

Between 300 million and 400 million people around the world identify as indigenous. Although there is no standard definition of the term, it is widely accepted that 'indigenous peoples' are socially, culturally and economically different from other sections of the population where they live; practise their own customs and traditions; and descend from the original inhabitants of countries that were later conquered or colonised. A close, spiritual relationship with the land is a universal mark of indigenous cultures.

Many governments, especially in Africa and Asia, resist the notion that their population includes 'indigenous peoples'. Recognising an indigenous minority as a 'people' will, they fear, open the gates to claims to the right to secede and set up an independent state under the terms of the UN Charter. These concerns are largely unfounded, however; most indigenous peoples seek autonomy within the state, not secession.

A frequent criticism of indigenous peoples is that they are 'backward'. Yet by embodying humanity's longest-lived, most sustainable cultures, they live within the Earth's ecological limits more successfully than most societies. Yet today's dominant 'one-size-fits-all' approach to economic growth undermines their livelihoods; they generally experience 'development' as the destruction of their communities and expulsion from their lands.

Land rights denied

The Mapuche – 'People of the Earth' – are the largest indigenous nation in Chile. Numbering between 700,000 and 1.5 million, they comprise up to 10 per cent of the population. They traditionally inhabited Chile's southern provinces, resisting Spanish conquest for two centuries. Imperial Spain recognised Mapuche collective landownership and autonomy by treaty. But when Chile won independence in the nineteenth century it launched a brutal 25-year 'pacification' campaign, confiscating most Mapuche territories and pushing them on to *reducciones* (reservations). Even these meagre lands were encroached upon as European-descended Chileans and later immigrants took firmer hold of the country and its resources. Although many Mapuche migrated from the overpopulated reservations to urban centres, significant communities remained in the rural south, where their traditions, including use of their language *Mapudungun*, remain strong.

Salvador Allende's socialist government (1970–73) reinstated Mapuche collective landownership and took other steps to support Mapuche culture. This policy was reversed by General Pinochet's notorious 'Law for the Division of the Reserves and the Liquidation of the Indian Communities', which divided up Mapuche lands for sale to logging companies and other private interests.

With democracy's return in the 1990s, Chile passed a new 'indigenous law' to promote Mapuche development, and some progress has been achieved. However, on indicators such as income levels, educational attainment and life expectancy, the Mapuche lag badly behind most Chileans.

Resisting the dams

Since 1990 Chile, a democracy once again, has followed the same neo-liberal economic policies that the military embraced in the 1970s. With the accelerating exploitation of natural resources, the

The struggle of indigenous peoples: Chile's Mapuche

Indigenous peoples worldwide are fighting for political recognition and a greater say in decisions that affect their lives. Miles Litvinoff, a writer and editor on human rights, sustainable development and corporate responsibility issues, describes the plight of Chile's Mapuche



Mapuche protest, Santiago, Chile, October 2004

Photo: Meili Wivian Mapu

Mapuche have been pitched into bitter struggles.

The Bío-Bío River in south-central Chile flows through biodiversity-rich mountainous lands, home to the Pehuenche ('People of the Pines') branch of the Mapuche. Chile's national electricity company ENDESA – privatised under Pinochet and today Spanish-owned – used World Bank funds to build the Pangu hydroelectric dam, which opened in 1997. By then, 500 hectares of Pehuenche land were under water and 50 Pehuenche had been relocated.

In 1992 ENDESA announced plans for a second dam, upstream at Ralco, which would flood an area seven times larger than Pangu and displace 92 Pehuenche families. The plan ran contrary to new laws protecting the environment and indigenous peoples, so ENDESA had to propose ways to mitigate the damage. Mapuche organisations and state bodies deemed the measures inadequate. A World Bank consultant accused his employers and ENDESA of violating Pehuenche rights and behaving in a 'racist' manner. The government gave the go-ahead. Senior state officials resigned in protest.

ENDESA offered money and empty promises of employment to the Pehuenche in return for their land. Mapuche activists staged demonstrations and acts of sabotage. Four Pehuenche women, joint owners of 50 hectares, refused to sell. The case of sisters Nicolasa and Berta Quintremán went to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2003, after which a Chilean court halted construction – but by then the dam was almost built.

In January 2004 Mapuche leader Victor Anclaf was sentenced under Chile's notorious 'anti-terrorist' law – draconian legislation inherited from the Pinochet

years – for 'instigating arson' against ENDESA vehicles. Opposition crumbled. ENDESA offered the Quintremán sisters nearly US \$300,000 each plus land elsewhere. Now the country's largest hydro-power plant, Ralco opened in September 2004. Chile's centre-left President, Ricardo Lagos, earned praise by not attending the inauguration.

Under Pinochet, Chile sold hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest lands to timber companies at knock-down prices. World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank funds subsidised industrial-scale logging as private corporations clear-cut the south-central forests, replacing them with commercial pine and eucalyptus. Between 1985 and 1995 Chile lost an estimated 1.8 million hectares of native forest.

Much of the land affected – said to be the world's second-largest temperate rainforest – is claimed by the Mapuche under a treaty of 1890. But nowadays huge tracts that once supported their communities belong to forestry corporations. Most of the timber is exported to the USA, Europe and Japan. Marooned on their smallholdings, their water sources diminishing and heavily polluted, Mapuche households have paid a heavy price.

The Mapuche claim restitution of more than a million hectares overall. They have been unimpressed by a small-scale government scheme to buy back and return some of their lands. Likewise they criticise voluntary agreements between US wood importers and Chile's two leading timber companies as lacking the force of law.

Disputes between Mapuche communities and logging corporations began in the 1980s and continue today. Although many Mapuche protests have been

peaceful, militants have committed acts of sabotage against vehicles, buildings and plantations. The authorities have responded harshly.

The police often failed to distinguish peaceful protest from illegal actions that presented a genuine threat to public order by clamping down equally hard on both, sometimes with indiscriminate violence against women, children, and old people.

In May 2000 community leader Juana Calfunao Paillalef was taken into police custody and, it is alleged, beaten and tortured which resulted in her suffering a miscarriage. Her house was set on fire; her uncle is thought to have been murdered. Mapuche teenager Alex Lemun was shot and killed by uniformed police during a demonstration in November 2002. In 2003 two officers, husband and wife Jose Pino Ubilla and Miram Solís Fernández, fled Chile for political asylum in the UK after raising concerns about institutionalised police mistreatment of Mapuche detainees.

While the Carabineros remain immune from prosecution, the state has invoked 'internal security' legislation – including the Pinochet-style 'anti-terrorist' law – to arrest and interrogate Mapuche community leaders. Besides carrying heavier sentences, this legislation allows prosecutors to withhold evidence from the defence for six months and to conceal the identity of witnesses, who testify from behind screens. As Human Rights Watch points out, these provisions prevent the Mapuche accused from mounting an effective defence and 'unfairly [lump] them together with those responsible for the worst crimes, like mass murder.'

So far Chile's Supreme Court has supported application of the anti-terrorist law to Mapuche cases, overturning acquittals of lower courts. However, in November 2004, in what may mark a turning point, a southern regional court acquitted a group of Mapuche activists of such 'terrorism' charges on grounds of the weakness of evidence against them.

In March 2005 Mapuche representatives petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, DC, to alert the international community to what they claim is the persecution of the Mapuche people. They hope the Commission, which is reviewing the petition, will encourage the Chilean government to recognise their land rights and grant amnesty to Mapuche prisoners.

Recognition overdue for indigenous rights

Like all human societies – the Mapuche assert the right to live according to their values and vision of the future. The tide of opinion may be changing, if slowly. The UN's first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People ran from 1995 to 2004, and a second Decade will be proposed to the UN General Assembly later in 2005.

When UN Rapporteur Rodolfo Stavenhagen reported on the Mapuche's situation to the UN Human Rights Commission in 2004, he emphasised the validity of their struggle: 'Under no circumstances should legitimate protest activities or social demands by indigenous organisations and communities be outlawed or penalised.'

Real challenges remain. In conflicts over land and resources governments regularly claim that 'national interest' takes priority over indigenous peoples' rights and environmental protection. In this regard, Chile, like most other countries, has far to go before it can claim to be developing sustainably. The Mapuche will attest to that.

Population matters



Demographers from the Washington-based Population Reference Bureau believe the planet is in for uneven population swings between 2005 and 2050 following statistical analysis of infant mortality, age structure, population growth, life expectancy, incomes, and fertility rates. Rich countries will see falls in population while developing countries rapidly expand. By 2050 demographers believe the population of Africa will increase by a billion people, the United States by 120 million, and India will overtake China as the planet's most populous country. Bangladesh's population will have doubled to 280 million.

Nigeria will double in size to 300 million but Japan, because of a fall in birth rate (only 14 per cent of its population is under 15), may have shrunk in size by 100 million people. Eastern European countries will see a down shift in population. Bulgaria is expected to see a 40 per cent fall, Romania a 27 per cent fall, and Russia a fall of 17 per cent. In Western Europe the populations of Germany and Italy are expected to shrink by 10 per cent.

Twelve countries defined as politically, socially or environmentally volatile are projected to see huge increases. These include Yemen with a rise of 255 per cent. Other countries' increases include Palestine (211 per cent), Afghanistan (187 per cent), Kuwait (187 per cent), Kiribati (133 per cent), Vanuatu (124 per cent), Tuvalu (122 per cent), Bhutan (113 per cent) and Nepal (105 per cent). The world's developed countries are expected to grow by 4 per cent to over 1.2 billion. The population in developing countries could surge by 55 per cent more than 8 billion by 2050.



Child labour is increasing. There are 246 million children under 14 working in the world. 73 million child workers are less than 10 years of age. 2.5 million children work in developed economies. 25 million work in developing economies. 127 million – the largest number of working children under 14 years of age – work in the Asia Pacific region. 1 million children work in mines or quarries. Over 22,000 children die in work-related accidents each year.



Britain is expected to see a 5.5 million growth in population during the next 45 years. These projections were confirmed by a European Commission report published in March 2005, which pointed to a demographic time bomb and a widening gap between the EU and the US as Europeans' age and birth rates decline. The EU found that the fertility rate across Europe was not sufficient to replace the population. This may have a negative impact on economic growth. 'Ever larger migrant flows may be needed to meet the need for labour and safeguard Europe's prosperity', the report concludes. The EU identified five key factors in the low fertility rates across Europe: obstacles in private choices, late access to employment, job instability, the high cost of housing, and the lack of incentives (in the shape of state benefits for family growth, parental leave, child care and equal pay).



2004 saw the highest number of executions in the world for over a decade. Of the recorded 3,797 people executed (the minimum that could be confirmed), 3,400 were executed in China, which topped the death penalty league table: Iran came second with 159 executions, Vietnam third with 64, and the US fourth with 59. In March 2005, the US banned execution for crimes committed by minors. The US is one of the few democracies which implement the death penalty. A total of 144 death sentences were imposed in the US in 2003, the lowest level since 1977 (Amnesty International, March 2005).



The Arab world is young. Since infant mortality rates began to fall in the 1970s the population of the Middle East's 20 countries rose to more than 380 million (as against 100 million in 1950); nearly two-thirds are under 25. In Iraq the median age is 19 (as against 38 in Europe). Last year the UN revealed that since 1995, 16 of the world's 25 countries with the lowest median age experienced major civil conflicts. The World Bank says the Middle East and North Africa experienced the 'fastest expansion in educational attainment in the world between 1980 and 2000'. The new generation of Arabs, male and female, is 'the most educated in the region's history'. Over the next ten years the region will need to create 37 million new jobs for first-time job-seekers, as well as 19 million jobs to eliminate current unemployment.



Over three per cent of the adult population of the United States – nearly seven million people – are under the control of the prison system – imprisoned, on parole or on probation. The US prisons held over two million people in 2004 making the country, along with Russia, the biggest incarcerators in the world (US Justice Department, July 2004). In 2003, federal prison populations rose by 2.3 per cent and county and state penitentiary populations by 3.9 per cent. Research indicates that while crime rates have stabilised in the US as a whole, and serious crimes such as murder have fallen, these increases reflect a tendency during the last decade to introduce stricter sentencing standards for minor offences. In the US one in three black men aged between 20 and 29 are currently under the prison system. Black men in the US are seven times more likely to be in prison than whites, the majority for non-violent offences. There are more black men in prison than in universities.



The United States has a murder rate of 9.3 per 100,000; in Britain it is 1.3 per 100,000. In the most recent statistics available, 32,436 gunshot deaths a year were recorded in the US, compared with 19 in Japan. There are 192 million privately owned guns in the US, and 39 per cent of US households have guns.



China has 22 suicides for every 100,000 of its people, more than twice the global average. The rate is three times worse in rural than urban areas, the Beijing Suicide Research and Prevention Centre reported in January 2005, despite a gradual alleviation of poverty in the last decade. While more women than men attempt to commit suicide in every country in the world, only in China do the women succeed more often. China has experienced an 80 per cent increase in the reporting of emotional and behavioural problems in the past five years, partly due to the growing pains of the 'one child generation', the movement from the countryside, which can leave mothers alone in villages, and a reluctance to report depression. Chinese researchers at Beijing University found that 60 per cent of farmers had never heard of the Chinese word for depression.