
Indigenous peoples excluded at COP IV

Representatives of the indigenous and local communities present at the meeting room of the Contact Group on Article 8j (*) of the Convention of Biological Diversity at the IV Conference of the Parties, that took place recently in Bratislava, Slovakia, declared their total disapproval with a decision of the Presidency of the Group on May 12th, that excluded them from the negotiation round. After the declaration they left the room.

Senator Lorenzo Muelas, that was representing the indigenous peoples of Colombia, accused the Presidency of ignoring indigenous communities' rights and acting in favour of the big biotechnology holdings, that are supported by Northern governments. The Presidency's decision was also severely criticised by most of the governments represented at the Group.

As a consequence of this arbitrary decision, most of the indigenous delegates at COP IV decided to leave the Conference. They sealed their lips with plastic tape to demonstrate that they had been forced to remain silent. According to the Brazilian government, that promoted the idea of excluding the indigenous representatives, they were authorized to attend the plenary discussions but not the negotiations round. On the contrary Brazilian environmentalist organizations considered that the rules had been modified and that what the Brazilian Foreign Office really wants is to avoid transparency in the discussions.

Sources: Diana Pombo, 13/5/98; Fabio Schivartche, 14/5/98

(*) Article 8 (j) "Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices;"