

INTRODUCTION

There are currently a number of different indigenous peoples living in the most remote areas of the Peruvian Amazon who refuse to establish sustained contact with national society. Although little is known of them, information provided by indigenous people who previously lived in such conditions and who are now, for one reason or another, interacting more closely with the surrounding population suggests that this rejection is due to previous tragic experiences of contact that scarred their lives, leading them to opt for isolation as a defence mechanism that enables their continued existence. And yet, despite their attitude and their increasingly remote locations, these people are failing in their objective because of various external agents who are invading their territories for different reasons and threatening their physical, cultural and territorial integrity.

In fact, the granting of exploitation and use rights within these territories to gas/oil and timber companies, the proliferation of illegal activities such as the felling of high value tree species and drugs trafficking, among other things, are all forcing these peoples into the furthest corners of their territories, depriving them of their right to territory and, with this, the right to enjoy the land area necessary for their subsistence purposes. In addition, despite the tragic consequences of forced contact, such as the rapid spread of fatal epidemics, there are still some groups of Protestant and Catholic missionaries who pay no heed to these peoples' repeated and overwhelming rejection of direct contact with outsiders and who, via traditional contact methods, are seeking them out in order to "pacify" them, "civilize" them, "convert" them and translate the Bible into their respective languages.

The Madre de Dios region, which is the focus of this book, is in the south-east of the Peruvian Amazon and is home to at least four indigenous peoples in isolation. The active and violent expansion of the extraction frontier, primarily logging, is precisely the reason behind the increased reports of encounters and clashes between these peoples and the loggers, with the tragic result of deaths, injuries and disappearances on both sides, territorial dislocations and the likelihood that an illness could decimate a population, even destroy it completely, at any moment. As this book goes to press, FENAMAD, the Native Federation of the Madre de Dios River and its Tributaries, is continuing to denounce these incidents to the police,

the National Institute for Natural Resources INRENA and the Ministry of Agriculture. And yet the replies it receives show no real concern or desire to address this problem.

Although we do not have precise figures on the number of peoples living in these conditions we know that there are isolated peoples facing similar threats in the least accessible areas of the regions of Loreto, Ucayali, Huánuco and Cusco. Indeed, reports from indigenous organisations (AIDSEP, 2003) and the Ombudsman, amongst others, serve to highlight the massive invasion of illegal loggers onto all the reserves created for the indigenous peoples in isolation without exception. The establishment of settlements, farms and paths by missionary groups in areas close to the territory of these peoples, as a way of establishing sustained contact, has also been observed. Alongside this, tourist companies and explorers enter these territories to find and film what they consider to be "exotic Indians". They do so with the backing of the state institutions whose representatives, having been sufficiently informed of the dangers of such actions by indigenous leaders, should know better. Such is the case, for example, of the Manu National Park. Another area of concern for those defending the rights of these peoples is the superimposition of proposed Protected Natural Areas with these reserves. The criteria for these Protected Areas are overwhelmingly conservationist and fail to recognise the indigenous right to territory, consequently ignoring the need to treat the areas as such, and failing to show the peoples in isolation the care their vulnerable situation requires.

Since the end of the 1980s, regional indigenous organisations of the Peruvian Amazon such FENAMAD, the Matsigenka Council of the Urubamba River, COMARU, the Regional Indigenous Organisation of Atalaya, OIRA and the national level Inter-ethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Forest, AIDSEP have, through concrete political, technical, legal and administrative actions, been defending the fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples in isolation in the Peruvian Amazon.

These actions have resulted in significant progress in terms of obtaining official recognition of part of the territories where Indigenous Peoples in isolation are known to live. Nonetheless, the absence of any state policy respecting the rights of these people along with notorious legal loopholes with regard to institutional responsibilities and mechanisms for protecting their territories from outside intrusion have been major obstacles for these indigenous organisations in achieving their objectives for the well-being of those they call their "indigenous brothers in isolation". Worse still, the Peruvian state has actually been promoting investment projects within these territo-

ries, primarily extraction activities, despite an awareness of these peoples' existence, their crucial dependence upon the natural resources and, in many cases, their lack of immunity to outside illness.

The need to join forces and act in a coordinated and systematic way in the defence of the rights of indigenous peoples in isolation led AIDSESEP's National Assembly to create a National Programme for Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact during its 19th Congress in December 2002. The plan's objective is to continue to put pressure on the state to establish Territorial Reserves for these peoples while at the same time providing the technical studies for their territorial demarcation. The organisation has, in fact, been doing similar work since 1994 through its Territorial Programme, which has received constant support from the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, IWGIA, throughout. AIDSESEP's other actions have included drafting national and international level regulatory proposals with which to implement supervisory mechanisms for the Territorial Reserves so that the isolated peoples' right to territory, along with their right to self-determination, can be guaranteed. In addition, it has been raising awareness of these peoples' problems and submitting complaints with regard to the impact of both mega-projects such as Camisea Gas and illegal logging on their physical, territorial and cultural integrity. Alongside this, and given the gradually increasing proximity of some isolated groups to wider society, the indigenous organisations are seeking a commitment from various state sectors and civil society to produce and apply contingency plans counteracting the possible tragic consequences of untimely contact and also to offer essential post-contact care.

Indigenous peoples in isolation are not just a Peruvian phenomenon but can also be found in other parts of the world. On the Latin American continent, for example, indigenous peoples in isolation can also be found in Brazil. Here the well-documented and tragic experiences of the central government's previous policy of forced contact have now led to a change in direction, the government having recently opted to respect these peoples' right to self-determination.

Ecuador is another example. In May 2003, news of fatal clashes between indigenous clans in isolation along the border with Peru caught the attention of many of the country's media, human rights networks and indigenous experts such as the Spanish capuchin missionary Miguel Ángel Cabodevilla who, after much reflection, concluded that they were facing a case that called for the adequate protection of "invaluable human groups" (2003).

In Paraguay, too, there are Totobiegosode families who have chosen to remain in isolation.

Crossing continental borders now, we can also mention the Sentinelese and Jarawa peoples who live on the Andaman Islands, a group of islands in the Bay of Bengal that forms part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Union Territory of India. The Sentinelese, who live on North Sentinel island and are one of the most reluctant to establish contact with the outside world, are being threatened by poachers and invasions from the Andaman authorities, who are using the island as a tourist attraction.

The book

This text is an updated version of the Spanish edition of *“Los pueblos indígenas en aislamiento: su lucha por la sobrevivencia y la libertad”* first published in Peru in May 2002. The indigenous organisations in Peru, along with IWGIA, wish to raise awareness of the delicate problems facing the indigenous peoples in isolation in the Peruvian Amazon, particularly in Madre de Dios, where FENAMAD has been carrying out intensive work and constant defence of their rights. It is also hoped that this book will attract the attention of the Peruvian government and international community, encouraging them to contribute to effective actions aimed at protecting these peoples, based particularly on the principle of respect for their right to life, health, territory and self-determination.

In addition to this, based on an analysis of the historic processes of indigenous peoples, it seeks to construct a logic that will enable their current condition of isolation to be understood. As Heinrich Helberg notes, “Our way of tackling the problem is to create a logical model by which to understand their possible motives and dynamic, and some minimum concepts to begin to understand the indigenous peoples in isolation, but this does not constitute a theory” (Helberg, 2001).

The ethnographic section of this text has been based on the “Study on Territorial Demarcation” produced by FENAMAD’s technical team for the isolated indigenous peoples living around the middle and upper reaches of the Los Amigos, Las Piedras, Tahuamanu, Acre and Yaco rivers in the north of Madre de Dios. Aware of their extreme vulnerability to illness and their explicit rejection of direct contact with agents external to their culture, the indigenous organisations have adopted a principle of ‘no contact’, and it is this principle that has guided the study’s methodology. For this reason, research has been carried out by gathering information on these peoples from all the population centres based near their areas of movement, both in Peru and Brazil, as well as by means of inter-

views, primarily with loggers and oil workers who, on entering their territories, have witnessed their presence. For this reason, the information provided is referential. A vast array of secondary information has also been reviewed, comprising documentary sources from the missionaries, rubber barons, scientific and military expeditions that visited the area at different times in its history.

In order to give the reader some orientation from the start, the first chapter offers a general explanation of the definition and origin of the indigenous peoples in question. A geographic and socio-economic description of the Madre de Dios department follows in the second chapter. The third provides information on the cultural characteristics of the indigenous peoples in isolation in terms of their ethnic belonging, areas of movement, subsistence practices and recent evidence of their presence in the area. The fourth chapter analyses their problems, focusing on the kinds of external agents that are approaching them, and their different reasons. The risks involved in the advance of such external agents onto indigenous territory and the establishment of contact are discussed in the fifth chapter. The current situation of the territorial reserves that have been created is considered in the sixth chapter. The seventh is aimed at highlighting the role FENAMAD has played in defending the indigenous peoples in isolation in Madre de Dios, its policy and management. The eighth chapter considers the indigenous peoples in isolation along the Peru/Brazil border, their problems, Brazil's experience and policy in this regard and the coordination FENAMAD has achieved with this country's federal and state bodies with the aim of making proposals for their protection. The ninth chapter presents the actions and guidelines that are being adopted or proposed in order to protect these peoples. An analysis is made of their prospects for protection in the current political climate, the current government's progress in this regard and a general assessment of the situation. The tenth and final chapter offers some conclusions and recommendations.

Finally, it is important to note that some irresponsible people and companies, particularly journalists and tourist agencies, are spreading inappropriate information on the indigenous peoples in isolation, making them seem more exotic and thus trivialising the difficult situation they are going through. For our part, we would like to emphasise that one of the most important objectives of this book is to promote attitudes of responsibility and good ethics among the general public when considering this issue, particularly given the need and obligation we have to respect these peoples' way of life, preventing them from being exposed to forced contact. The vast majority of contact to date has led to mass deaths among these

populations. Only when people are aware of the tragedies of the past will we be able to present their future defence as an historic need.

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