

# Indigenous people under threat

By Gustavo Gonzalez

*Dawn  
8/6/05*

**SANTIAGO:** The "war on terror", identified in Amnesty International's annual report as a new source of human rights abuses, is threatening to expand to Latin America, targeting indigenous movements that are demanding autonomy and protesting free-market policies and "neo-liberal" globalization.

In the United States "there is a perception of indigenous activists as destabilising elements and terrorists," and their demands and activism have begun to be cast in a criminal light, lawyer José Aylwin, with the Institute of Indigenous Studies at the University of the Border in Temuco (670 km south of the Chilean capital), told IPS.

Pedro Cayuqueo, director of the Mapuche newspaper *Azkintuwe*, also from the city of Temuco, wrote that the growing indigenous activism in Latin America and Islamic radicalism are both depicted as threats to the security and hegemony of the United States in the "Global Trends 2020 — Mapping the Global Future" study by the US National Intelligence Council (NIC).

NIC works with 13 government agencies, including the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), and is advised by experts from the United States and other countries. Cayuqueo described the report as "a veritable x-ray" of potential "counterinsurgency scenarios" from now to the year 2020.

In the process of drafting the report, NIC organized 12 regional conferences around the world, one of which was held in Santiago in June 2004.

The reporter said the emergence of increasingly organized indigenous movements and the strengthening of their ethnic identities become, in that view, targets of "the so-called low-intensity warfare doctrine, a renovated version of the National Security Doctrine" that formed the basis of US interventionism in Latin America from the 1960s to the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.

democratic essence in their organizational and decision-making structures, but transnational corporations foment their exclusion from society and push indigenous people to violence, which could translate into armed struggle," Aymara leader Juan de la Cruz Vilca told IPS in Bolivia.

In Bolivia, 70 per cent of the population of 9.2 million identify themselves as indigenous, and the indigenous movement, along with other sectors, is demanding a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution and "re-found the republic" to grant self-determination to the country's 36 native groups, added de la Cruz Vilca.

The activist, the former president of Bolivia's Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, a peasant farmer union, accused foreign oil companies of backing the demands for regional autonomy put forth by business and large landowners in the wealthy eastern regions of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando and Beni, where the country's natural gas reserves are concentrated.

"Behind that movement lies a hidden plan aimed at generating a violent reaction by the indigenous movements, in order to justify external military intervention," he maintained.

"It's true that indigenous peoples are a threat, from the point of view of the political and economic powers-that-be. They see us as terrorists, but we aren't, because our struggle is open, legal and legitimate," said Ricardo Díaz, an indigenous lawmaker with the leftist Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), the strongest opposition party in Bolivia.

In Ecuador, indigenous people account for an estimated 40 per cent of the population of nearly 13 million.

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ries," the Nasa indigenous leader commented to IPS, saying the Colombian government was already following policies aimed at the persecution of social and indigenous movements even before the "Global Trends 2020" report was issued.

The Nasa people number around 150,000, making them the second-largest indigenous group in Colombia, which is home to 90 aboriginal communities that make up around two per cent of the population of 44 million.

Although Colombia's 1991 constitution granted autonomy to indigenous peoples in their reserves, that provision is not respected, and there are continuous occupations of land by the military and irregular armed groups, said Valencia.

He also protested the spraying of coca and poppy crops and the displacement of indigenous peoples from their land by those interested in getting their hands on natural resources.

Chilean Deputy Minister of Planning Jaime Andrade Huenchucuy, the government agent in charge of indigenous affairs, told IPS that the native peoples in his country represent no threat of destabilization or terrorism, as described in the NIC report.

José Santos Millao, one of the Mapuche members of Chile's National Corporation of Indigenous Development, remarked to IPS that the US intelligence services "suspiciously or stupidly" cast the protests of indigenous peoples as part of "terrorist" tendencies, in order to distort their "legitimate demands."

In Chile, 6.4 per cent of the population of 15.2 million identify themselves as indigenous members of six ethnic groups, although other estimates put the proportion at 10 per cent.

In neighbouring Argentina, meanwhile, native peoples make up between 1.5 and 2.0 million people, out of a population of 37 million.

In both Chile and Argentina, the Mapuches comprise the biggest indigenous group.

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The indigenous question would thus appear to form part of what the United States sees as future threats to its hegemony.

In Latin America, the Andean sub-region is seen as the "hottest" area, because of the growing political role played by well-organized indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador, but also because of the impact on indigenous peoples of armed conflict and drug trafficking in Colombia.

Farther south in the Andes mountains, Mapuche organizations in southern Chile and Argentina have become more and more radical in recent years in their claims to their ancestral territory, demands for autonomy and the creation of indigenous reserves, and defence of the environment, which is threatened by transnational mining and forestry corporations that are granted tax breaks and other incentives by governments.

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struggle is open, legal and legitimate," said Ricardo Díaz, an indigenous lawmaker with the leftist Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), the strongest opposition party in Bolivia.

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For the first seven months of the government of Lucio Gutiérrez, who was removed from his post by Congress on April 20 after a week of protests, the Pachakutik Movement, the political arm of the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), formed part of the administration.

CONAIE president Luis Macas told IPS that if his movement, "which guides the indigenous struggle along peaceful channels, didn't exist, the poverty in which our communities, and the Ecuadorian people in general, are steeped could become a breeding-ground for the emergence of organizations that could try to change the social situation through violence, but that hasn't happened," said Macas.

"We are not a threat to the world, or to the United States. On the contrary, we hold out a hope, an alternative for humanity," said Feliciano Valencia, coordinator of human rights in the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca, in the southwestern Colombian province of Cauca.

The shamans (traditional healers) "had warned that very difficult times lay ahead, with a black cloud hanging over our territo-

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The land conflicts that are currently raging began with the arrival of the foreign mining, oil, forestry and water companies, Mauro Millán, leader of the Mapuche Tehuelche Organization of Argentina, told IPS. "The United States is trying to depict the reaction of the Mapuche people in defence of their land as an internal security problem facing our countries," he said.

In an interview with IPS, Rafael González, spokesman for the Committee of Campesino Unity in Guatemala, said that "since the Sept 11 (2001) terror attacks (on New York and Washington), anyone who criticizes the establishment is dubbed a terrorist" by the US government.

In the view of anthropologist Pedro Ciciliano at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the NITC report is "exaggerated and fraught with errors typical of US intelligence based on biased information." — Dawn/The InterPress News Service