
The Indigenous Peoples' Right to live in Voluntary Isolation

In a world characterized by information, there are issues that have been made so invisible that the great majority of people do not know that they exist. This is the case of the Indigenous Peoples living in voluntary isolation. Most are not even aware that some of these peoples have not yet been contacted by the predominating society and in other cases, have resisted integrating it in spite – or as a result of – having been contacted.

To this ignorance is added a second one: that the very existence of these peoples is seriously threatened by the destructive advance of “development.” Roads penetrating into the forests to extract timber, oil, minerals or to promote land settlement for agriculture and cattle-raising, can be labelled “roads of death” for these peoples. They bring unknown diseases their bodies are unready for, the destruction of the forests that provide for their livelihoods, pollution of the waters that they drink, where they bathe and fish, confrontations with those who intend to take over their territory, the death of their millenary cultures.

To understand the problem we need to divest ourselves of our “truths” and try to put ourselves in their place. All of us live in territories with very precise limits. They do too. All of us are jealous custodians of our frontiers when faced with potential or real external aggression. They are too. All of us have our feeling of nationality, with a specific language, culture and knowledge. They have too.

What would we do if a group of armed foreigners entered our territory without our authorization? The same as they do: we would resist in every possible way, including armed resistance. However while we would be considered to be “heroic patriots” they are classified as “savages.” Why is this? Because we are the ones to describe resistance.

It is important to emphasize that these peoples were never asked if they wanted to be Brazilians or Ecuadorians or Peruvians or Congolese or Cameroonian or Indonesian or Malaysian. Each government (colonial or national) simply drew up a map and determined that all the territories included within its frontiers “belong” to the corresponding country or colony. No matter that these peoples had been living on these territories before the very creation of national states or foreign colonization. They were in fact “nationalized.”

Again the question: what would we do if we had to face a similar situation? Would we accept the imposed change of nationality or would we resist it? Surely we would do everything possible to continue being what we are and what we want to be.

The difference is that these peoples are in total inferiority of conditions to resist the devastating advance of predominant society. For this reason, all of us who believe in justice have the obligation to provide them, under many forms, with the support that they need – although they do not ask for it – to defend their rights and to stop the silent and invisible genocide they are being subjected to.

In this respect, the first thing we can do is inform the world that they exist, as an initial step towards the objective of gathering determination in defence of their right to live in their territories in the way

they themselves decide, including the right to remain outside a society they have no wish to belong to.

In addition to this, we must do everything possible to protect their territories from outside invasion linked to activities such as logging, mining, oil exploitation and settlement. In the first place, this implies legal recognition of their rights by the State and strict compliance with legal provisions vis-à-vis possible non-authorized invasion. It also implies that the State explicitly excludes these territories from its development programmes.

In fact, we should not be surprised that there are peoples who do not want to integrate a society such as the one we live in, that thrusts millions of people into poverty and hunger and that destroys everything it touches (climate, forests, grasslands, wetlands, soil, air). These peoples are neither poor nor ignorant. They are different and are showing enormous wisdom in wanting to maintain their isolation. In the contemporary world where so many people dream of living on an idyllic tropical island, they are integrating something very similar. But it is increasingly difficult for them to defend themselves from external aggression. Let us help them to live on their own island until the day comes when they freely decide to integrate the predominant society – if ever they decide to do so.

Ricardo Carrere