

# **SEMINAR OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF THE AMERICAS**

**Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 28-30 June 1992**

## **Participation**

Forty indigenous women from 15 countries, including a Maori women from Aotearoa/New Zealand, participated in the seminar. A number of non-indigenous women attended as observers. The participants list is attached.

## **Organization**

The Seminar was directed by Maria Luisa La Fuente, assisted by members of the Bolivian Section of WILPF. It took place immediately prior to the WILPF Congress, 1 to 6 July. The results of the Seminar formed the basis of discussion in one of the Congress workshops which made proposals for specific actions to be incorporated in WILPF's programme for the period 1993 - 1995.

Most of the seminar participants stayed on to take part in the Gertrud Baer Seminar and the WILPF Congress (1-6 July), contributing to the different workshops, the regional round table on the Americas, and to the discussions in the plenary sessions. Of particular interest to them were the workshops on Environment & Development, the Global Economic Crisis, The Struggle of Native Women in the Americas, and Human Rights.

A children's peace camp ran simultaneously, with an experienced woman and man working with the children who had come with their mothers.

## **Programme and Outcome**

The seminar was opened with speeches by indigenous women from Argentina, Bolivia and Peru, as well as WILPF's international vice-president from Central America. They set the historical background to the discussion of the situation 500 years after the European invasion of the continent, and introduced the different aspects of the meeting's theme. Short cultural programmes were presented by Bolivian and Chilean indigenous groups.

The first plenary meeting began with introductions, each participant telling her story, her aspirations, her hopes. For most, it was the first time that they met indigenous women from other regions and countries on the continent, even from within Bolivia.

The discussions took place mainly in five workshops:

- Impact of the encounter of the cultures 500 years after.
- The agrarian reform process, property of the land, territory and legislation.
- Human rights, women's rights, native nations' rights, and political contribution of the continent.
- Traditional community organization and historic culture.
- Ecology, native nations and environment.

In rich exchanges of experience and analysis of their present situation, the indigenous women underlined the following:

"In 1492, the European invaders, starting with the Spaniards, first treat upon the territory of the indigenous communities. Since then our riches

have been pillaged and our people have been the victims of exploitation and domination. Before 1492 we had our own world view, but we lost our freedom when other forms of thought were imposed on us. Today we are still abused although the methods may differ. The education that was and is imposed on us is aimed at wiping out our identity. The indigenous peoples are still the object of exploitation. Women, as cheap sources of labor, are the most affected.

"As the heirs of these abuses irresponsibly and in a triumphal manner celebrate the 500 years of 'discovery', we grieve the disappearance of millions of ours, and of those who continue to disappear in the struggle to reclaim their rights and to recuperate the territories that the invaders took from us.

"For us the earth signifies Pachamama, the Mother, whom we venerate because from this source comes life and the food that sustains us. We must preserve her as she is. The indigenous woman is the principal axis of the family, and in this sense she is equal to Pachamama because she gives life, produces, and transmits culture. For this she must be respected.

"Agrarian reform has not succeeded at all and nothing has changed. It was a method by which the oppressors manipulated in order to continue to rule. Sharing and developing the land to satisfy the needs of the people, while giving it all the respect it is due, remains a goal that indigenous women want to achieve."

Evaluating the Seminar, the participants concluded that the experience was positive. It helped bring a better understanding between them and the non-indigenous members with whom they live and who organized the event. They particularly appreciated meeting and discussing issues with indigenous women from other countries and other regions within Bolivia.

Recommendations were taken from the Seminar to the WILPF Congress which accept them. These included:

- That WILPF recognize the right to self-determination of Indigenous Nations and Peoples.

- That WILPF pressure the United Nations to admit Indigenous Nations and Peoples to their rightful place among the nations of the world.

- That during 1993, which has been designated the International Year for Indigenous People, the United Nations adopt the wording "Indigenous Nations and Peoples."

- That when Indigenous Nations and Peoples take forceful actions to repossess their lands, WILPF give active support to these efforts. WILPF sections should network with organizations such as the South and Central American Indian Information Center (SAIIC), and with other networks to have the information that enables them to pressure their governments and the governments of countries in which conflict is occurring.

- That WILPF should recognize the 500 Years of oppression of Indigenous Peoples, and also recognize the Diasporic Nations of Africa, which have been displaced from their lands.

- That educational programs should be developed by Indigenous Peoples themselves, for the Quincentenary Year, in order to counter mis-education.

- That WILPF incorporate more indigenous women and women of color in its decision-making bodies.

- That WILPF publications should be bilingual, news from communities of colour should be included, and they should be distributed in those

communities.

- That WILPF have indigenous women lead more of their meetings and workshops, in their ways, to deepen the understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous women, peoples, and nations.

A detailed report is being prepared by a group of participants and will be available on request when ready.