

## **Indigenous Peoples and the FTAA: Strategies for Influence**

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PHOTO: Quito, Ecuador. FTAA Ministerial Meeting protests. Huipala, indigenous solidarity symbol, used as gas mask.

## **Indigenous Peoples and the FTAA: Strategies for Influence**

Indigenous peoples are often considered to be one of the societal groups worst disfranchised and least considered in the processes of economic globalization and Free Trade. How, if at all, can indigenous people of the Americas ensure that their rights and concerns be considered in the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)? In order to address this question with consideration for realistic situations and suggestions,

this study will analyze one key indigenous organization that is active in response to the FTAA, contextualized within the general relationship of indigenous peoples and Free Trade. The case study will center around CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador. We will explore CONAIE's stance on free trade and assess their opportunities for inclusion and influence on actual policy in the FTAA. The study will ask what approaches would serve CONAIE's best interest, and what the utility of those approaches is for other indigenous communities elsewhere.

In terms of the indigenous relationship to economic globalization, Ecuador is a key country within the Western Hemisphere because it has a high indigenous population (25% of the total population), and because that population has been organized around economic issues for many years. CONAIE is particularly interesting as a case study feature because it is active as a broad-based national organization that employs both grassroots projects and larger-scale, often international, non-governmental campaigns in order to have its voice heard. CONAIE has been instrumental in indigenous responses to the FTAA and, more currently, to the pending Andean Free Trade Agreement (FTA)\* between Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and the United States (Bolivia is keeping observer status in AFTA negotiations).

### **the indigenous circumstance**

All indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere have been irreversibly affected by colonization. In this sense, different indigenous peoples and nations are tied by their related histories of oppression under colonial powers through economic and cultural means. Even now, the indigenous circumstance in most countries is a troubled one; indigenous populations are markedly poor, under-served by public infrastructure,

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\* "Andean FTA" is a misnomer; the accord is simply called the FTA of Peru, Ecuador and Colombia with the United States. For convenience this study refers to the agreement using the term AFTA.

suffering social stigma and discrimination and afflicted by social problems that come hand in hand with severe social marginalization.

Indigenous peoples in each country remain largely unsatisfied with the state response to their sufferings and concerns; entry into a state-endorsed free trade agreement designed by elite members of elite countries threatens to aggravate what are already unfavorable domestic conditions for indigenous groups. According to Beverly Bell and Juan Haughton in their analysis Latin American Movements in the Context of Globalization, “The historic trends of systematic exclusion and dispossession continue in Trade Negotiations such as the FTAA that operate without the consent or consultation of civil society.” (Bell, Haughton. 2).

The countries in the Western Hemisphere with the largest indigenous populations are in Latin America; Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador have the highest percentage of indigenous populations. These southern countries’ economic influence is pathetic in comparison with the power of the North American hegemons (particularly the USA); the ability, used or unused, of ‘developing’ nations to advocate for their marginalized populations is significantly compromised in the fora of international trade and finance institutions. Where their influence is mitigated by the economic hierarchy, their power is minimal. What’s more, the capacity of states to protect their populations through regulatory means is being eroded through current forms of economic rule-making. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) articles such as Chapter 11 in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) open the opportunity for corporations and states to sue foreign governments by claiming that state regulations (environmental, tariff-based or otherwise) are impediments to their “free” trade. The effects of NAFTA on national sovereignty have been widely criticized as severely detrimental to regulatory protections of citizens and the environment. “Under the current terms of economic integration, national sovereignty itself has become virtually expendable, its power often trumped by laws of international trade pacts and the demands of international financial institutions” (Bell, Houghton. 6).

Considerations of sovereignty and negotiating power aside, countries do not come to the table with the socio-economic positions of their poorest populations in mind, they

come prepared to advertise the saleable aspects of their markets, and to pursue consumer markets elsewhere.

Despite the fact that indigenous groups in nearly every country of the Western Hemisphere have organized to address the problems with free trade, there is no location within the FTAA text where indigenous groups are mentioned, included or specifically considered. Indigenous interests go unrepresented not only in the FTAA but in the trade institutions 'above' and surrounding the FTAA in the global trade regime. This is true of the keystone international organization of the WTO, and also of the less renowned yet highly powerful plurilaterals such as the OECD, QUAD and G7/G8, as well as the IMF/World Bank.

In this global context of nations, regional blocks, multinational corporations and international financial institutions, all of whom are vying for economic power, indigenous communities are at the bottom of the barrel. Still, they are some of the most vocal and most organized groups when it comes to free trade and the many workings of the global economy, having mobilized countless protests, national and international alliances, and the publication of educational materials and declarations. Their common experience of economic and cultural marginalization sets them at the lowest rank of clout influencing government, but it also unifies many groups nationally and internationally, making the indigenous position more visible and, in the eyes of some, more viable as a leader of the body politic.

### **the indigenous stance**

It must be made clear that indigenous cultures in the Americas are distinct from each other. No two indigenous nations share identical situations or approaches in relation to the globalized, neoliberal economy. In the last decade alone, the hemisphere has seen the rise of tactics as disparate as militant armed factions (Chiapas Zapatistas) to bureaucratic governmental associations (UN indigenous fora and reports). Even within the CONAIE, a national indigenous organization of a single country, each group is of distinct ethnic identity, and therefore distinct circumstances and concerns as well. "In the future, CONAIE leaders hope that indigenous people will be called by their cultural name

(e.g., Shuar, Otavalero, et. al) as opposed to the general label ‘indigenous’” (Gerlach, 67).

However, because indigenous peoples are now facing a current global economy that operates on “Western” capitalist political-economic thought that has evolved from the colonial model, they are threatened by free trade in similar ways; analogous situations and common concepts of resistance emerge. Because of a shared sense of threatening commercial exploitation of resources and people, the myriad concerns of CONAIE and Ecuador’s indigenous align with many of those voiced in by other civil society groups the world over. This quote from the Guayquil Declaration of the CONAIE-led *Ecuador Decide coalition* campaign reflects these concerns as particular to AFTA.

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) threatens the destruction of agricultural, pharmaceutical, artesian and industrial production, with the subsequent elimination of sources of employment. It forces the mass importation of foreign products, some that are prohibited in other countries, tries to control and privatize our water reserves and restrict the use of generic medicines, to overexploit the natural resources, sacrifice our biodiversity, and our ancestral knowledge and values, imposing on us a conception of intellectual property that implies the removal of our biological and cultural resources. The FTA will mean the annihilation of our national laws and the loss of our rights (Campaña Ecuador Decide).

Stated most simply, the basic aims of these indigenous movements are self-determination (the meaning of this ranging from participation in localized democracy to complete national autonomy within a state), cultural survival, and economic sustainability (meaning both the survival and sustainability of local economies and the opportunity for local products to be sold on the global market). For most, protection of the environment is a key concern because preservation of traditional cultures relies on preservation of the natural world, and because local (rural) economies of indigenous peoples rely on natural resources.

Working with what they have, hundreds of thousands of indigenous people in the Americas have been organizing grassroots community initiatives as well as configuring institutional bodies with which to lobby, not only *against* destruction and over-exploitation for commercial profit, but *for* the international development of infrastructures that support the environment and their communities. There are strategic

and issues-based commonalities between many indigenous movements in the Americas, and on these bases groups have begun integrating across international borders in increasing numbers and with greater organization in the recent decade. Both the Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas (Ottawa, Canada, March, 2001) as well as the Hemispheric Social Alliance (meeting in Quito, Ecuador at the same time as the FTAA ministerial November 2002), released formal, international indigenous declarations regarding the FTAA.

It is important to note that indigenous resistance movements to the neoliberal model of free trade are not necessarily also against the idea of international integration, as is articulated in the following quotes:

“We Indigenous peoples know that the Free Trade Agreement will bring greater levels of poverty, social exclusion and the death of the productive apparatus of the country. (We) are not against trade nor integration, but yes (we are against) the business that the big economic groups want with the country, to market its wealth, its natural resources, to the transnational and the North American governments” (Zhingri).

*Integration is different from Free Trade.*

One must not confuse the new free trade agreements with the processes of integration. Agreements of trade opening such as the NAFTA or the proposed FTAA are restricted to an economic plan and do not contemplate a political integration. In fact, free trade agreements ensure that politics stay subordinated to commercial goals, and can therefore prevent political and cultural integration between nations. In contrast, a process of integration contemplates the economic aspects but also incorporates the social, political and cultural linking between countries. Examples in the sense, although still imperfect, are the European Union and Mercosur. These processes of integration incorporate political aspects; they appear to generate policies of coordinated regional development between countries and amplify democracy, for instance with regional Parliaments. (Gudynas, Acosta).

**the case for total rejection**

Before considering CONAIE's potential strategies for influence on the FTAA, the case for total rejection of the agreement must be acknowledged.

The Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), (a coalition representing over 50 million people and comprising 26 sectoral networks from the Americas, of which CONAIE is a member), works specifically with citizens' mobilization in response to Free Trade. The HSA has denounced the FTAA ministerial declarations' promises of free trade as an asset for 'employment generation, raising living standards, creating greater opportunities for people to emerge from poverty, foreign debt, coordination with environmental and labor policies'. The HSA's official statement in response to the Quito 2002 FTAA Ministerial Declaration states: "Many points in the ministerial declaration only serve to strengthen our conviction that the solution is not to add to or modify details of the FTAA but to continue with our hemispheric campaign against the FTAA. After more than eight years of experience under NAFTA, which serves as the parameter and model for the FTAA negotiations, there is abundant evidence that completely contradicts these promises." (HSA).

Centuries after the colonists' first arrival, nation-states in the Americas are charged with the task of 'moral rehabilitation' as understanding of past atrocities against indigenous peoples becomes more and more universal, and as indigenous nations stake their own independence and sovereignty. This is a process of emancipating indigenous peoples from a history where rule was imposed upon them by foreign governments, economic frameworks, and force. All FTA's essentially create new laws under which indigenous people (and the rest of citizens), must live – introducing new rules 'from above', and imposing a 'new transnational neoliberal constitution' (ACINC,5). The nature of these rules is, by and large, seen by indigenous peoples as economically, ecologically, and culturally exploitative; the current neoliberal economic and political model is often called 'neocolonialism'- something that indigenous peoples will readily reject after centuries of colonial oppression.

Therefore, the validity of an argument for total rejection of all FTA's must be recognized. For those dedicated to the realization of indigenous rights, it may be considered absolutely worthless to be complicit in any FTA - asking for presence within the negotiation processes being one form of such complicity.

Total rejection of free trade is, in fact the most common stance taken by indigenous groups. Statement 17 of the *Manifiesto Andino contra el ALCA* (Andean

Manifesto against the FTAA) by the Andean Forum (of which the CONAIE is a participating organization), states:

The participants in this Forum reaffirm that the FTAA is an absolutely unacceptable option for our nations; we demand that the governments assume responsibility in the definition of national policies of economic development that promote well-being, development and national sovereignty; and, overall, that defend our *campesino* farms which are the base of food security for our peoples.

This said, there exist opportunities for influence on the FTAA, some of which are already engaged. Within the *Manifiesto Andino contra el ALCA*, for instance, the Andean Forum also demands spaces of dialogue within the international decision-making process.

### **communication barriers**

When considering whether indigenous organizations can participate in the trade processes which affect them, there lies a conflict at the most basic level. The language of the trade negotiations is many worlds away from the language of the indigenous peoples. Not as English or Spanish versus an indigenous language, but by the divergent premises of thought around trade, its utility, and its consequences.

If contemporary liberal political thought presents itself as a universal idiom for understanding and reflecting upon social and political relations, where does this leave indigenous political thought and indigenous understandings of their rights to land, culture and self-rule? (Iverson, Patton, Sanders, 1)



Indigenous groups are organizing institutionally, and are engaging in bureaucratic realms (judicial processes regarding constitutional rights around issues of territory and resources, for example). While these efforts are commendable, the most genuinely reflective methods of delivering the peoples' voice are the declarations and explanations which speak in the straightforward and often simple terms of indigenous communities that to lived realities affected by the global economy. Trade ministers and top business leaders concerned with the FTAA do not speak this language nor heed it with much credit, economic logic prevents it.

When the conversation is distilled, it becomes clear that the aspirations of indigenous groups are in many ways antithetical to the aspirations and effects of neoliberalism.

*From the perspective of the indigenous peoples and nations, to think of a regional integration is to think of communal identities, forms of co-living in harmony with the environment, and economic relations with the sustenance of fairness. Without these bases, the integrations are only free trade agreements that offer the possibility for the big fish to eat the little ones. In this sense, the FTAA is a proposal that goes against the principals of our nationalities and peoples, generating more unemployment because it is not a model of equitable integration. .... It is necessary to work towards an economic, political, social, technological and cultural integration that takes into account the diversity and plurinationalism of each country, and deepens in intercultural relations, putting emphasis on the identities of each nation and continent, and the defense of the environment.*

-Luis Macas. President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), from his work "Una minga contra el ALCA". October 14, 2002.

Indigenous organizations are in the unique position of being 'middle people' between large institutions and local communities; they serve as interpreters by bringing the concerns of communities to the attention of higher-up decision making bodies. Rather than entirely conforming their efforts to meet the solely profit-oriented economic lens of "trade-talk", indigenous movements are charged with balancing systemic involvement and the ground level work. In most cases what this looks like is indigenous organisations continuing work in popular education, popular declarations and informal connections with other groups while at the same time establishing official NGO's, formal international alliances, and producing documents prepared in a format more legible to

those in control of trade processes. CONAIE, in large part, is actively doing all these things.

## CONAIE

To understand the role that the CONAIE plays in the indigenous movement and policy influence, one must understand the structure of the organisation itself. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador came into being on 16 November, 1986; it had formed over a long period of gradual mobilization (Gerlach, 69). As a political movement of the national level, CONAIE amalgamates all of the indigenous movements in Ecuador. The structural organization serves from the bottom up. *Cabildos* in communities are the basic unit of the greater organization; to establish a *cabildo* and join the CONAIE, a community group must first have a well-established practice of *mingas*. (The concept of the *minga* is essentially shared community service; building a school, road construction, or digging irrigation ditches are all common examples of *mingas*). Unions of *cabildos* form provincial federations. Provincial federations within three geographic areas combine to form the regional federations: the Amazon, or *oriente* region, organized under the auspices of the CONENIAE (est. 1980), the highlands, or *sierra* region with the ECUARUNARI (est.1972), and the coastal region with the COICE. This regional design is intended to ensure representation of the diverse ethnicities and indigenous tendencies that exist in each one of the large regions of the country.

The CONAIE unified each of these regional federations, and brought an umbrella administrative and mobilizing function. Nationally, CONAIE is lead by a number of indigenous people elected to the positions of President, Vice President, and Secretaries of Organization and Promotion, Human Resources, Women, Health, and Education. While the CONAIE leaders and permanent office are based in Quito, assemblies and congresses throughout Ecuador. The organization is structured to operate with direction taken from the ground up, and local communities are invested with the decision-making power to follow the lead of national CONAIE initiatives or not.

In 1990, CONAIE led a now world-renowned uprising of indigenous people in Ecuador. Major highways and access roads to the capitol were blocked, markets were boycotted, water supplies were cut off to urban areas, military personnel were kidnapped and held hostage until they were released when the government signed an agreement with the CONAIE. The mass disruption generated sudden attention for indigenous issues and sparked a new national tone of recognition, leading to indigenous concerns being taken more seriously than they had ever been. The uprising “shattered stereotypes of the passive ‘humble Indian; and established a political presence for CONAIE” (Selverston, 140).

CONAIE’s principal objective is the defense of indigenous Ecuadorian nations on economic, socio-cultural and political fronts; defending the right to self-determinations in ethnic territories, the conservation of cultural features of indigenous identity and the full recognition of indigenusness in comparison to the rest of Ecuadorian citizens. Their efforts have always been centered around indigenous land and territory rights and the demand of plurinationalism, (a state in which it would be officially recognized that within Ecuador exist many distinct nationalities). More recently, CONAIE’s efforts to resist neoliberalism have also taken stage. This quote from Luis Macas, a long time indigenous CONAIE leader, exemplifies the stance on a “modernized” neoliberal economic model:

The application of neoliberalism is quite well designed to finish with everything – the disappearance of centuries-old cultures, the disappearance of peoples, of life itself. I don’t know how to interpret this term modernization. For us, modernization obviously is the changing of structures that don’t currently serve to advance at least some of the fundamental elements that are components of the development of the humanity that we currently live... I have only seen a single dimension here, which is the economic part. And we know clearly that this comes from the interests of the sectors that have always hegemonized economic power, and therefore political power. They try to monopolize in their hands all the resources that in one way or another are also the conquest of our peoples. For example, here in Ecuador what they is to actually confuse the terms modernization and privatization, that is, to use the label modernization to privatize the state’s resources, which are resources that belong to all Ecuadorians (Gerlasch, 71).

Into its network of mobilization the CONAIE invites other sectors such as labour , farming and environmental organizations (Gerlach, 72). Likewise, the organization has

built alliances by supporting the initiatives of other civil society groups. Since its inception, CONAIE has been supported by outside alliances, anthropologists, environmental and social NGO's like OXFAM and the Inter-American Foundation.

Its status as both a radical grassroots organization and an internationally connected NGO has kept CONAIE involved in Ecuador's infrastructure for some time now, which has led to a number of federally significant successes for the organization. In 1989, during the presidency of Rodrigo Borja, CONAIE was granted the position of deciding who would serve as directors of bilingual and alternative programs. This meant that indigenous people had control over their own educational materials, a move that threatened dominant culture, particularly politicians who had relied on manipulation of the school system in the past (Selverston, 144). Also under the Borja administration, CONAIE was given official representation of indigenous people in negotiations with the government. While this didn't result in an immediate revolution in the treatment of indigenous people, it did reinforce the presence of the CONAIE and its proclamations. The Borja administration was not amicable towards the CONAIE's every initiative, however. The organisation once filed a one-million dollar lawsuit against Texaco for environmental and health damages; Ecuador's ambassador at the time supported Texaco, not CONAIE, in Washington DC (Hey, 45). Regardless, CONAIE was becoming increasingly revered as a key actor on the political scene.

CONAIE and other indigenous organisations place indigenous concerns and perspectives on the Ecuadorian agenda. These groups are very far from controlling the state, but they have achieved recognition as a legitimate voice to be heard in national policymaking (Eckstein, Crowley, 267).

### **opportunities for influence**

We will examine the opportunities for influence that CONAIE has vis a vis the FTAA in three areas: local autonomous initiatives, national lobbying on the Ecuadorian government, and direct influence within the trade negotiation process. These three areas exist as concentric circles, though distinct with particular actors and issues, each affects the next. Autonomous local initiatives and national lobbying could take effect on actions at the level of national concern, and lead to influence on Ecuador's negotiating stance. In

turn, this could sway official recommendations and decisions at the tables of AFTA, the FTAA and the WTO. Similarly, the actual negotiation process of the FTAA could also be affected by direct campaigning on the part of CONAIE, to assess this possibility we will observe the FTAA process itself.

#### *autonomous local initiatives*

The globalized economy presents a new context for self-determination for indigenous peoples. The hostility of the multinational corporation-dominated free market, a neoliberal ideology which increasingly advocates the minimalization of state intervention, and a global economy designed to favour the rich necessitate greater autonomy for all movements; the state can no longer be trusted as the sole provider of support for communities or the single avenue for democratic participation. *Cabildo*-run projects define most of the autonomous initiatives supported by CONAIE. Beyond these and issues-based mobilizations (protests etc), the CONAIE leads projects that enable citizens and meet community needs. For instance, the organization has run bilingual literacy campaigns and education initiatives across the country, this supports CONAIE's aims for confronting Free Trade because it builds a wider base of engaged citizens; when people are empowered to communicate they can better stake claims and actuate in the 'civilized' spheres of government and business.

#### *national lobbying, alliance building*

Born out of alliances between existing indigenous federations for the purpose of national unification, CONAIE has always focused on national lobbying as one of its primary activities. In its history, the organization has focused on solidifying national and international links with civil society groups of all kinds, endowing it with a political voice that has many strong voices emphasizing its message. The CONAIE consistently mobilizes thousands of people in public protest around specific issues and incidents, pressuring the government to take note. For example, 1992 mobilizations in Quito brought thousands from across the country to address the specific case of Huaorani indigenous land having been given to a foreign oil company as a concession by the Ecuadorian government. In when the FTAA ministerial meeting was held in Quito, 2002,

CONAIE orchestrated fora, mass protest marches, a media campaign and a brief hearing between 40 indigenous and civil society representatives and the negotiating FTAA ministers. As well, the organization produces declarations aimed at influencing government, media and public opinion, while also forwarding official proposals for policy (such as the Agrarian Reform Proposal, which included macro and local considerations) (Gerlach, 64). Most recently, CONAIE has spearheaded the *Ecuador Decide* campaign, collecting over 500 000 signatures in favour of a referendum against the Andean Free Trade Agreement with the United States (Declaration Andino).

*within the ftaa process*

The single most direct avenue for CONAIE to influence the FTAA would be to enter the trade negotiation process. Being that the FTAA is an amalgamation of democratic states, it could be expected that the agreement follows a democratic process of creation. However, the ministerial meetings of the FTAA are closed to civil society. While civil society is barred from any place near the negotiating table, business leaders hold meetings parallel to the ministerial meetings where official ‘suggestion drafts’ are written and later passed to negotiators. CONAIE has identified this process as “part of a principal of confidentiality that contradicts with any democracy, because it implies a loss of sovereignty and establishes a supranational normative (body) with eminent commercial and economic purposes of profit to corporations” (CONAIE).

The FTAA meetings do not afford even the tokenistic participation that the WTO does, where a few high-profile NGO’s (Council of Canadians, Sierra Club etc) carry observer status for selective aspects of the meetings. Still, although the WTO may permit certain NGO’s to be present at certain specific times, they are not invited to participate whatsoever. The exclusive nature of negotiation processes is not unique to the FTAA and WTO, in fact the lack of transparency and inclusivity is the most hotly criticized aspect of the entire system of international trade and finance institutions. In Mutual Misgivings: Civil Society Inclusion in the Americas, Yasmine Shamsie comments on this issue. She asserts that multiple actors beyond state representatives must be included in multilateral governance, and that this necessary reform “demands that the ethos of the hemisphere’s decision-making systems, now more than ever, be

based on principles of consultation, transparency, and accountability.”<sup>i</sup> The realization of these needs would affect the existence and volume of indigenous voice within the trade process immensely.

For CONAIE and other civil society organizations, a key question to ask is whether there exists any body within FTAA infrastructure that could effectively serve to bring feedback, research and consultation about the lived realities of the 8.8 million citizens within the FTAA.

At present, the only aspect of the FTAA designed to deal with any issues or concerns related to civil society is the Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society, dubbed with the acronym SOC. Governments are not obliged to have representatives who attend SOC meetings, nor are governments obliged to heed, or even listen to, any of the recommendations received through the “Open Invitation to Civil Society in the FTAA Participating Countries to present their written contributions” that is advertised on the official FTAA website. The last report of the SOC to the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) was in May 2003. The last organizational report to the SOC was in June 2004. This analysis is written in March 2005, therefore approximately one year has passed since there was any activity between the Trade Negotiations Committee and the SOC; the last time the SOC reported to the TNC was approximately 2 years ago.

There is no official commentary from any FTAA committee that addresses indigenous concerns directly. What does exist within one SOC report is brief mention of indigenous concern, alongside notes on other societal sectors that have been prominent in objection to free trade. This is found in the record of indigenous opposition to the FTAA contained in the Summary Report on the First (and only) Issue Meeting with the Participation of Hemispheric Civil society (held in Sao Paolo, June 25, 2003). Under ‘Remarks on the FTAA in general and its impact on the participating countries’ it states: “Finally, representatives from some indigenous communities expressed their opposition to the process, stating that it threatened the core spiritual and cultural values of their communities.” This was prefaced by a narrative from the FTAA committee responsible for the meetings that stated “a position supporting the creation of the FTAA, given the

positive and wide-ranging impact it will have on the economies of the countries, job creation, and poverty reduction.”

The SOC process is, despite its name, extremely biased in favour of business and its process is, for the most part, defunct. Within the text of the TNC there have been suggestions of a post-entry-into-force of the FTAA permanent social committee. Because these have only been occasional suggestions, and because no such committee would even be discussed as a real option until the FTAA has been signed and ratified, little weight should be put on the idea; a future committee would not necessarily do any better a job of incorporating civil society's concerns than the existing FTAA structure does.

### ***recommendations***

In what ways should CONAIE expand its strategies for the best interests of indigenous people in Ecuador? In terms of existing assets for effective future work, the structure of the CONAIE itself resists the commercial exploitation that is feared of the FTAA. The locality of *cabildo* governance supported by provincial, regional and national links of one organisation is a systemic strength for otherwise disenfranchised peoples. If this structure of local-national self-governance can be maintained, CONAIE will be kept in good stead - stability and connections being powerful aspects of any organization facing adversity. The structure of the organization is also conducive to democratic decision making, which will prove helpful for future endeavours as well. While the organization is already engaged in many effective initiatives, CONAIE could narrow its focuses in line with their specific intentions regarding free trade.

CONAIE and other indigenous groups in similar positions need to either reject Free Trade entirely and mobilize accordingly with the goal of preventing any FTA's (including the so far unmentioned bilateral agreements) from being signed, *or*, they need to decide to strive for affecting ministerial negotiating positions and the FTAA process itself.

What is vital to the success of indigenous organizations like CONAIE that are working on behalf of indigenous peoples is that they be constantly active at the community level - maintaining relevance, connection and rapport with the citizens they



are working for - while also being constantly active in the international arena, where new trade agreements, a variety of fora, and multilateral initiatives incorporate contribution from these indigenous interests, or, at least, have the indigenous representatives knocking at the door of the decision-room with an official declaration in-hand and a loud, clear voice that addresses the negotiators directly.

The following suggestions are actions that would aid efforts at both rejection and reform:

- The Declaration of Andean Societies, produced by civil society organizations, and led by the CONAIE-fronted Ecuador Decide campaign, suggests the three following actions:

- To strengthen the links with democratic organizations in the United States to expand the disclosure of the harmful effects of the agreement and to bring issues before the United States parliament.
- To promote a declaration of the parliaments of Andean countries against the FTA (Andean Declaration).
- To promote that the actions which mark the Week of World Action against Free Trade, to be realized April 9<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, are oriented at halting the Andean FTA with the US.

- In the paper “Free Trade” Agreements and the Indigenous Peoples, the following stages are shared as essential to the creation a strategy that contemplates a progressive series of actions:

1. To know the content of the proposals inscribed in the FTAA, especially it's explicit and hidden objectives.
2. To obtain information to comprehend the negotiations in process.
3. To analyze and identify the possible impacts for indigenous peoples.
4. To consider which issues and which actors are at play in these negotiations.
5. To identify those with whom coordination and associations can be established.
6. To establish a strategy of action to follow, in particular amplifying the ambitions at the national and international level. (Gudynas, Acosta. 5.)

CONAIE should:

- mobilize at the Second Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas, which will be held in Argentina in October 2005. Broadly stated, the theme will be the “Relationship of

Indigenous Peoples to Lands and Resources in the Americas.” The Summit will include a main forum for deliberations, as well as an Indigenous Exposition and Business Summit. This summit, and other fora of its kind, should produce documents and strategic alliances for direct pressure on the FTAA SOC and the public exposure of the entire FTAA process criticizing the lack of transparency and representation within the deliberations.

- research free trade history: Consultations and reports on the economic, social and environmental effects of existing signed FTA’s (e.g. NAFTA, CAFTA, US bilateral agreements with Latin American countries) should be analyzed and used to inform both the creation of strategies against free trade and the reforming of the FTAA and other pending FTA’s.
- create official statements and disseminate them. Official statements should be provided to the SOC, all related or linking civil society organisations, and be made available to the public via the internet, local *cabildos* and any other media or far-reaching avenues of information.
- create educational materials, make those materials available to other civil organizations, disseminate educational resources in Spanish and Quichwa (the primary indigenous language in Ecuador) through rural and urban centers.
- utilize independent media. Maintain pressure on corporate media to publicize information about Free Trade Agreements and protest to them as a key item on the national agenda.
- scrutinize the existing trends towards neoliberalism that are functioning without a Free Trade agreement. This has already partially occurred; the CONAIE’s February society 16, 2005 declaration stated as one of its objectives “To denounce the privatization projects disguised under the concept of concessions” (CONAIE). The FTAA does not exist within a vacuum, it is couched inside the processes and rules of

other plurinational trade and finance institutions. These institutions (WTO, IMF/WB, G8, UN) should be pressured as well.

Economic globalization is not decelerating, and indigenous groups themselves have recognized that integration, whether guided within a plurinational infrastructure or not, is inevitable. If the CONAIE (or any other indigenous group working in its style), decides to focus explicitly upon refusing the FTAA, the creation of an alternative regional integration which holds indigenous concerns at central importance should be pursued. The most likely form that this would take at present is something of the nature of ALBA, a South American regional grouping which has been suggested by Venezuela and is supported by CONAIE.

Mercosur and the Community of South American Nations are already established as international fora in South America, while some believe them to be essentially defunct and serving no real social or economic end, others consider them more ‘friendly’ avenues of dialogue than the current FTA process. These existing venues could be retargeted for renewed efforts at indigenous representation on the world stage.

Alongside media pressure, and the organization’s dissemination of education materials regarding Free Trade, the government should be lobbied to produce nationally accessible basic information about the Free Trade Agreements it is negotiating. This could be fought for on a constitutional premise of free speech and the obligation of the government to provide necessary information to citizens regarding laws that affect them.

After a sufficient period of public education regarding free trade, a national referendum should be held on the participation of Ecuador in the FTAA and other FTA’s.

- The CONAIE-led *Ecuador Decide* campaign has collected over 500 000 signatures towards a referendum against the Andean FTA with the United States.
- The Association of Indigenous *Cabildos* North of Cauca, a coalition which groups with many other Colombian indigenous organizations, has released a call for a citizen’s popular consultation concerning the Andean FTA. In it they state a demand for the mayors of municipalities to facilitate public consultations ‘by way of resources and support, according to their possibilities and capacities, including interceding so that departmental and national authorities recognize, respect, and

facilitate this democratic process (ACINC, 5). This localized approach to public consultations could also serve the CONAIE.

In sum, CONAIE should consider it the responsibility of the organization to continue its current works and to expand its service as the ‘language-bridge’; the potential of a state-recognized national organization to have institutional voice is considerable, the fact that CONAIE derives that voice directly from Ecuadorian indigenous people is remarkable. Their efforts must be continually renewed and revised, evolving with the feedback of the citizenry they serve and in reference to the political circumstances they address. It is absolutely necessary to continue a domestic struggle for the democratic and ethnic rights of indigenous peoples while also addressing issues of international concern such as free trade. In Ecuador, this implies continued work towards the constitution of a plurinational state, “in which a genuinely democratic, participatory, just and common institutionalism is established, that implies the refoundation of the country and in which the rights of all are effectively guaranteed by an equitable society”, as CONAIE iterates in the February 16, 2005 declaration. At best, they would see some democratization of the FTA process through their efforts. Alternatively, they will maintain their rejection of unjust economic deals and will strengthen indigenous people’s capacity for self-sustainability and self-determination.

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