



CONTINENTAL INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS NETWORK – IDEA

THIRD ENCOUNTER OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS

“For the rights of indigenous peoples and unity in diversity”

Indigenous educators representing teachers’ unions and community organizations from ten countries in the Americas came together November 9-11 2012 in Tikal, Peten-Guatemala with the purpose of sharing experiences and strategies for strengthening indigenous education in the Western Hemisphere.

In addition to teachers and other educators, members of MoveMayas of Guatemala (Mayan Student Movement) also participated. The various presentations included the experience of the Nasa indigenous people of the province of Cauca, Colombia. The spokesperson for the tejido de educacion (education network or “tapestry”) of the Northern Cauca Indigenous Council (ACIN) explained that Colombia has a population of forty-two million people, of which 1,600,000 belong to 102 indigenous groups that speak 63 different languages and dialects.

The indigenous nations of Cauca include the Yanokona, Ingas, Esperara, Siapidaras, Misak, Nasa, Totoro and Kokonuco.

An Education System of Their Own

The following are excerpts from a presentation by ACIN’s tejido de educacion coordinator Jeann Nilton Campo on the educational system established by the indigenous peoples in Cauca:

An education system that really belongs to a people results from reflection on what education means in the perspective and practices that have been handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. It creates and recreates values, traditions, myths and artistic expressions as well as languages, means of production, wisdom and self-understanding to strengthen a shared view of the world, collective identity, spirituality, and traditional systems of authority, territoriality, political organization and other specific elements of the culture. All this is done by exercising autonomy in mutual exchange and reciprocity

with nature, with community members and with other cultures.

It is a vital process that creates knowledge, awareness, feeling, ways of being and learning that are acquired before birth and continue to be developed during all of the life cycles, guided by family, elders and the world of spiritual beings.

Thus, education is shaped by the world view of the peoples, our cultural identity, and it considers a balanced relationship with Mother Earth to be Holistic Well-Being (“wet wet finzenxi”).

Education should be a fundamental right and must be free and guaranteed by the state through educational policies that come from the grassroots; it must be a bottom-up approach with direct participation and real democracy. Education must contribute to building a critical perspective that defends the land, cultural identity and the construction of autonomy. It must teach collective awareness to resist colonization and to be able to move forward in self-determination.

This indigenous educational system, conceived by the peoples of the Cauca, represents a historical and cultural heritage. It comprises a set of political organizational processes and pedagogical and administrative procedures, combined with guidelines to respect the knowledge, actions, spaces and times of the different life cycles.

Interrelated and governed by their own rules in the search for cultural survival, indigenous people also seek harmony with Mother Earth, by strengthening their identity and spirituality and by revitalizing all of the dimensions of their cultures to fully exercise their territorial, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental autonomy.

Jeann Nilton Campo’s full presentation and other documents from the III Gathering of Indigenous Educators are now available on the IDEA Network webpage at

www.idea-network.ca