

## International Delegation on Indigenous Rights Finds Substantial Progress and Serious Challenges

### *Executive Summary*

A delegation from the Nicaragua Network based in the United States and with 35 years in solidarity with Nicaragua, from March 16 to 25, visited the indigenous territories of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) of Nicaragua to investigate the situation of the rights of the indigenous to their own land and resources and to health care and education.



Under the current government, Nicaragua has advanced more than any other country in the recognition of the rights of the indigenous to their land. Four of the five stages of demarcation and titling of indigenous lands in the RAAN under Law 445 have been completed. The fifth state, the legal removal of illegal colonizers from titled indigenous land and the prevention of further land invasions has barely begun. One of the principal goals of the delegation was to learn about the threat these invaders presented to the UNESCO-recognized Bosawas Biosphere Nature Reserve, which is defended by the indigenous Mayangna.

The treasurer of the Mayangna Tuahka Indigenous Territorial Government, Roberto Johnny, told the group from the Nicaragua Network, “We have so many problems with the advance of the agricultural frontier, but when we present our complaints to the government in Managua, they have no answer.”

The group saw as positive the process used by the Indigenous Territorial Government of the Mayangna Sauni As who, with an order from the judge and a team from the National Police and the Ecological Battalion of the Army, captured and jailed several men who were selling land illegally, but this needs to happen more often. There are not enough Ecological Battalions in the Army to protect the Bosawas Reserve and the resources of the indigenous from these invaders.

The indigenous leaders protested the environmental degradation of their lands noting that the Bosawas was especially threatened. The leaders told the group that by clearing these forests, the invaders were destroying the lungs of Central America. They also stated that many rivers were polluted by chemicals from gold mining.

The delegation saw another problem: In many communities there was a health center but there was no money to pay the nurse and no medicine. And there was no way to transport seriously ill patients to the closest hospital. At the same time that modern medicines are lacking, the knowledge of traditional natural medicines is being lost because of the lack of policies to promote the continued development of that medicine.

In the case of bilingual, intercultural education, the delegation noted that it functioned well in several communities that they visited although community residents said that the textbooks needed to be brought up to date. The government now provides Saturday high school classes for the indigenous communities. While seeing this as positive, the communities are anxious to have secondary schools with classes every day in order to properly educate their youth.

In summary, delegation members found that all of the positive work of the demarcation and titling under Law 445 is being threatened by the invasion of colonizers from other parts of Nicaragua and they reiterated the petition of the Indigenous Territorial Governments that the central government invest more resources in resolving this problem.