

Violent eviction: A practice against Indigenous people in Paraguay

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By María Josefina Arce

The year 2021 ended with new attacks and threats against indigenous peoples in Paraguay. Stripped of their lands, their livelihoods and sacred places they have been victims for years of violence by landowners and multinationals, protected by the state.

A criminal practice that violates the Paraguayan Constitution, which recognizes the prerogatives of the Indigenous communities to communal lands, with sufficient extension so that they can live according to

their traditions, in addition to prohibiting the expulsion of the different ethnic groups.

However, under the mandate of President Mario Abdo Benítez, pressures and aggressions against these peoples have increased. Violent eviction has characterized his government since he came to power in August 2018.

In fact some two thousand 500 people were evicted from their homes last year. During the operations, the destruction and burning of houses, sacred temples and schools was recorded, as well as the theft of belongings, food and animals.

To complicate the situation, last September Abdo Benítez enacted a law approved in record time by both houses of Congress. The legislation modified article 142 of the Penal Code, with the aim of raising the penalty for those who want to recover their territories or protect the places where they live to 10 years in prison. A new maneuver to broaden the criminalization of the struggle for land.

The legislation was promoted by the largest landowners in the South American nation, where almost 90% of the land is in the hands of 5% of the citizens.

Many agribusiness entrepreneurs, cattle ranchers and landowners who obtained land illegally are protected by this law, since they can request the eviction before the public prosecutor's office, without the need to investigate the situation of the property.

The opposition Frente Guazú has denounced that in this matter there is a mafia operating from the state, the National Institute of Rural and Land Development and the judiciary.

The fact is that many of these territories that were destined for Agrarian Reform ended up in the hands of politicians, companies, judges and other people related to the authorities.

The Paraguayan government privileges private interests, leaving aside the right to land, housing and food of the Indigenous communities and the protection of children, the most affected by this unjust and criminal policy.

Today the indigenous population of Paraguay amounts to 120,000 people, 76% of whom live in extreme poverty and marginalization.

Paraguay is not a safe country for the native peoples, who day by day are forced to defend their culture and the lands that rightfully belong to them and are stolen from them, under the protection of the government.

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