

Amazonian Bishops Statement on the Protest of the Amazon Peoples

As pastors of the Catholic communities in the Amazon, we issue this statement expressing our position on the protest by the peoples of Amazonia.

1. The Amazon Basin is rich in ancestral cultures and biodiversity. It is the source of life and represents hope for humankind. This is the reason we consider it as one of God's finest gifts, since Peru is one of the eight most diverse countries in the world. The Amazon Basin includes thirty one of the world's one hundred fourteen eco systems. It also represents 95% of Peru's forests and a very important source of hydrological and hydroelectric energy. These reasons impel all Peruvians to assume the responsibility of "working and caring for the earth" (Gen. 2) for our own good and for future generations.
2. Hence, as prophets "of life we want to insist that the interests of economic groups that irrationally demolish sources of life are not to prevail in dealing with natural resources, at the cost of whole nations and of humankind itself" (Aparecida Document 471).
3. We witness how, in the name of a distorted concept of development, the government allows the deforestation of large expanses of primary forests by both national and transnational companies for palm oil and sugar cane plantations and other crops.
4. It is no secret that the rivers are polluted with lead, other heavy metals and toxic materials because of irresponsible mining, both formal and informal, and oil production. We also witness indiscriminate, uncontrolled logging.
5. The indigenous and riverine communities' call for integral development is being ignored, as the government fails to acknowledge that those lands have been used and occupied for generations. The Amazonian peoples' right to be heard — which is enshrined in the Peruvian Constitution and international human rights treaties, such as ILO Convention 169 and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — goes unheeded. The ILO Committee of Experts Report on the Application of ILO Conventions, published in February 2009, urges the Peruvian government to take immediate steps to design appropriate mechanisms for indigenous peoples' participation and to consult indigenous peoples before taking any measure that may affect them directly or indirectly.
6. We must express that "the Catholic Church ... especially cherishes indigenous people because of their respect for nature and their love for mother earth as a source for food, a common home and an altar of human fellowship" (Aparecida Document 472).
7. Situations such as the one we are currently experiencing in Amazonia reflect a cruel and inhuman effort to make decisions about the possessions of riverine and Amazonian communities because they lack the legal means to defend their just demands, even in their own country. These communities are condemned to be exiled from their lands and to become laborers on sugar cane and palm oil plantations, and in mines and oil fields.

8. Legislation enacted by the government in 2008 (especially two laws and seven legislative decrees) makes no contribution to the integral development of the people of the Amazon. It only threatens to cause greater poverty in the region.
9. We do not want violence; we therefore urge the government and Congress to demonstrate a willingness to dialogue and seek fair, peaceful solutions to the problems facing Amazonian peoples, so they are not left in desperation that could increase social conflict.
10. We call on the media to provide accurate information, contributing to the right of citizens to be well informed about the events in the Peruvian Amazon.
11. Given this sensitive situation, we call on the president and congress to repeal this legislation and to contribute to the development of new legislation with the participation of the Amazonian peoples. We also call on the Amazonian and riverine communities and their leaders to join together to seek the common good. We believe it is necessary to establish a true round table for dialogue, which includes all stakeholders, to find a peaceful and harmonious solution for this conflict.

With the bishops of Latin America, we reaffirm the need to "...pursue an alternative development model, one that is comprehensive and communal, based on an ethic that includes responsibility for true natural and human ecology, and rooted in the Gospel of justice, solidarity, and the universal destination of goods." (Aparecida Document 474c).

May 5, 2009

Bishop José Luis Astigarraga, C.P. Vicariate of Yurimaguas	Bishop Santiago García de la Rasilla, S.J. Vicariate of Jaén
Bishop Gaetano Galbusera, S.D.B. Vicariate of Pucallpa	
Bishop Julián García, O.S.A. Vicariate of Iquitos	Bishop Rafael Alfonso Escudero López-Brea Territorial Prelature of Moyobamba
Bishop Alberto Campos, O.F.M. Vicariate of San José de Amazonas	Bishop Gerardo Zerdin, O.F.M. Vicariate of San Ramón
Bishop Francisco González, O.P. Vicariate of Puerto Maldonado	Bishop Juan Tomás Oliver, O.F.M. Vicariate of Requena