

Quito, Ecuador

## We defend Mother Earth

The following is an excerpt from a statement issued by the Women's Commission at the "First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples -- 500 Years of Indian Resistance" in Quito, Ecuador, July 1990.



Sparerib

1. As women we particularly identify with our Mother Earth. We recognize that the Earth is life. We must respect ourselves as women so identified. This Mother Earth is the only one that we have: we must respect her, care for her, love her. In every country people are destroying and violating our Mother Earth. She is dying, so we the people are dying. We take our responsibility seriously. We defend the Earth.

2. The invasion of a non-indigenous value system has

*negatively changed the relationship between women and men in the home, and the role of women in our communities and nations. We have all been victims of this oppressive system, of western vices, of addictions, of the violence of a system that is anti-life...*

*We must reclaim our traditional values, our indigenous ways of organizing ourselves, of conducting ourselves as communities ... In order to reestablish*

*balance in our homes and in order to realize the self-determination and liberation of our oppressed peoples, women and men must participate equally in accordance with the traditional values of our indigenous nations.*

3. The churches must respect our religion as we respect theirs. We have the right to practice our native beliefs, to have our sacred sites and our sacred objects. Instead of celebrating the



500 years in 1992, the churches should ask our forgiveness and observe our time of mourning and pain. We must have the right under law to our religious ceremonies according to our indigenous beliefs. We must protect our sacred sites and our sacred burial grounds.

4. Militarism is anti-life, anti-Earth, anti-women. Militarism is the destruction of our ancestral culture, the destruction of our way of thinking and acting. We stand against military recruitment which robs us of our sons and brothers and turns them into bullets in the hands of the oppressor. When they return to their homes, they no longer know how to live with respect and in community. We have the right to live in freedom, in peace, without military intervention, without war.

5. We recognize that in isolation, we cannot achieve the goals of our struggle. Within the oppressor's system we are alienated as indigenous nations, as women. We suffer from a lack of information. The mass media does not effectively communicate our needs and objectives. The mass media distorts and deletes our truth. For example, very few of us were aware of the indigenous uprising here in Ecuador prior to coming to this Gathering.

We conclude that it is necessary to establish an effective communication and support network and to coordinate among the indigenous wom-

en's organizations of the Americas.

6. We agree that as indigenous women of this hemisphere we will participate in a coordinated manner in the different activities opposed to the so-called discovery of America, declaring a Day of Mourning for Indigenous Peoples.

7. From here on, we will actively participate in the national and international tribunals, in order to guar-



Photo by Mary Addle Andrew



antee the representation of indigenous women. We no longer accept the intermediary role of intellectuals who use us as objects of folklore.

8. We are very concerned, and have discussed in detail in our commission, the lack of training, education and health resources for women... Here in this gathering we are laying out the basics.' The real work begins when we return to our organizations. We work together for our own development, one which reflects our values as well as our needs: organizational training, an end to illiteracy, eradication of addictions such as alcoholism and drug addiction, rescue and development of our traditional medicines without throwing away technology developed for the good of humanity, and rescue and development of our

own agricultural and nutritional systems.

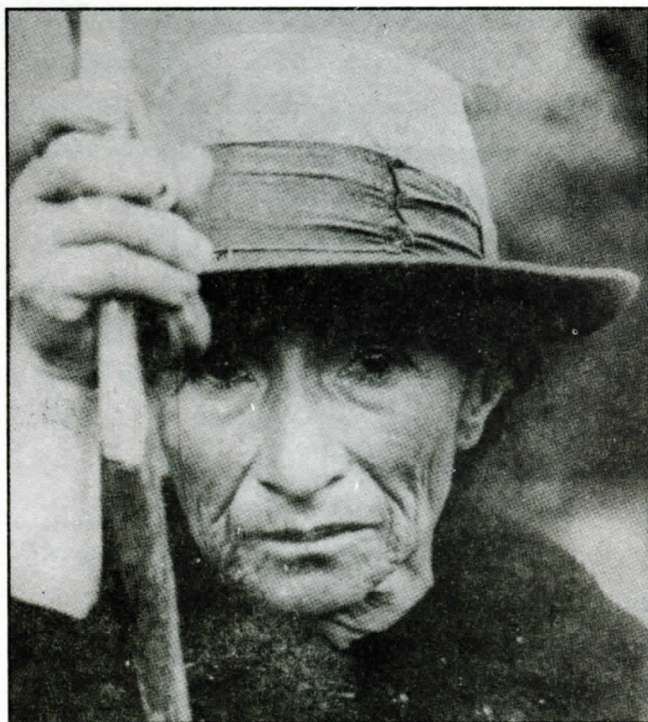
9. To live according to our indigenous values is to assume responsibility for the well-being and the harmony of all, putting an end to poverty and inequality. We need all people, each person has their place, the old and the young. We must support the widows, the orphans, the single mothers, and the elders, as has been the way of our peoples.

10. As women and as indigenous people, we feel a connection to the

Earth. In order to bring closure to this gathering in balance with the Earth we must be here at her breast, where we have our sacred fire.

---

**Source:** Spare Rib, October 1991. pp. 36-37. 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0AT England. Tel.: (071) 253 9792; Fax: (071) 251 1773.



Amnesty International