



MAPUCHE INTERNATIONAL LINK

UNITED NATIONS
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Geneva 18-22 July 2005

Review of developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, including their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr Chairman, respected members of the Working Group and participants of the Assembly:

I have not long returned from Chile where I lived amongst the Mapuche for almost three months.

I was humbled by their generosity as they welcomed me into their homes and invited me to share their food. I witnessed much of the poverty and deprivation they face in their daily lives. I became more acutely aware of the threats to their human rights and their way of life.

The word 'Mapuche' translates as 'people of the land', land that the Mapuche love and depend on for their survival.

How can a government oversee the continuing theft of this important resource by ruthless forestry companies, big landowners and other interested parties? Why are old treaties being disrespected? Is it right to meet legitimate protests with repression and blatant violations of human rights? How many more Mapuche will be physically and psychologically injured during such protests due to police brutality? How many more will die in confrontations? Is it right to use anti-terrorist laws dating back to Pinochet's dictatorship against people defending their ancestral land and traditional way of life? How many more Mapuche need to suffer questionable court proceedings and degrading imprisonment for exercising their democratic rights?

In the last few years, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch, amongst others, have expressed their deep concern about the situation of the Mapuche. In 2003, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues, explicitly recommended that "... measures be taken to avoid the criminalisation of the legitimate activities of protest or social demands" of the Mapuche.

The Chilean government has failed to act on these recommendations. On the contrary, it has continued with its repressive policies. Currently, two Mapuche Lonkos (chiefs), Pascual Pichún and Aniceto Norín, along with fourteen other members of the Mapuche community, are in court on allegations of 'illicit terrorist association'. Roberto Garretón, Regional Representative of the UN High Commission on Human Rights, has visited Temuco to observe these proceedings and raised serious questions about the continued use of anti-terrorist legislation in such cases.

Mapuche International Link appeals to the Working Group and the international community to put pressure on the Chilean government to implement the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur Rodolfo Stavenhagen and other international organizations. Key amongst these recommendations is the request for the prompt ratification of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organisation, as well as of other international conventions that guarantee the human rights of indigenous people.

Barbara Chambers
EU Co-ordinator
Mapuche International Link