, which stated that for each guerilla warrior released from prison, one political hostage and 100 ransom hostages would be freed. We never received a reply and after the death of Turbay [September 2005], everything froze,” he explained.

However, Muñoz, who in 2003 was named member of the National Peace Counsel, managed to get a law passed in 2005, which protects kidnap victims as well as their families. After being held hostage for six months by the Arturo Ruiz block of the FARC and earning his freedom with a multi-million peso ransom that left him in ruin, Muñoz realized that there are vast legal shortcomings in the protection of these people.

The new law requires employers to continue paying the kidnapped person's salary to their family members through national banks and requires financial entities to grant loans of up to \$100,000 so that in the absence of their loved ones, the families can generate income through productive projects.

The legislation also considers the freezing of payment of public services, mortgage debts, taxes and other financial obligations until the kidnapped person appears. In the case that the hostage is killed, the debt is terminated. The New Hope Foundation estimates 4,000 families have benefited from this law.

Family members talk

“The government is indifferent when someone receives pressure — both from the guerilla front by telephone and the creditors who forget that the debtor is no longer here, that there is no income, no wages and no worker. If it weren't for a court protection I obtained, my belongings would have been seized by

the National Tax and Custom Directorate,” said Mariela, who asked to withhold her real name and whose husband was kidnapped for five years, during which she paid high sums of money to receive proofs of life that kept her hope alive.

“My illusion was centered on calls, that always presented new demands. The families have no other option but to go into debt because when a family member has been kidnapped, you exhaust human resources, looking around everywhere, doing anything possible so that the person is freed,” she told.

This search included travelling to remote areas to turn in certain amounts of money in specified bill denominations, with the unfulfilled promise of freeing her husband.

“The possibility of them including the ransom hostages in a human exchange is still a distant dream for us,” she said. “FARC and the government demand things without keeping us in mind. We are abandoned because even to negotiate, we need mediators who charge. Our case is all about money.”

Over two years ago, Arturo, owner of a shoe factory who also asked that his last name not be used, said he paid \$250,000 for his son's freedom, having received seven proofs of life over the course of the same number of months. Later, when taken by a former guerilla to the mass grave where his son's body was located, he found out that he had only been kept alive for eight days.

“What the FARC does is inhuman, but so is what the government does. Our families were not nor will be included in negotiations — as if some victims were more valuable than others. In the jungle, there are no preferences, deals, or distinction of any kind, whether the person is a military officer's son, black or white,” said Arturo. □

CARIBBEAN

Lucila Horta in Havana

Petrocaribe's time to shine

New energy pact strengthens Venezuelan initiative.

With Honduras' signing on to Venezuela's Petrocaribe initiative to provide Caribbean nations with low-cost fuel as oil prices now hold steady at around US\$90, the total number of nations who have inked deals with Venezuela amounts to 17.

Venezuelan officials say the alliance for energy cooperation is a method that cuts unequal access to fuels, through an exchange system that is “favorable, equal and just between the countries in the region.”

Petrocaribe began on June 29, 2005 in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, with the participa-

tion of 14 countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Granada, Guyana, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname (*LP*, Oct. 5, 2005), as well as the host country. Haiti and Nicaragua signed on in August 2007. In the latest meeting, Dec. 21-22 in Cienfuegos, Cuba, in which Honduras was added as a member, Barbados, Guatemala and Trinidad and Tobago attended as observers, as well as regional organizations such as the Caribbean Community and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

In the summit it was announced that a part of the oil bill can be exchanged for local goods and services from participating nations, a system already in place between Argentina, Cuba, Uruguay and Venezuela.

LATIN AMERICA

A frozen Noah's Ark. At the end of January, research centers in 10 countries around the world, including Colombia, Mexico and Peru, sent thousands of seeds to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway — close to the Arctic Circle — which is part of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

The CGIAR, founded in 1971, comprises 15 agricultural research centers globally, including the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT for its initials in Spanish) in Colombia, the International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement (CIMMYT) in Mexico, and the International Potato Center (CIP) in Peru.

The project's objective is to guarantee human food production over the next centuries, in case of any threat by a regional or global catastrophe.

CIAT sent 31,000 varieties of bean, yucca and tropical forage, CIMMYT sent 48,000 samples of wheat and 7,000 of maize and CIP sent 12,000 species of potato and sweet potato (*LP*, Jan. 23, 2008). These seeds are duplicates of those already in the centers' germplasm banks. —*LP*

"We are proposing actions to make payment compensation mechanisms concrete," Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said at the summit, and added that the first countries in benefiting from these mechanisms are those which must begin to pay in 2008 and own a total of \$1 billion, including the Dominican Republic, which receives some 35,000 barrels of oil a day.

Alternative energy

Petrocaribe also used the summit to discuss another of its initiatives: alternative energy, including wind, solar and geothermal energy. There have been some advances including those in 13 of the Petrocaribe countries such as the replacement of incandescent light bulbs for more energy-saving ones, or the production of 1,000 new megawatts using diesel and fuel oil. Participants in the summit agreed to create a common fund to implement alternative energy projects. They also agreed to use the Cienfuegos refinery in Cuba to process oil for countries throughout the region.

The refinery had closed in 1990 due to an abrupt lack of funding after the Soviet Union collapsed. Until eighteen months ago, the plant had received only basic maintenance to keep it from deteriorating. But in 2006, a joint Cuban-Venezuelan-run company made an \$83 million investment to modernize the plant, upgrades that will allow it to process 65,000 barrels of oil a day in a first stage and later 150,000 barrels a day.

The adjacent port was also overhauled to accommodate up to 70,000-metric-ton ships.

Recipient countries must speed up their work to increase fuel storage. Venezuela produces 3 million barrels a day and has allotted 102,000 of them to the region. But because of a lack of infrastructure in these countries, only 53,000 are distributed now.

Other Petrocaribe projects are already in motion, including the recently-opened liquid gas plant in St. Vincent — with a production of 20,000 gas cylinders a day — allowing it to become an exporter, or the construction of "petrocasas," homes built with oil derivatives.

"Petrocasas"

The first 100 of these homes were opened in Cienfuegos, and another 150 were built in Peru where a deadly earthquake struck last August (*LP*, Sept. 5, 2007) and more are planned for this year in the Dominican Republic.

Also, a new refinery is in the works for Leon, Nicaragua, the first of about 10 that will be upgraded or constructed in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Chavez's Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA, an answer to the US-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), which derailed in 2005, also implemented the ALBA-Caribbean Fund to manage financing for these projects. It was first activated by Venezuela with \$50 million, which was raised to more than \$100 million and are being used in projects in Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Granada, Haiti, Nicaragua, St. Kitts Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The money finances social and development programs in the Caribbean in an effort to reduce poverty with job creation and increase environmentally-friendly energy security. Petrocaribe establishes a long-term financing of 30 percent when the barrel has an international market value of \$40, 40 percent at \$50 and 50 percent if the price reaches \$100. The grace period for repayment is up to two years. Deferred payments could be extended up to 17 years, but if the prices exceed \$40 a barrel the payment period increases to 25 years and the interest rate drops to 1 percent. □

PERU

Kelly Phenicie in Lima

Fujimori on trial

Legal proceedings against former president polarizes Peruvians as evidence is admitted to the court.

The human rights trial of former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) is speeding along in just its second month, a milestone for rights activists who have long-sought to bring the ex-president to justice for crimes stemming from his decade-long administration. Fujimori is facing up to 30 years in prison if he is found guilty of having authorized to two death squad massacres and two kidnappings.

So far, more than 30 witnesses have testified in the first eight weeks of the trial that

started on Dec. 10, 2007, without any major obstacles. But some activists are claiming that allies of Fujimori are overstepping their bounds with intimidation against victims of the ex-leader's government.

In early January, local newspapers reported that lawyer Gloria Cano as well as state prosecutor Avelino Guillén had received death threats for their role in the trial. Both lawyers are acting as prosecutors — Guillén for the state and Cano for the relatives of those murdered at Barrios Altos and La Cantuta — within the same trial.

Norma Espinoza, a witness in the La Cantuta case, said that she had received telephone threats before she gave her testimony and Pedro Supo Sánchez, a former member of the Colina military death squad, which committed the massacres, said in his testimony on Jan. 28, that it was the first time he felt safe talking openly about what he knows. Supo claimed that he has had various attacks on his family since 2000 and only now, with them outside of Lima, feels he can talk.

“I hope that ...
we all learn
from this
painful
experience.”

— Gisela Ortiz

Fujimori-allied politicians as well as Fujimori's lawyer César Nakazaki have denied links to all the threats.



Alberto Fujimori addresses the court.

“Politicizing” the trial

A string of recent events have caused some Peruvians to believe that Fujimori supporters are attempting to “politicize” the trial by imposing political consequences on the justice system.

Alberto Fujimori's daughter, Keiko, recently announced plans to form a new pro-Fujimori party, Fuerza 2011, to prepare for the country's next presidential elections in that year. She also told the press that she did not rule out a presidential nomination.

During his recent appearance on local television program Cuarto Poder, Fujimori's son, Kenji, claimed that if the Fujimoristas collect the 1 million signatures necessary to legally register their new party, it would mean a “passport to freedom” for his father. Santiago Fujimori, the former president's brother, explained his nephew's comment to a local radio station by claiming that a guilty verdict for his the ex-leader would mean “civil war.”

Editor-in-chief of daily *Peru21*, Augusto Álvarez Rodrich, said in a Jan. 28 column that there are two reasons for the new party: to “show the country that there is political backing for past administration,” which would show the Supreme Court the country's support for the defendant; and, as signaled by Kenji, “to win the presidency in 2011 and later, for his sister Keiko to pardon their father.”

Indeed Fujimori's chances of being found innocent in the human right trial are looking grim. Witness' testimonies — especially those of former Colina members — have not been positive for the ex-president, who has already been sentenced to six years for abusing power when he ordered the illegal search of the apartment of Trinidad Becerra, wife of his former top adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos.

At the Jan. 25 hearing, one of the former Colina members, testified that military officers had never been taught to respect human rights and even apologized to the Peruvian people. Rodrich asserts that “not even the witnesses for the defense are helping him.”

Julio Chuqui Aquirre, also a member of Colina, recently testified that he knows Fujimori was aware of the Barrios Altos massacre because the leader of Colina said beforehand, “I've already gotten the green light from the *Chino*,” referring to Fujimori by his nickname.

Courtroom tensions

Uneasiness has also been stewing inside the courtroom itself between Fujimori's supporters and the relatives of the Barrios Altos and La Cantuta murder victims.

Gisela Ortiz, sister of one of the students killed at La Cantuta and spokesperson for the victims' families, said in an e-mail interview that “the climate in the courtroom has been difficult because the Fujimoristas make offensive comments about our family members — like calling them terrorists — or about us in a loud voice, as if they want us to hear them.”

Since the courtroom is divided by a wall with glass windows, separating the trial participants from the attendants, neither the judges, lawyers nor defendant are able to hear anything from the observation room.

During one of the witness' testimonies, Ortiz said that “every time the students and professor [who were killed at La Cantuta] were mentioned, former Congresswoman Carmen Lozada de Gamboa said ‘the terrorists,’ ‘because they were terrorists,’ or ‘they were terrorists, they had to be killed.’”

Pro-Fujimori Congressman Carlos Raffo, who has attended the hearings, denies the allegations. He claims that human rights organizations are trying to tarnish the Fujimoristas' reputation by making them look “aggressive.” Furthermore, he says the accusations have not been proven and that the police and security inside the courtroom have denied the families' claims.

“It might sound Utopian, but I hope that people change their attitude and that we all learn from this painful experience,” says Ortiz. □

GUATEMALA

Judges incriminated.

The Never Again Genocide Coordinating Office, which groups Guatemalan civil war victims (1960-96), filed a suit Jan. 17 against five Constitutional Court (CC) judges who annulled the trial of seven defendants accused of crimes against humanity.

On Dec. 12, 2007, the CC rejected Spain's request for the extradition of the defendants, including former dictator and current representative Efraín Ríos Montt (1982-83), arguing that the European country did not have competence to investigate these crimes.

“The resolution is biased, it violates international law and completely obstructs the possibility of clarifying the genocide,” said indigenous leader Rigoberta Menchú, Nobel Peace Prize winner (*LP*, Apr. 6, 2005).

All seven have been accused of assault and arson against the Spanish Embassy in 1980, where a group of *campesinos*, including Menchú's father, had sought refuge. 37 people died in the attack. —*IPS/LP*.

BOLIVIA

Martin Garat in Santa Cruz de la Sierra

Promoting good citizenship

Street soccer program encourages dialogue and non-violence.

"Pass it to Rosita!" shouts one of the players. But the ball bounces wrong and goes the other way, sparking an eruption of laughter on the small soccer field of the San Isidro neighborhood.

The area is one of the poorest in the eastern city Santa Cruz de la Sierra — Bolivia's most populated city and capital of the wealthy Santa Cruz department. Almost all the streets are made of dirt, which turns to mud during the rainy season.

Though they play on a field, the youths play "street soccer," a concept that is earning more importance in Latin America and promotes dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution.

"Before each game, the players decide on the rules: penalty shots, the boundaries of the playing field, etc. If a conflict arises during the game, the teams have to resolve it with the help of a mediator. There are no referees, forcing them to negotiate and find ways to compromise. After each game we gather with the kids in order to talk about their performance: if they followed the rules, if they played fair and if they were supportive of their teammates," explained Juan Pablo Sejas, coordinator of the San Isidro Cultural Center, or CCSI.

Another important principle is equal treatment of girls and boys. One of the five players on each team must be a girl.

"If someone doesn't want to pass me the ball because I'm a girl, we talk after the game and the person who didn't act as a team has to reflect," explains Gabriela, 13, who waits her turn to go on the field.

Innovative methodology

CCSI was founded in 2005 when a group of friends wanted to do something for their neighborhood, located between two other highly populated, low-income neighborhoods considered "dangerous."

They began organizing competitions for games that are popular in the region, like "fat stick" and slingshot shooting. Later, one of the CCSI members visited Argentina, where there are dozens of street soccer clubs — even leagues — and returned with the idea of incorporating this sport into their activities. CCSI funded a program in order

to spread the values of "street soccer" in San Isidro.

"We all love soccer in Bolivia. The passion it awakes helps us to reach kids," Sejas explained.

The soccer program currently has 250 participants between 9 and 18 years old. The majority come from humble families in the area. All of them study and many also work as street vendors. They dream of being professional soccer players and their idols are the European leagues' soccer stars.

However, for CCSI the objective is different. "When the kids go to the field, they want to win. But we teach them not to cry over defeats nor win by playing dirty. Here, we don't develop soccer players, but responsible citizens," said Sejas.

According to the coordinator, San Isidro is managing to erase its reputation as a red zone.

Thanks to a thriving economy, Santa Cruz attracts immigrants from other departments, overall from the Altiplano in the west of Bolivia. There is a lot of tension between the "kollas" from the highlands and the "cambas" from lower areas, due to regional conflicts in the country (*LP*, Dec. 12, 2007).

A large percentage of children from San Isidro have immigrant parents and, at first, there were problems, says player Pablo Torres.

"Conflicts arose between kids from central Bolivia and kids from here. But with our street soccer methodology, we reflected together and the situation changed. In the soccer program, there is no racism. Here, we're all equals."

Sejas adds that their goal is for "the children not to see themselves first as *cambas* or *kollas*, but as Bolivians."

"It is difficult to measure the impact that our activities have. But our method works. There are always more youths playing sports and who participate in the cultural activities of our folkloric dance. And we've noticed that crime and violence have gone down in the area."

Beyond the neighborhood

CCSI has represented Bolivia in various international street soccer competitions. With a lot of effort, they managed to collect the resources necessary to send their team to the Buenos Aires South American Championship in 2005. Later, the center received help from the national government to represent Bolivia in the first Street Soccer World Cup, held in Germany. The San Isidro team won third place.

Two months ago, the team won the South American Championship held in Asuncion, Paraguay. CCSI proudly displays the trophies earned by its youths.



Speaking through a passion for soccer.

"We've noticed that crime and violence have gone down in the area."

— Juan Pablo Sejas

Due to its increasing fame, CCSI now has sponsors who help with shirts, infrastructure and even the soccer field.

"Where we currently play, there used to be a well, a *kurichi*. With the help of private companies, we were able to build fields," Sejas said.

Now, CCSI proposes encouraging similar initiatives in other regions of Bolivia. There many urban youths who need to

learn about good citizenship and the opportunity to play sports.

CCSI is also supporting street soccer projects in the Cochabamba and Tarija departments, and is trying to get in touch with interested organizations in El Alto, the poorest city in Bolivia (*LP*, July 25, 2007).

"Our goal is to create a national league and various regional leagues," said Sejas. □

ARGENTINA

Andrés Gaudin in Buenos Aires

Saving fading communities

Non-profit seeks to revive communities on the verge of disappearing.

Last year, more than 500 retirees from different professions offered to help a non-governmental organization that seeks to rescue some 600 rural populations in danger of extinction due to isolation and population decreases.

In 2006, the organization Social Recuperation of Disappearing National Small Towns, or RESPONDE called on civil society to develop

educational programs that could avoid the death of these communities by promoting unconventional tourism, job training, craft-making, community orchards and cultural formation.

"An analysis of the 1991 and 2001 censuses allows us to see that there are 602 small towns in Argentina that have stagnated or decreased in population growth and are now headed toward disappearance since its communities no longer have incentive to stay there," said Marcela Benítez, geographer and sociologist who founded RESPONDE.

The first RESPONDE calling saw a turn-out of almost 300 retirees between 65 and 75 years who offered to give courses on brickwork, painting, carpentry, electrical and sewage systems, in addition to other less urgent but equally necessary courses on hairdressing, cosmetology,

confectionary and tailoring.

The census analysis that Benítez alludes to found that 602 towns — a little less than half of the number of rural area communities — hovered around 2,000 inhabitants and that

in the decade between the two censuses, 124 communities had not even one additional inhabitant, 98 reduced in number of inhabitants and 90 that were mentioned in 1991 did not appear in the 2001 census.

In all, those small towns had 268,920 inhabitants in 2001, and were located in different areas in the country: 60 percent in the central region's rich agriculture and livestock zone, 24 percent in the northwest, 4 percent in the northeast, 6 percent in the south and 6 percent in the western fruit and vegetable producing areas.

Retirees to the rescue

"Thanks to the wisdom of my instructor, I've become a good carpenter, which we did not have in the community and needed. What the people at RESPONDE are doing is very good, I hope it manages to save us and remove us from this abandonment that we were left in when trains disappeared," says David Grosso, 40-year-old father in San Francisco de Bellocq, community located 550 kilometers (340 miles) south of Buenos Aires.

In Bellocq, there were little more than 4,000 inhabitants according to the 1991 census, but when railroads were privatized and trains no longer passed, the agriculture cooperative — which was the axis of the community's economy — was closed. Due to the lack of opportunities, young inhabitants began to emigrate, to the point that "we no longer have any young people. In 2001, there were 2,000 of us and now they say there are 576," says Grosso.

The closing of the railway stations and massive soy production on plantations comes up in all the explanations — from community members as well as researchers — as the two biggest causes of the gradual death of rural peoples, and the numbers seem to support this.

When the state nationalized the British railways in 1947, the country had 43,000 kilometers (26,700 miles) of railway which grew to 47,000 kilometers (29,000 miles) in the following two years. During the 1990s, with the privatization program of President Carlos Menem (1989-99), the network was reduced to 34,000 kilometers (21,000 miles), of which only little more than 28,000 kilometers (just over 17,000 miles) are active.

The figures for soy production are equally shocking: in 1994 the grain occupied little more than 8 million hectares (20 million acres) (*LP*, June 2, 2004), in 2007 it grew to 16 million hectares (40 million acres) and the official estimate for 2008 is 17.4 million hectares (43 million acres). But soy does not take up more than one worker per 10 hectares (25



Faustino Parera Station, before (top) and after it was refurbished. It now serves as a tourist office, internet center and railroad museum.

RESPONDE (2)

GUYANA

Mass killing. Eleven people, including five children, were murdered on Jan. 26 in Lusignan, 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) east of capital Georgetown, marking the most tragic killing in the last 30 years.

Armed men invaded five homes and opened fire on occupants. Hours before they had attacked the police headquarters in Georgetown, where two officers were injured.

Authorities suspect this is a group who works under Rondell Rawlins, suspected for the murder of Agriculture Minister Satyadeo Sawk in 2006. Rawlins had threatened to attack the police to which he accuses of kidnapping his 18-year-old girlfriend, who is pregnant.

Some believe that the attack had racial motives. The majority of Lusignan inhabitants are of Indo-Asian origin, while Rawlins is Afro-descendant.

Lusignan residents and other neighboring localities held violent protests and blocked the highway that unites the eastern and western parts of the country.

President Bharrat Jagdeo called on Guyanese to stay calm and promised to capture the "sick, demented cowards" who perpetrated the massacre. —LP.

acres) cultivated — it expels people — and its extension is due to the occupation of native forest zones that were cut down in order to use the land for agriculture.

Forests disappear

A study done by the National Environmental Secretary revealed that between 1998 and 2002, in the northern province of Santiago del Estero alone, 306,000 hectares (756,000 acres) of original forest were destroyed, while soy cultivation rose 379,000 hectares (936,000 acres). The institution also reports that some 250,000 hectares (620,000 acres) of forest disappear every year.

"In our history, the train has been a generator for communities, which is why, when they start to close the stations and the state doesn't plan for alternative measures, the communities end up isolated and start emigrating, without any preparation to confront

EL SALVADOR

Inter Press Service

Benefits of free trade deal still remote

Two-year old trade agreement with United States fails to convince.

The Salvadoran government had proclaimed that from the moment of its entry into force, the free trade agreement with the United States would boost the local economy, creating thousands of jobs, so that even street vendors would be exporting their typical snacks. But nearly two years later, the economic paradise has yet to arrive.

The Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) with the United States — which went into force in El Salvador on March 1, 2006, after its ratification by Congress three months prior (*LP*, Nov. 1, 2006) — was supposed to enable El Salvador to increase its exports to the US market and attract foreign investment. However, consulted economists said that is "unrealistic" and that ordinary Salvadorans are still waiting for the promised benefits.

René Salazar, head of the Administration of Trade Treaties, said DR-CAFTA — which also includes Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic — was El Salvador's "most important trade agreement" because it has promoted increased trade with the United States.

The exportation of non-traditional Salvadoran products to the United States, such as seafood, agribusiness goods, beverages and

life in cities that aren't prepared to absorb this new demand. They ended up in shantytowns, excluded from the economic process," said Benítez.

"The governments' blindness is alarming, it's creating dangerous pockets of marginalization in the country's principal cities," Benítez adds, "when it would have been cheaper to invest in local development instead of trying to calm the chaos caused by the arrival of thousands to the cities in search of work, housing and health, who only find an infuriating rejection."

Father José Genaró, priest of Ñorquinco, a Mapuche community situated 1,840 kilometers (1,140 miles) south of Buenos Aires, feels for his people and says that "the government's savage capitalist policies, privatizing the railways and allowing the stations to be closed, are to blame for everything, and in our case, they left us with no opportunities." □

ethnic foods, grew by 68 percent in 2006, according to Salazar. Complete figures for 2007 are not yet available, but the trend has remained steady, he said.

El Salvador's total exports, including traditional products like coffee, sugar and shrimp, amounted to US\$3.66 billion between January and November 2007, 4.3 percent more than in 2006. The United States continues to be the main destination: in 2006, exports to the United States alone totaled \$2.01 billion.

No jobs in sight

Official statistics estimate that 27,000 jobs were created in 2007, although not all of these were necessarily due to the regional trade treaty with the United States.

Herminio Alas, 50, a former employee of the privatized National Telecommunications Administration (ANTEL), which is now in the hands of the Telecom consortium, says he is not aware of any benefits, as "the economy is not improving and there are few jobs to be had."

A telephone line technician, he has been unemployed for three months and has not managed to find a stable job since he was laid off by ANTEL 10 years ago.

El Salvador has also signed bilateral trade treaties with Chile, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Panama, and will shortly do so with Taiwan, according to Salazar.

In spite of the government's optimism, economist Carlos Acevedo of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) said that there is no reliable data on how many jobs DR-CAFTA has created.

Acevedo said that 80,000 new jobs a year are needed to absorb the growth of the economically active population.

"The government's expectations [before signing the agreement] were unrealistic, and obviously have not been met," said the expert, assistant coordinator of the El Salvador chapter of the UNDP Human Development Report.

The Directorate General for Migration and Alien Status in El Salvador recently announced

“The government’s expectations [before signing the agreement] were unrealistic, and obviously have not been met.”

— Carlos Acevedo

that 60 percent of the 200 to 500 Salvadorans a day who emigrate have jobs, Acevedo noted. Some 2.5 million Salvadorans are currently living in the United States.

“They decide to leave in search of higher pay, so their jobs become vacant,” said Acevedo, who does not rule out the possibility that those jobs are included in the official figures on new employment opportunities.

According to the government, the unemployment rate is about seven percent of the economically active population, while 35 percent are underemployed (working in the informal economy, with no social benefits).

Increased food dependence

Mateo Rendón, of the Salvadoran Federation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives (FESACORA), said DR-CAFTA has “increased food dependency” due to the growth in imports from the United States.

The country’s dependence on imported food is increasing while the area devoted to the cultivation of basic products like maize, rice, beans and vegetables, and to raising livestock, is shrinking.

Rendón deplored the lack of “public policies to support the agricultural and livestock sectors,” which have become less profitable because of the high prices of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, which rose by up to 30 percent in 2006.

Prior to DR-CAFTA, FESACORA members, belonging to 189 agricultural coopera-

tives, farmed 12,500 hectares (30,888 acres) collectively and individually, whereas now they only farm 6,000 hectares (14,826 acres), and only for family subsistence.

DR-CAFTA established that 50 percent of imported rice, maize, pork, powdered milk and other products were to enter the country tariff-free from the first year of its implementation, and that every year the proportion of tariff-free imports would increase by between two and five percent, depending on the product.

The deadlines for completely eliminating tariff barriers on imports were set at between 10 and 20 years.

Some 65,000 tons of rice, 35,000 tons of white maize, 350,000 tons of yellow maize and 10 tons of milk began to be imported by El Salvador on March 1, 2006.

In late 2007, the Salvadoran Central Reserve Bank (BCR) announced that the economy had grown 4.5 percent that year, one of the lowest rates in Central America, which had an average growth rate of 5.2 percent. Only Nicaragua, with just over three percent, had less growth than El Salvador.

The BCR also reported that between January and November 2007, El Salvador built up a trade deficit of \$4.35 billion, larger than the 2006 deficit of \$4.11 billion.

Foreign direct investment amounted to \$5.37 billion from January to September 2007, according to the BCR. But this figure includes the sale of banks, which merely changed hands to multinational corporations, for \$1.13 billion. □

URUGUAY

Pablo Long in Montevideo

Same-sex civil unions legalized

Landmark gives rights to homosexual couples.

In late 2007, Uruguay became the first country in Latin America and sixth worldwide to recognize civil unions for same-sex couples.

President Tabaré Vázquez signed the law, which went into effect in mid-January and was opposed by the conservative *Blanco* Party and the Catholic Church, to give same-sex couples that live together for at least five years rights that until now had only been granted to heterosexual couples, such as inheritance, pension and shared assets rights.

The law states that civil unions are recognized by “a shared life of two people — regardless of their sex, identity or sexual identity or orientation — that is of a sexual nature, exclusive, singular, stable and permanent without their being united by marriage.”

To prove their co-habitation, couples must present themselves with two witnesses before a judge in the Civil Registry. They are obligated to provide support for each other and cover household expenses and if the relationship dissolves, the responsibility continues for a period no longer than the cohab-

itation, unless one of the parties was the victim of domestic violence.

If one of the members dies, the inheritance rights will automatically go to the other, giving them the same rights as traditionally married couples; the other member is entitled to their partner’s retirement fund and to half of the assets they acquire together.

Differing opinions

“This law deepens democracy, protects the diversity of options and leaves existing legislative discrimination behind. Something so intimate such as how to choose with whom to live and share parts of one’s private life is a significant step in the incessant search for freedom,” said ruling party Dep. Diego Cánepa, one of the law’s champions.

For María Paz, an activist with the *Colectivo Oveja Negra*, or the “Black Sheep Collective” a gender diversity rights group, “the law’s approval is a first step in the recognition of one of the more demanded rights in the world for our communities, even though this doesn’t

- The slowing of the US economy will affect growth in **Latin America**. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the regional economy will grow to 4.5 percent in 2008 — 0.4 percent less than its earlier prediction, and 1.1 percent less than in 2007.

- The armed conflict in **Colombia** caused the displacement of 3,885 people in the departments of Arauca, Cauca, Choco and Nariño, between November 2007 and January 2008, according to local nongovernmental organization, Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy.

- On Jan. 18, the territorial waters of **Costa Rica** were converted into a sanctuary for dolphins and whales when President Óscar Arias signed a decree that prohibits all activity associated with the fishing, capture, wounding, transferal or commercializing of these animals.

- On Jan. 25, the government of **Ecuador** voided 587 private mining concessions, claiming the firms had not complied with the annual conservation patent fee of US\$1 per hectare conceded (\$0.40 per acre). This measure implies that 536,387 hectares (1,325,441 acres) will return to the state.

- Last year 447 illegal immigrants from **Mexico** died while trying to enter US territory, informed Jorge Bustamante, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.

mean that tomorrow we're going to go out en masse to make our unions official. We're satisfied that we have won another liberty."

Catholic Bishop Pablo Galimberti says that the Church accepts the economic parts of the law, but rejects its deeper philosophy.

"It doesn't seem bad to me that the shared assets of a homosexual couples are recognized but I vehemently reject that a stable marriage be defined as something other than that between a man and a woman," he said.

Deputy of the opposition *Blanco* Party Eber da Rosa voted against the law.

"The family is the basic cell of all society and here we are watching a serious attack on the family institution. Article 2 of the law consecrates the domestic union, even between homosexuals and that exceeds what the culture or conception of our society accepts as family values."

In a country where the presence of the Church is historically irrelevant (*LP, April 18, 2007*), bishops' opinions did not have much weight among the majority of lawmakers. Ironically the comments reminded many of Mons. Nicolás Cotugno, when he said that "homosexuality is an abhorrent manifestation of nature" that "should be treated as an illness."

Acceptance elsewhere

Before Uruguay passed this law, only Belgium, Canada, Spain, the Netherlands and South Africa had laws legalizing relationships between gay couples. In Latin America, homosexual unions were regularized but only on a municipal level: in Mexico City, Rio Grande

do Sul, Brazil, Buenos Aires and Carlos Paz in Argentina; and the Argentine province of Rio Negro.

In Colombia, the Constitutional Court recognized rights to assets of homosexual couples (*LP, Feb. 21, 2007*). But in June, the country's Senate rejected a bill that would give gay couples access to their same-sex partners' social security, health care benefits and pension.

The Uruguayan law does not permit same-sex couples to adopt children, which has sparked criticism among some homosexual rights groups.

"We do not see the fact that the law does not include adoption as an attitude of rejection or questioning. Any Uruguayan knows that if the right to adopt were included in the bill, the new law never would have passed. Frankly, this didn't worry us because the Children's Code allows single men and women to adopt children without problems," said Dep. Margarita Percovich, a well-known gender rights activists.

She says that "the law seeks to get Uruguayan society up to date after decades in which cohabitation — a widespread practice among the poorer sectors and ultimately the middle-income sectors and fundamentally, young people — was judged as social misconduct, when in reality there are more and more of [this kind] of union than marriages."

According to the National Statistics Institute, 12.6 percent of couples between the ages of 20 and 49 lived together without being married in 1980. That figure jumped to 27.4 percent in 2006. □

LATIN AMERICA

Cecilia Remón in Lima

Slight reduction in unemployment

Indigenous women and Afro-descendants continue to be the biggest targets of employment discrimination.

Jean Maninat, the International Labor Organization's (ILO) regional director for the Americas, regards the results of the recently released Labor Overview 2007 for Latin America and the Caribbean, as "cautious optimism."

According to the report, which examines the evolution of work and salaries in the region, the rate of urban unemployment lowered in the region for the fifth consecutive year, going from 9.1 percent in 2006 to 8.5 percent in 2007 in 15 of the region's countries.

Though the ILO foresees a reduction of urban unemployment to 7.9 percent for 2008, Maninat reiterated the need to stay cautious regarding the "elevated volatility of the international economic situation that could cause a stagnation or recession."

The report emphasizes the decent work deficit — understood as productive work with

fair remuneration, access to social security and recognized labor rights — in which one of the principal issues is the persistence of informal unemployment, affecting 61.5 percent of urban inhabitants.

Likewise, it affirms that 39.2 percent of urban workers did not have health protection or pensions in 2006, which rose alarmingly for the case of unpaid employment, domestic service and independent workers.

One of the most worrying issues for the ILO is the persistence of the unemployment gap, concerning access to employment. The unemployment rate for women is 1.6 times greater than that of men, with the situation of indigenous and Afro-descendent women being much more severe.

"Women in these two groups have the worst statistics," said Mónica Castillo, regional specialist in Decent Work, Information and

statistics spotlight

LATIN AMERICA/ CARIBBEAN Urban unemployment rate (%)

Country	2006*	2007*
Colombia	13.2	12.0
Jamaica	11.4	10.2
Uruguay	11.9	10.0
Ecuador	10.3	9.8
Brazil	10.2	9.7
Venezuela	10.5	9.0
Argentina	10.7	8.8
Peru	8.8	8.7
Barbados	8.7	7.9
Panama	10.4	7.7
Chile	8.4	7.1
Trin. & Tob.	7.0	6.3
Mexico	4.6	4.9
Costa Rica	6.0	4.8
Honduras	5.2	4.1

Source: ILO

* Until the third quarter

Labor Analysis as well as coordinator for Labor Overview 2007.

Afro-descendants singled out

According to Castillo, “the wages per hour for indigenous Afro-descendent women represent only 39 percent of the wages earned by men who are neither indigenous nor Afro-descendants in the six countries studied [Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Uruguay, where there is a high population density of these groups].”

To combat this situation, Castillo signaled the need to “strengthen knowledge of these groups, improve statistics on indigenous and Afro-descendent women, carry out better studies on these groups in order to better understand what the problem is and allow the creation of adequate policies.”

“In the second term, to improve the application of agreements 100 [on equal pay] and 111 [on employment and work-place discrimination] and in the specific case of indigenous communities, agreement 169. In each there are specific references to the treatment of women,” she explained.

Finally, Castillo mentioned the “development of employment policies and programs that can improve the work situation of these

vulnerable groups.”

The ILO’s Decent Work Agenda for the Hemisphere 2006-2015, approved in May 2006 and adopted by workers and employers organizations as well as governments in the region, proposes measures for the progressive elimination of work discrimination.

To achieve this objective, the ILO suggested to “increase knowledge on the magnitude and dimension of the discrimination problem in the job market, by advancing in the fulfillment of agreements 110 and 111 of the ILO, and reducing the existing barriers for the incorporation of women, indigenous and Afro-descendent communities as well as other discriminated peoples in the job market in unfair conditions.”

In its conclusions, the Labor Overview 2007 report mentions that while the regional gross domestic product has grown an average of 4.8 percent in the last five years — which has had a favorable impact on employment and, on a lesser scale, on real salaries — this progress is insufficient.

“High levels of informal employment persist as well as a lack of social protection, employment gaps due to gender, age and ethnic group, and labor rights are not effectively carried out,” states the report. □

ECUADOR

Lily Céspedes in Loja

Rescuing Quichua

Indigenous community promotes bilingual education.

Descendants of the Incas, they managed to escape extermination during the Spanish conquest, though this has meant integrating into a new way of life imposed by another culture — a difficulty that still persists today.

The Saraguro indigenous community in Ecuador, whose name was derived from the Quechua term “sarajuru,” meaning “germinated maize,” currently includes 28,000 inhabitants in 32 communities of the Andean and Amazonian regions of Ecuador.

Located 64 kilometers (nearly 40 miles) north of the Southern province of Loja, Saraguro is well-known for having developed a bilingual education system almost two decades ago, with the principal objective of recuperating the Quechua (or Quichua) language that has been lost over time.

According to current studies, Quechua or “Runasimi” was born in the central region of Peru and expanded as a *lingua franca* over the entire Incan empire until the 16th century. Today Quechua is spoken in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and some parts of Argentina and Chile (*LP, April 18, 2007*).

“Our native language is Quichua, but it started fading since the 1970s. Quichua is was only spoken in the communities,” said Rosa Valvina Quispe Bacacela, pres-

ident of the Saraguro indigenous community.

Bilingual schools

In contrast to what is happening in Peru, where Quechua is losing out to Spanish, despite being one of the official languages, the Saraguros have decided to rescue their language.

“We are in a singular process of recuperating the Quichua language through the bilingual schools,” Quispe explained. “The National Office of Intercultural Bilingual Education in Ecuador is strengthening this language in 12 of the country’s provinces as well as other systems of coexistence.”

For the mayor of the Loja province, Jorge Bailón Abad, the bilingual education program “seeks to offer excellence in academics for the Saraguros, an education with values for boys, girls and youths who have to use Quichua for communication and learning.”

“There is concern and interest in consolidating this educational model so that it becomes an education alternative through the Saraguro communities,” indicated Bailón.

In Saraguro, education begins at zero years, when the child is integrated into community centers where women take care of him or her while the mother works on agricultural

tasks and handicrafts in the community. When the child turns three years old, he or she begins formal education.

"It is a process until they finish primary school; from there they go to secondary school and interact with other children, and on the completion of this period, they have the opportunity to continue technical studies in superior institutes or public or private universities. Here there are many Saraguro professionals, from doctors to engineers, teachers and economists who work in the communities," said Quispe.

"Before, it was very different," he adds. "The children were taken care of at home until they were five and then sent to educational centers. Now we are strengthening education through a common vision since they have more freedom to express their emotions in bilingual schools and have access to all of the universities."

Quichua-speaking teachers

One of the constant challenges for the Saraguros is to have Quichua-speaking teachers, according to Rafael Huamán Andrade, farming technician and former president of the indigenous community, who lives in rural zone Las Lagunas.

Huamán recalled that in 1987 a group of indigenous teachers were interested in creating a new educational system that responded to the reality and perspectives of their people. Following an indigenous community uprising to call the government's attention, the School of Andean Education was born, headed by indigenous Saraguro teachers, where Quichua and Spanish are taught. In addition to regular courses, the school teaches respect of the environment, values and beliefs, and promotes the recuperation of their ancestors' artisanal work.



Women of the Saraguro indigenous community.

"Interculturalism proposes that each culture has its values and counter-values".

— Luis Montaluisa

Even article 69 of the current constitution clearly says that the state must guarantee a bilingual education system, respecting the principal language of diverse communities and the use of Spanish as a language for intercultural relations.

Linguist Luis Montaluisa, former head of the National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education, says that this program has given the indigenous population equal opportunities to access education by strengthening the indigenous organizing process.

Education, he said, was a kind of indoctrination that imposed values from other peoples as if they were universal.

"Interculturalism proposes that each culture has its values and counter-values; in this context, the best of each culture is seen and bilingualism is provided not only through Spanish, but through the possibilities available through knowing other languages," said Montaluisa.

Bilingual education in Ecuador reaches 2,500 boys and girls at the elementary level who study in 46 centers, 100,951 students in 1,966 primary schools, and 12,301 students in 112 secondary schools. The program also reaches six

educational institutes, seven technology institutes, 13 centers for curricular development of superior education, 18 education provincial offices and six offices of indigenous nationalities.

In the province of Loja alone, there are 170 teachers in bilingual schools who educate 2,353 students.

However, the emigration of these teachers to countries like Spain or Italy is starting to spark concern, as 50 percent of teachers from bilingual education have left the system in order to go to Europe in search of other opportunities. □

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