

MISURASATA
REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA

Miskito, Sumo, Rama Sandinista Aslatakanka

Wayah, Mayangna, Rama Sandino Balma Karak Aslah Kalahna

Pakpa Sumukitna Rama Sandino Umusik

TRAGEDY STRIKES AT THE HEART OF THE INDIGENOUS STRUGGLE IN NICARAGUA

By: B. Rivera B.
MISURASATA

I want to express my humble thanks to all those persons who have kindly made it possible for me to be here to participate in this outstanding convention of your organization, the LULAC.

I consider it a privilege this opportunity that you have given me to share with you, imbued with a high sense of duty and objectivity, the reality of my indigenous brethren: the Miskitu, the Súmu and the Rama nations of Eastern Nicaragua. Having as my only commitment of liberty and justice of my native peoples, I will speak to you with my hands on my heart in favor of just interests and the real situation and struggle of our people in the context of our contradictory relations with the so-called Sandinista Revolution of Nicaragua.

Since the month of May 1980, I am the General Coordinator (General Secretary) of MISURASATA (Miskitu, Súmu, Rama Sandinista Aslatakanka). This is an indigenous organization whose members are the last three native peoples who have survived the onslaught of imperialism and local politics. And in my capacity as leader and principal spokesman of this organization, I address you.

The traditional homeland of the Miskitu, Súmu and Rama peoples of Nicaragua represents 38% of the territory of the country, nearly half of Nicaragua and it is situated in the eastern part of the country in the region locally known as the Atlantic Coast. The indigenous population adds up to about 145,000 inhabitants. Besides this group we have as neighbors 40,000 "creoles" which is a group mixed in various ways with the indigenous and white population underlined with black African characteristics, and finally there are about some 100,000 ladinos, the dominant Spanish-speaking mestizo, group who live both insi-



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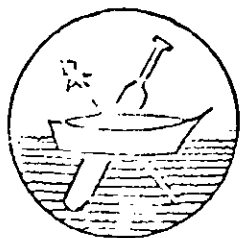
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de and encircling the territory of the indigenous peoples.

History reveals that this region has had a dialectical development completely different to the other regions that comprise Nicaragua with the result that the cultural, social, economic and ideological reality has grown and consolidated itself in a way very different to the rest of the country. For example, in the indigenous territory each native people is marked by its own cultural and linguistic patterns, its particular traditions and associations, and its own means of subsistence, which is an autonomous economic system. All these factors combine together to make these native peoples totally different to the rest of Nicaraguans.

Our ancestrals lived in this region from very ancient times. Archeology reveals their presence in the southern area from about 400 years before the common era. A rich tradition of our heritage relates that in the 10th. century these ancient peoples occupied the whole region, both the southern and the northern parts of Eastern Nicaragua, long before the conformation of the present State of Nicaragua. This is the same land that we have inherited integrally for the common good of the great indigenous family, thanks to our ancestors who were not afraid to defend themselves and put up a fight to exercise their rights to selfdetermination as they struggled against the encroachments of colonialists powers of Europe. Our lands were never colonized and our ancestors never knew slavery or subjection, as it occurred in the Central and Western regions of Nicaragua which were subject to Spain's imperialism. Across the centuries, with the blood and life of our indigenous martyrs, we have been defending the sovereignty of our territory so that our children of the present and of the future may be free men and women living with dignity their own lives as they build their destiny. In such a manner the indigenous territory was able to enjoy the benefits of selfdetermination up to 1860. But in this year our people lost their rights to free determination in consequence of the Treaty of

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Managua signed between Nicaragua and Great Britain. They did not have even the decency to take into consideration the opinions and authority of the indigenous peoples. The treaty confined the surviving families to an autonomous status which dramatically ended in 1894 when the Nicaraguan army arbitrarily occupied the territory abolishing the autonomous status, and baptizing this illegal act as the "re-incorporation of Moskitia".

From that date onward all the Liberal and Conservative governments that have governed in Nicaragua for nearly 90 years had one characteristic in common in relation to the indigenous territory: They never formulated any program for the integral development of the region. Rather they were subjected to a situation in the which they suffered all the evils of marginalization, discrimination, social and inhuman exploitation. The 45 years of the Somoza dictatorship were noted for the oppression, internal colonialism and ethnocide of our people who had their lot of misery, backwardness and sufferings increased in the whole region. In spite of Somoza's opposition to the organizing spirit of our indigenous nations, our people in 1973 gave the first step establishing the "Alliance for the Progress of the Miskitos and Sumos" (ALPROMISU). This was the first indigenous movement, in a long time since the past century, for the defense and promotion of our aboriginal rights.

With the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, the forgotten and exploited indigenous saw in the early part of this movement a new and better day had dawned upon Nicaragua. In consequence they deposited their hopes and confidence in the revolutionary process. But the F.S.L.N. -the Sandinista National Liberation Front- refusing to recognize the free and historical development of our communities, their ethnic identities and their historical rights, expressed their



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to the autochthonous and independent organizations of the indigenous peoples. Nevertheless after four months of firmness and struggle in favor of the continuation of our indigenous movements, in the month of November 1979, the organization known as ALPROMISU was transformed into MISURASATA. Our Rama brethren were now included in this organization and the term "Sandinista" was added as a testimony of our solidarity and alliance to the Nicaraguan Revolution, considering that inside the revolutionary process there should be place for our aspirations for an autonomous territory and the ethno-development of our communities and natural resources, all of which had been usurped by the previous governments.

During the first two years of the Sandinista Revolution, the indigenous movements articulated its development participating in the different tasks and plans of the Revolution. Our contribution for the defense and advancement of the Revolution was positive: Our people participated in the different activities revindicating the Revolution, such as the literacy campaign in our native languages, the health programs, and the plans for increasing production, and so on.

But suddenly without warning the F.S.L.N. took us by surprise: they assaulted militarily the indigenous movement with the purpose of destroying us completely. They considered that our movement was an obstacle to the implantation of their totalitarian project in Nicaragua.

As a matter of fact, the model of the totalitarian system of the Sandinista government does not contemplate the existence of independent sectors or movements outside their political sphere. In spite of our indigenous leaders intentions to work together with the Revolution --but non-- aligned and not subject to the F.S.L.N.-- the nine traitors commanders have not tolerated the organic independence of our movement nor that of our indigenous peoples. Rather they have considered the



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Indigenous peoples to be the principal enemies of their Revolution. With the intentions of dominating our autonomous peoples the Sandinista government has made use of various measures like intimidation, economic pressure and brutal repression with the object of putting us under their totalitarian control and authority. That is to say, inside the revolution, the indigenous problems are aggravated whenever the Sandinista government --guided by their totalitarian and dogmatic conceptions of the state-- assail militarily the indigenous communities with the purpose of destroying them, and from their ashes transform the communities into new situations according to the Sandinista's ideological interests.

They want to attain this new situation by creating a new type of "Indian" (one that would be assimilated or subjected to their ideology), one without their ethnic consciousness nor their aboriginal rights, just simple proletarians dependents of the State, their Orwellian Employer.

From this, it is evident that the basis of our problems and struggle are to be found in the nefarious policy the F.S.L.N. has towards the indigenous peoples, and not as the regime with maquiavellian cunning asserts that they are due to external factors contrary to the Revolution. Seeking to justify their racial hatred and their process of systematic extermination against the indigenous peoples, the Sandinista government has assumed a cynical and irresponsible attitude attributing the cause of their problems to the activities of enemies of their revolution.

The sole responsibility for the indigenous tragedy -- independently of whatever enemy sectors that have taken advantage ultimately of the situation to extend it and confuse it more-- we repeat, the sole responsibility for the indigenous tragedy falls squarely upon the shoulders of the F.S.L.N. In the indigenous territory the principal and sole



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counterrevolutionaries are the very members of the Sandinista government, although the F.S.L.N. utilizing his lies propagandistics, have presented to the world the image of the crisis twisted, appearing as the victim of the contrarrevolution from the MISURASATA or the Somocistas. To almost five years of the Revolution, we see objectively that on the indigenous territory, there is a racist aggression and destruction of the F.S.L.N.. Definitely, it is not right to call social justice Revolution to a process without precedents of hatred, repression and ethnocide. In all these time our indigenous peoples have lived the biggest epoch of disregard, violence, trampling and hunger in all their history.

This dramatic situation is impelled by the F.S.L.N. by means of a double mechanism of ethnic and cultural assimilation (ethnocide) and physical elimination, (genocide), both converging to the systematic extermination of the indigenous families. Please allow me to describe these two aspects of violations and destructions of the rights of our indigenous peoples:

A. ETHNOCIDE

1. Nearly half (98) of the indigenous communities have been destroyed totally (burn down to ashes) by the Sandinista's military forces. The physical destruction of our traditional communities, including our homes, our houses of worship, our schools, livestock, crops, fruit trees and personal effects began in late 1981 on the Coco river (Wanki) and has continued into 1984 in other indigenous zones far removed from the borders areas. There has been no compensation for this destruction and none of the destroyed villages has been rebuilt.
2. More than 25,000 indigenous are enclosed restrictively in ethnocide camps, created and controlled by the Sandinistas repressive



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military forces. Our brethren who have been forced under gun point and other threats to abandon their traditional lands and familiar environment, on the basis of false reasonings sprinkled with lies (like the infamous "Red Christmas - Navidad Roja") In this way they have been trying to bring our people into bondage. With the support of military control and force they do this because they consider the indigenous peoples to be ignorant, nomads improductive for their plans, and hostile to the Revolution. Precisely, these mass removals are part of their plans to impose on the indigenous peoples their outdated model of socioeconomic development which is alien and foreign to their reality and interests. In this new situation they are converted into simple productive objects and not the owners of their destiny. Ironically, the indigenous families of the streams of the Coco River (río Coco) and the department of Jinotega, have been relocated in the same zone of daily combat.

The racist regime of Nicaragua has put forth some effort in the new settlement camp of Tasba Pri. Here they have a series of prefabricated dwellings built from lumber and with zinc roofing. The scenery is almost colonial and of the semi-urban type, which is completely different to the type of dwellings and the form of orientation known and practiced by the natives peoples. They have also established a health program which is quite good but our brethren are so affected by the crisis that they do not want these things: Their only plea is to return back to the Coco river (Wanki). As payment for these marginal social facilities, our people are subjected and harassed by the Sandinistas authorities to do *hard* labor on the State farms, to attend both the weekly programs for political indoctrination and the frequent meetings of the para-military mass organizations.

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3. In the month of February 1981, the MISURASATA organization was assaulted by the State Security forces, arresting arbitrarily the entire leadership (more than 30). The outcome was the destruction of MISURASATA. The leaders were imprisoned, interrogated and in some cases tortured by the military officers who invented the accusation that our people were separatists, racists and counterrevolutionaries. Few month later, the F.S.L.N. unilaterally declared the un law full of the indian organization after the brutal repression let loose by the Marxist-Leninist leaders of the F.S.L.N. obligated the leaders and other members of MISURASARA to flee into exile and to adopt other forms of struggle.
During all this time while the Sandinista ethnocide program was underway, the F.S.L.N. prohibited the operations of the indigenous autochthonous organizations or forced their substitution with the so-called mass organizations, nationally known as C.D.S. (Sandinist Defense Committee), A.T.C. (Field Workers Association - Farmers Union) and so on. At the same time they are promoting the establishment of a official indigenous organization. In Nicaragua this type of association is known as a "White organization" under the control and interest of the government of the F.S.L.N. The creation of this parallel organization is part of the brazen efforts of the Sandinista government to try to discredit the legitimate organization and the indigenous leadership and to continue denying the aboriginal rights of our brethren. With the forced disappearance of the indigenous autochthonous organizations the F.S.L.N. promotes the elimination of the sociopolitical and economic alternative for ethnic and community development.
4. The invading force of the F.S.L.N. exercises a strict control over all the indigenous territory. Indian self-government is denied. Identification cards and written passes are used to control and



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monitor the movement of the indigenous people outside their villages. Those who are kept in the relocation camps are also required to have official permission before leaving. Because of restrictions on indian rights to move freely, hunt and to fish, and because of other Sandinista policies food has often been scarce in all the indigenous villages.

5. The Sandinista government has nationalized our ancestral lands, which are our inalienable rights, transferring the indigenous lands and resources to the arbitrary control of the State, robbing in this way the millennial rights of our peoples, favouring slavery and our destruction. With their false Agrarian Reform program they are now promoting the distribution of our historic lands into small parcels. Our people will be obligated to receive these lots of land, to work them and deliver the product to the government, who is now the new owner. Likewise they have robbed us of the natural resources of our lands, putting into effect a continuous program of devastating exploitation by means of the transnational companies, which are now in the hands of the State.
6. The Sandinista government has synthesized their racist policy in the proclamation of their so-called "Declaration of Principles of the Popular Sandinist Revolution in regards to the indigenous communities of the Atlantic Coast" where they unilaterally proclaim their nefarious ethnocidal practice.

B. GENOCIDE

1. More than 25,000 indigenous have sought refuge in Honduras and Costa Rica, beginning in the month of April 1981, and continuing through the following years including the recent exodus of the indigenous families of Sandy Bay. This crisis came as a result of the policy of mass repression and persecution of the Sandinista



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government. These indigenous are to be found located in the different refugee camps administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. Over 75 indigenous persons who were arrested by the F.S.L.N. forces during the middle of 1982 are now "disappeared persons". The Sandinist regime has yet to account for their whereabouts or their fate.
3. Several hundredes of our people have been injured, arrested and imprisoned arbitrarily by the Security forces. Most have been held for interrogation, threatened and then released. The partial Amnesty declared in December 1983 has resulted in the release of 309 prisoners, but over 40 still remain imprisoned.
4. During the time when the repressive military forces of the Sandinista government a invaded and occupied our communities, they committed a series of abuses and outrages against our defencesles indigenous brethren, including torture, summary executions, beatings, many rapes, thefts and destruction of property, and so forth, and those responsible have not been prosecuted.
5. Restriction on our indigenous religious freedom continues. The use of the churches for military porpuses has been a serious problem in many of the indigenous communities.
6. Mass murders (massacres) and assassinations have been the common lot of the indigenous peoples on the part of the Sandinista military forces. It all began in September 1979, barely six weeks after the triumph of the Sandinist Revolution, when the military forces muredered the community leader, Lester Athers. This way of killing was no pattern for the Sandinista regime, for they murdered both the community leaders and the ordinary citizens as happened with the assassination of the teenager Nazario Carlos in Wiring Kay and the more than 30 civilians murdered by the indiscriminate bombings of the Sandinista Air Force in Great River (Río



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Grande of Nicaragua) as recently as past month of May of the present year, 1984. Among the most relevant massacres of our people are the following ones:

- 1.- Prinzaolka, four (4) indigenous persons killed in February, 1981.
- 2.- Laimus, 80 persons were captures, 15 executed, the rest counted as "disappeared", December 1981.
- 3.- Walpasiksa, nine(9) persons murdered on the 12th. of January 1982.
- 4.- Tulimbila, 13 persons killed in January 1982.
- 5.- Tungla, five (5) persons massacred in April 1982.
- 6.- Musawas, 19 persons executed in July 1982.
- 7.- Dakban, 13 members of the Francis family were murdered on the 16th. and 17th. of August 1982.
- 8.- Kligna, 10 members of the Wellington family were gunned down in the second week of August 1982.
- 9.- Bokay, 84 persons were murdered indiscriminately among them were 75 children, ages one to four, in an helicopter, in the first week of December 1983.

The racist war of the Sandinista government against the indigenous peoples is due to their pretensions of trying to control the lives, and destiny of our people and their historic territory.

For the objective observer, all these actions reveal a series of outrageous violations of all those rights guaranteed internationally. Also these violations lead us to the fact that there is a massive discrimination going on against our indigenous peoples. The Sandinista regime believes that each indigenous person is a real or potential enemy of their outdated revolution, therefore our people must be controlled or repressed by the military forces. With this thesis, the Sandinista government has become the contemporaneous colonializing force of the indigenous peoples



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of Nicaragua. The resistance displayed by the indigenous peoples is a matter of elemental logic, and is in accordance with their natural and human rights for survival in a hostile environment. United collectively because of the crude repressions of the F.S.L.N., the indigenous nations are seeking the revindication of their authonomous status inside their own traditional territory and within the limits of a representative national state.

In able to fulfill their political and propagandistic objectives, the Sandinista government, like the alligator tears, has repeating over and over that they have "made mistakes" in their interrelationships with the indigenous peoples.

Unfortunately this declaration was interpreted by certain sectors and international organizations as positive indication on their part and as opportunity to hold a dialogue with the purpose of solving the indigenous crisis. Nevertheless, up to this moment there is very little indications that the Sandinista government is willing to make any sincere effort in the search for a dialogue that would put an end to the continuation of the tragedy of our people. All to the contrary, the situation indicates that the militarization of the whole region continues at an increassing rate and is leading to an aggravation of the conflict.

Finally, I make a urgent calling to the all good willing and consciensness persons, organizations and institutions, to accept the challenge to compromise on the cause of my indigenous peoples devoloping every posible effort on the seeking of the mechanisms that would permit to save from the present cruel tragedy and to have their integrāl liberation throughout the conquest of the just aboriginals rights. There will be no national peace, without the justice for the indian.

iiiiii FOR THE INDIGENOUS TERRITORY, CULTURE AND AUTONOMY!!!!!!!

Thank You.

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