
Venezuela: social and environmental demands to new President

On 22 April (Earth Day), a demonstration was staged in Caracas to put pressure on the new government on a number of crucial social and environmental issues. The demonstration included environmental and other groups, as well as representatives from indigenous communities facing the destruction of their forests, rivers and culture resulting from the activities of mining, oil, logging and electricity corporations. Indigenous peoples' delegates came from their faraway communities in Gran Sabana, Imataca and the Orinoco Delta. Some of the slogans voiced during the demonstration --which received support and applause from the public-- reflect the different types of problems which need to be addressed by the government:

"President Chávez: a new type of country is impossible without environmental conscience";
"Solidarity with the Yupca, Bari, Pemon and Warao indigenous peoples in defence of their environmental and cultural heritage"; "Economic development is impossible if Nature is destroyed";
"Water, forests and soils are the true riches"; "Imataca yes, transnationals no"; "Respect for indigenous territories".

The demonstrators reached the Presidential Palace and given the absence of the President, continued their march to the Foreign Office, where the Chancellor agreed to meet them and expressed his support for an open dialogue between the relevant government officials and the organizations involved in the issues raised at the demonstration.

Among the main issues to be addressed in such dialogue are: the support of the Governor of Zulia to activities damaging to the indigenous peoples of Sierra de Pirajá; President Chávez's support for mining in the Imataca reserve, the government's support to coal and other mining activities in different regions, the lack of government policies to help the poorest State of Venezuela (Delta Amacuro) and the widespread problems derived from oil exploitation activities.

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