

**Conference on Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Challenge of Poverty  
Reduction, Land Rights and Natural Resource Control**

*Background and Summary*

Center for Latin American Studies  
Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service  
Georgetown University  
December 3, 2004

*“One of the more remarkable developments that took place in Latin America during the last two decades of the twentieth century was the emergence of indigenous peoples as new social and political actors and their implantation in the national consciousness of the region’s countries. The changing relationship between nation states and indigenous peoples in Latin America mirrors to a certain extent the re-emergence of indigenous issues in international legal debates since the early 1980s. However, it is remarkable, considering that throughout most of their modern history the Latin American republics had practically ignored the indigenous component of their national identity.”*

~ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Research Professor  
of Sociology, El Colegio de Mexico, and  
UN Special Rapporteur for the Human  
Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup>

The past three decades have seen a major change in the role which Latin America’s relatively large indigenous population is playing in the politics of several countries in the region. After nearly two centuries in which indigenous peoples were either excluded or marginalized from national politics, new types of indigenous social movements emerged in the 1970s and 1980s which called for a greater recognition of the human and cultural rights of indigenous peoples and their more

---

<sup>1</sup> Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “Indigenous Peoples and the State in Latin America: An Ongoing Debate,” in Rachel Sieder (editor), Multiculturalism in Latin AMERICA: indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy (London, Palgrave/Macmillan for the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 2002).

active participation in development and other forms of decision making. By the late 1980s, with a return to democratic regimes in most Latin American countries, these indigenous movements began to call for fundamental changes in the National Constitutions of their respective countries in order that their governments might provide the legislative and institutional conditions to maintain truly multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural societies. At the same time, these indigenous movements began to participate more actively in hemispheric and international politics, and to bring to world attention the obstacles which they faced in obtaining greater protection of their lands, cultures and communities.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the emergence of these indigenous movements and their success in focusing national and international attention on their political, socio-economic and cultural situations, there are still several challenges which they face in actually bringing about fundamental changes in the nature of the relationships between indigenous peoples and Latin American states. One such challenge is the reduction of the persistently high rates of poverty and inequality which continue to characterize most Latin American countries and which, in those countries with relatively large indigenous populations, are significantly higher among indigenous than non-indigenous populations. A second challenge is the difficulties which indigenous peoples face in getting their governments to effectively implement national legislation and international accords which recognize and call for the recognition and protection of indigenous land rights and natural resources. Finally, a third major challenge has been in the political arena itself, namely, how to get states to recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples and their communities and provide them with greater voice in both local and national decision-making. Each of these topics has been the subject of important analytical and empirical studies, but to date there has not been an integrated assessment at the hemispheric level of the obstacles and challenges which indigenous peoples continue to face in terms of poverty reduction, land rights and political reform.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> For background on the role of the new indigenous movements in the transition to democratic governments which took place in several Latin American countries in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see: Donna Lee Van Cott (editor), Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America (New York, St. Martin's Press for Inter-American Dialogue, 1994); and, by the same author, The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). See also, Jose Bengoa, La Emergencia Indigena en América Latina (México and Chile, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> For some examples of such studies of indigenous poverty, land rights and political reform: see: George Psacharopoulos and Harry Anthony Patrinos (editors), Indigenous Peoples and Poverty in Latin America: An Empirical Analysis (Washington, DC, World Bank, 1994); Jose Aylwin, El Acceso de los Indigenas a la Tierra en los Ordenamientos Juridicos de America Latina: Un Estudio de Casos (Chile, CEPAL, 2001); and, David Maybury-Lewis (editor), The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin America States (Cambridge, Harvard

Based upon the above considerations, the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University organized a half-day conference on December 3, 2004 on the theme of “Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Challenge of Poverty Reduction, Land Rights and Natural Resource Control.” The conference coincided with a visit to Washington of a group of Canadian indigenous leaders for a set of meetings at the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank organized in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Circumpolar Affairs Office and Aboriginal Market Support Division and International Trade Department of the Canadian Foreign Ministry. Several of these Canadian indigenous leaders participated in the Georgetown University conference along with CLAS faculty members and students, some indigenous peoples specialists at the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, and a select group of speakers from Latin America, including the current Vice Minister of Indigenous Affairs in Bolivia.

The conference itself began with a series of opening remarks by Arturo Valenzuela, the Director of CLAS and Erick Langer, Associate Professor of History at Georgetown University and also a member of the CLAS Faculty. Professor Valenzuela highlighted the importance of the conference’s focus upon indigenous peoples issues to the Center’s continuing interest in democratic governance and political reform issues in Latin America. He also highlighted the interest of CLAS in looking more deeply at political reform issues as they relate to indigenous peoples, and mentioned the possibility of a follow-up conference on the subject of indigenous peoples, political reform and governance issues, especially in the Andean countries.

Professor of History Erick Langer, in his opening comments, also highlighted some of the political issues relating to the role of the new indigenous movements in Latin America. Professor Langer discussed the historical context of indigenous peoples’ political involvement and pointed out some of the key factors—such as re-democratization, the rise of the modern Katarista movement in Bolivia, economic globalization, land reforms, and the involvement of the Catholic Church, among others—that led to the emergence of the contemporary indigenous movements in Latin America. He also pointed out that not all the indigenous peoples of Latin America are incorporated into contemporary nation states and that some indigenous communities do not even want to participate at the nation-state level. Professor Langer noted the historical and contemporary controversies surrounding land rights and resource exploitation in the gold and silver mining industries and sugar cane plantations, first in the Caribbean and then in Mexico and the Andes, noting that the issue of the use and abuse of the labor of indigenous peoples from the sixteenth century onward remains unresolved as indigenous peoples continue to be exploited and not paid equitably for their labors.

Professor Langer noted that while the contemporary indigenous movements arose in some Latin American countries such as Bolivia as early as the 1970s, there had been a relatively long history of indigenous peoples' involvement in politics in Latin America. However, this involvement in politics tended to have a strong class rather than an ethnic dimension, especially in the post-World War II period where several left-wing parties in Latin American countries looked at indigenous peoples as "peasants" and as key political actors in the struggle for agrarian reform. These movements did not take on a strong ethnic as opposed to a class dimension until the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially with the fall of the Soviet Union, the increasing macro-economic reforms which took place in most Latin American countries, and the rise of NGOs who called for greater support of indigenous peoples ethnic identities, human rights and their role in environmental conservation and natural resource management.

Professor Langer also highlighted the fact that it was a grave historical error to assume, because of their current social and economic situation, that indigenous peoples have always lived in conditions of poverty. In fact, he noted that that the supposed poverty and marginality of indigenous peoples, which has been highlighted in a number of recent empirical studies, actually had its root in most Latin American countries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially with the rise of new forms of export agriculture production, mining and forestry development in Latin America, and the passage of new legislation which led to the expropriation of indigenous communal lands and the mobilization of indigenous labor. "Indians," as he stated, "were not by their nature poor."

These comments by Professors Valenzuela and Langer provided an excellent introduction for the two panels which formed the basis of the December conference and were comprised of a small group of outside speakers and individual moderators and discussants from the CLAS faculty that provided a broad overview of the socio-economic situation of indigenous peoples in Latin America. The first panel was moderated by Angelo Rivero Santos, the Director of Academic Affairs and Coordinator of the CLAS Venezuela Program and was titled "Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Social Exclusion." The first panel focused upon a discussion of the current socio-economic situation of indigenous peoples in Latin America, looking at poverty and human and social development trends among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, as well as the importance of land tenure security for poverty reduction and the economic development of indigenous communities.

The panel opened with presentations by Gillette Hall and Harry Patrinos, two World Bank Human Development Economists, who described the results of a comparative study which they had been conducting of poverty, education, health, employment and other human and social development trends among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. Gillette

Hall indicated that few gains were made in terms of income poverty in the region throughout the decade of the 1990s, and that the rates of indigenous peoples poverty went down to a lesser degree compared to non-indigenous groups. Gillette Hall focused particularly on the factors—such as labor market and wage discrimination against indigenous workers—which could explain such poverty indicators and trends.

Harry Patrinos discussed education indicators demonstrating that gaps in access to schooling and educational attainment are still evident between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. He also pointed out the returns on the labor market based on education are still less for indigenous peoples than for non-indigenous people. Harry Patrinos also discussed health indicators demonstrating that indigenous peoples are less likely to be covered by health insurance than non-indigenous people. Besides discussing the evident need to improve the access to and quality of education, health, labor and other services, he elaborated on the necessity for improvements in data collection and analysis so as to better identify the needs of indigenous peoples and thereby make government and international development programs more relevant.

Following this, Dr. Salomon Nahmad Sitton, an anthropologist and investigator at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social in Oaxaca, Mexico, described the results of a recent study which he had conducted of indigenous peoples and rural poverty in Mexico. He began the presentation with his reflections on visiting the newly-opened National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, stating it truly expressed the incredible diversity which exists among indigenous peoples in the Americas and that it sheds new perspectives on how indigenous peoples—labeled as economically poor and marginalized—are rich in culture, territory, and numerous natural resources, the latter of which they do not have control over in most Latin American countries. Although he acknowledged that indigenous peoples do suffer from a greater lack of access to services and more income poverty, he also pointed out that the identification and generalized label of indigenous peoples as “poor” is not applicable to all indigenous peoples; and, he elaborated on the vast cultural and economic diversity among indigenous communities. The perception of poverty has changed throughout history, varies significantly among cultures, and as he stated, the perception of indigenous peoples as poor is many times skewed and incorrect. Dr. Nahmad particularly focused upon the need for local and regional sustainable development programs to address this diversity in order to be successful both in the short and long term.

This was followed by a very insightful presentation by Maria Eugenia Choque, an well-known Aymara social historian and current Vice Minister of Indigenous Affairs in Bolivia, who described many of the challenges which indigenous peoples and particularly indigenous women in her country face in responding to the high incidence of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion. Vice Minister Choque pointed out the lack of funds and resources and the prevalent

discrimination and illiteracy, among other factors, as still presenting obstacles for social inclusion, inter-cultural understanding, and human and social development for indigenous peoples in Bolivia.

Vice Minister Choque also discussed how the participation of indigenous women—or lack of participation—is a result of their cultural discrimination and marginalization. She noted that the participation of women—particularly indigenous women—in Bolivian history has not been recognized and has been made invisible, even though there have been great women leaders in the process of struggles and demands of the pueblos. Additionally, women still maintain their traditional roles as mothers and caretakers, further complicating the burdens and responsibilities they must deal with daily. The Vice Minister also commented on how within the Ministry, there is continued evidence of this discrimination and subordination of women and indigenous persons. However, she also noted that there is a growing desire among both indigenous and non-indigenous persons in the Ministry to work together and to begin understanding and applying the philosophy of processes of inter-culturalism. In Bolivia, the Law of Popular Participation and the Law of Education Reform have been important legislative steps forward but Vice Minister Choque acknowledged there is still no real and sincere inter-cultural dialogue taking place among indigenous and non-indigenous people.

World Bank Land Administration Specialist Jorge Munoz, who is also from Bolivia, discussed the importance of land tenure security for poverty reduction and economic development, pointing out that the securing of land rights for indigenous peoples remains a controversial issue in much of Latin America. Population growth and the increased value of land tend to complicate land matters. When populations are dispersed, property rights are usually not as pressing. However, the issue of indigenous property rights becomes critical when there is competition for the same territory, particularly in more market-oriented economies. Jorge Munoz elaborated on how market integration has created enormous opportunities and raised the issue of land rights. He also discussed the importance of such rights, as the very definition of property rights links directly and is important for the consolidation of social peace and good governance in most countries with large indigenous populations in Latin America. Such rights, in turn, are linked to issues of poverty reduction; and, because land is one of the most important assets and insurance for indigenous peoples and other rural populations, it is also a source of participation in most land-based communities. Secure land tenure rights are also important for indigenous peoples as they address deep-seated historical processes and realities.

Jorge Munoz also elaborated on ways to increase the land tenure security of indigenous peoples and their communities, stating that it starts with constitutional recognition, such as with the constitutional changes which took place in Bolivia and other Latin American countries in the decade of the 1990s. It is necessary to address what the original land rights of indigenous peoples are and also to address the characteristics of specific communities. In addition, it is necessary to address

the issue of whether the land is territorial, communal, family- owned, gender-based, or any other aspect that would define the land in question. Jorge Munoz stated that both state recognition and enforcement of such indigenous land rights are fundamental in order to provide security for indigenous peoples. However, states that are weak states in enforcing laws often nullify the land rights process. He also noted that it is not sufficient enough to have a good law if these are not enforced by the state and the state cannot enforce the law if there is not a strong democratic government.

Finally, Jorge Munoz concluded by noting that given the historical exclusion of indigenous populations, it is fundamental that state and society work together to make enforcement of those land rights easier. With more secure indigenous land rights, there will be a better chance for indigenous populations to participate in investment projects and this would allow greater opportunities for indigenous peoples and communities to enter into partnerships with other members of society, thereby contributing to greater economic development, equity and social cohesion. More secure indigenous land rights also can improve local governance and provide for more sustainable natural resource conservation and environmental management. The first panel closed with comments from Timothy Wickham-Crowley, Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the M.A. Program at CLAS.

The second panel was moderated by Marc Chernick, Associate Professor of Government and Latin American Studies at Georgetown University, and titled “Land Rights, Natural Resource Control and Hydrocarbon Development.” The purpose of this panel was to follow-up on several of the issues raised in the previous panel by focusing on the critical issues of indigenous peoples lands rights and the control and sustainable environmental management of the rich natural resources contained in their ancestral territories, especially in the face of increasing investments in hydro-carbon development projects. The Second Panel focused upon a discussion of (a) the processes of legally recognizing and regularizing the land rights of indigenous peoples; (b) the control and sustainable environmental management by indigenous communities of the rich natural resources contained on their ancestral territories; and (c) the social and environmental impacts and potential of indigenous communities benefiting from hydrocarbon developments on their lands.

This panel opened with a presentation by Professor Jose Aylwin, the Coordinator of the Indigenous Rights Program at the Institute of Indigenous Peoples Studies at the University of the Frontier in Temuco, Chile. Jose Aylwin, one of the region’s major experts on the legal recognition and protection of indigenous land rights, argued that the gradual process by which indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their ancestral lands was in some countries actually intensified rather than hindered by the official *indigenista* and agrarian reform policies that were introduced by several Latin American countries in the post-World War II period. “The agrarian reforms tried to involve the indigenous peoples as

*campesinos*, without seeing their singularities,” he stated. In most countries, these policies failed to recognize and protect indigenous communal lands, and the indigenous peoples “continue to have in common a focus on their demands for their rights to lands and natural resources.” In addition, the land dispossession process generated by official agrarian policies, especially in tropical lowland areas of several Latin American countries, has been reinforced and intensified by the “expansion processes” into indigenous lands in the last few years.

The indigenous demands for land rights recognition and protection, Professor Aylwin noted, have been growing. He pointed out that the historical demand of indigenous peoples for land has both a material and spiritual component and the latter is particularly growing in importance as indigenous peoples and their leaders stress both the political and symbolic meanings of the recognition of their land rights. The demand now is for self-determination and autonomy regarding the lands and the natural resources to which the indigenous peoples relate collectively and to which they have a special relationship. As the leaders of many indigenous organizations have pointed out at various international fora, the cultural survival of their peoples depends upon their ownership and control of their ancestral lands. National and international laws are also increasingly recognizing the rights of indigenous communities to be compensated in cases where there are negative impacts resulting from the exploitation of the subsoil resources in their ancestral territories. However, Professor Aylwin also noted that the methods of participation and consultation with indigenous peoples used by both national governments and extractive industry firms have many shortcomings. “The consultation consists, “ he said, “in a process through which the indigenous peoples are told what the project is going to be, but if they say ‘I don’t like it’ they are told ‘Then, I will do whatever I want’.” Professor Aylwin also noted that, although there are these new juridical frameworks, “in many countries the recognitions are merely declarative.”

Finally, Professor Aylwin mentioned the “expansion processes” into indigenous lands that globalization has generated. This is for some specialists one of the most critical issues currently facing indigenous peoples, especially in the lowland areas of South America. The great demand on the part of multinational companies and national governments to extract the hydrocarbon resources contained on indigenous lands has put more pressure into the already controversial topic of securing the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands.

Professor Aylwin’s talk was followed by a presentation on the current situation of hydrocarbon investments in Latin America by Roger Tissot, a Colombian economist and Director of Markets and Countries Group of the PFC Energy, an international energy consulting firm. Roger Tissot of PFC Energy noted that numerous petroleum analysts are looking at the opportunities for investing in hydrocarbon development in Latin American countries and that the issue presents continuing tensions with indigenous peoples who inhabit the lands where these resources are located, particularly true in countries such as Bolivia (because of its natural gas reserves), Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, but pointed out that in

Venezuela the petroleum industry does not at least at present face this issue because hydrocarbon resources are not located on indigenous lands. Tissot analyzed the current process of transformation taking place among international petroleum companies, in terms of their recognition of the need to deal with the social and environmental concerns of indigenous peoples affected by their investments. "These changes," he said, "in the oil industry will have profound implications for the indigenous communities." He also claimed that emerging small companies, many of them locally owned, are bound to ignore indigenous peoples' priorities more than the multinational corporations.

Tissot explained that Latin American governments are highly dependent upon the revenue that petroleum investments generate and this is more tied to international prices than levels of production. "When the price goes down, it generates high levels of unemployment, more uncertainty, less investments, all of which complicates the political situation," he said. In the Andean countries, the commodity boom was fundamental to the improvement of the fiscal balance of those economies, but their level of dependence is still very high. Furthermore, he noted that the evolution of certain national economies in Latin America defy preconceived ideas of how those economies should work. "In Peru," he said, "we see disconnect between a high level of investment and growth that has not accelerated at all the creation of jobs. There is growth but no major increase in jobs."

The outlook for 2005, according to Tissot, is that interest rates will increase; and, since Latin American governments are highly indebted in dollars, their debt payments will become more onerous. This will probably combine with a reduction in the price of commodities in 2006-2007 that will affect the income of many countries in the region. Meanwhile, the price of oil will continue to be "fairly high" due to the entry of China into the global economy and the need for raw materials to fuel its process of development and industrialization. Given this global economic context, it is expected that multinational companies from the US, Canada and Europe and very small companies entering the market will start to compete. Some of these small companies are owned by local capital, like Petrogas and Repsol, and companies from Colombia and Ecuador. The Chinese government's entrance into the Latin American market was also discussed, and it has been very active in suggesting billions of dollars in investments. "China knows that it is going to compete," Tissot said, "but its motivation in entering the regional petroleum investment and production market is not so much economic as it is more in ensuring security of supply. All these changes in the oil industry," Tissot pointed out, "will have profound implications for indigenous communities."

"The Andean countries," Tissot said, "will remain economically dependent on hydrocarbon investments and revenues. The private sector is in the best position to develop these resources, but the changing nature of the investor poses some challenges to indigenous peoples. Political activism and influence among the indigenous people affected by these investments will continue to grow." But, Tissot also warned that the smaller extractive companies that are emerging might be less

attentive to indigenous peoples concerns than multinational corporations that also do retail.

New types of indigenous-owned small extractive companies that have potential to grow in Latin American countries were discussed in the final two presentations of the panel by the founders and directors of two indigenous-owned natural resource companies: Edwin Piedra, manager of the indigenous-owned Puma Business Solutions of Quito, Ecuador; and Finlay Moses, president of the indigenous-owned Keyano-Pimee Exploration Company Limited of Alberta, Canada. Finlay Moses highlighted the “ongoing successes” that First Nations peoples in Canada are experiencing “thanks to the resources we have.” But he said that development meant different things to a large industry than to indigenous peoples, to whom “development for the community as a whole” is the main motivation and the only truly beneficial possibility.

Edwin Piedra, on the other hand, described how the extraction of petroleum by the Texaco Oil Company put in risk the very subsistence of many indigenous peoples in Ecuador. “The limited or no experience of these companies in dealing with the indigenous peoples,” he said, “resulted in the fact that their remedy or compensation actions, instead of helping, generated problems that are even deeper and more complicated.” As an example of the above, Piedra described how another international oil company in Ecuador provided employment to male members of the Huaorani tribe, but the women of this Amazonian indigenous community occupied the company’s plant to demand that it not employ the men of their community. According to Piedra, the Huaorani women’s argument was: “If our husbands leave the community, we do not have anybody to teach our children to hunt and fish. In our culture, we do not deal with money and when our men receive money they spend it on prostitutes and alcohol. We do not want you to employ them.” Based upon this example, Piedra argued that the programs for the development of indigenous communities should be different than those in Western communities.

Edwin Piedra discussed how in August 2000, the Keyano-Pimee Exploration Company Limited initiated a business relationship with Amazonia Gas. In the joint venture, 45 percent was owned by the Keyano-Pimee Exploration Company and 55 percent by Amazonia Gas. With an initial investment of 50 million dollars, it was estimated that a profit of 12 million dollars annually would be earned. The technical, legal, environmental and other studies for the joint venture were financed by grants from the Inter American Development Bank and the government of Canada. “There was an intense process of training,” Piedra said. “However, in spite of the fact that in the Amazon there is exploitation of hydrocarbons, the indigenous peoples have not been included. Only now, we have an indigenous technician, but in that time, there were not any. So , that is why we insisted so much on the need for a process of training and of formal education, so that our students and the younger members of our indigenous communities could learn, through an educational process that needs to be different for our indigenous peoples.”

Because of this lack of technical knowledge and experience on part of the promoters of Amazonia Gas, the operation of the plant was to be the responsibility of the Canadian partners for the first five years. After this, there would be a progressive transfer of the plant to the Ecuadorian indigenous peoples, who by then would be trained to manage the plant. Financially, the company was formed from different sources: 65 percent came in loans from multilateral organizations and 35 percent in equity provided by the shareholders. The equity of Amazon Gas was financed through a loan granted by their Canadian partners. In 2003, a contract was signed with the Ecuadorian government, but according to Edwin Piedra, “the happiness did not last long.” Different problems emerged, including a conflict between EnCana and the Ecuadorian government regarding a totally different project, and also conflicts among the indigenous leadership themselves. The Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENAIE) had 97 percent of the shares of Amazonia Gas and controlled the presidency of the company. However, according to Piedra, “The leadership of the company was not clear on how to manage the profits, and the project started to be handled in a political, rather than a technical, way.” According to Piedra, the main problem was that the indigenous nations, after having formed the private enterprise, had not defined what was to be done with its profits.

Piedra also described how despite the problems faced by Amazonia Gas and its eventual failure, there were many lessons learned. “It is not so difficult,” he said, “as it may seem for indigenous peoples to enter into the formal economy, to participate in businesses of this dimension. We realized that we have to work a lot more in education, training and leadership, under a perspective of entrepreneurship. Until now, the policies have been protectionist, ‘poor little Indians, we will have to give them something, we will have to help them survive.’ That is why when we started this project we did not have a single indigenous capacitated.” Finally, according to Piedra, another lesson learned was that a model for the distribution of the profits has to be established. In this sense, it is important that the profits earned from such an enterprise be used to change the relationship of the indigenous peoples with the state, abandoning the history of paternalism and protectionism and starting what he called “a relationship of proposals.” He went on to state:

*If we have 6.5 million dollars and we can pay the loan back and after seven years have that money available for ourselves, an idea would be to propose to the State to build a hospital together; or maybe the State could build it and we could equip the hospital; or they could finance 60 percent and 40 percent could be financed by us. The indigenous peoples have to take the initiative in solving things like this. And one of the things that we lack is financial resources. For example, there are no roads. The indigenous peoples have the raw materials and the labor. All we need is to generate the financial resources.*

In conclusion, Edwin Piedra said that “Amazonia Gas was a hard set-back, but we have continued with proposals and activities.”

A question and answer session was held following Panel 2 presentations. CLAS Director Arturo Valenzuela asked Piedra why the majority of the projects that were launched failed. Piedra answered that in the beginning, the mistake was to trust that others would provide the need for financial capital. “Now we have started to understand that in the business world there are three legs: capital, knowledge, and ownership. Without capital it is impossible to develop projects.” He also insisted in the need for indigenous peoples to get access to formal education and training in technology, and to assume ownership of the projects at the local level. But, he also point out that indigenous peoples have learned from their previous mistakes and experiences in establishing companies like Amazon Gas , and there are now new projects that are evolving more successfully. For example, he mentioned the construction of a Sheraton Hotel Four Points in the town of Cuenca in Ecuador, which has been financed with the remittances sent by indigenous migrants from New York and Chicago; and, also the case of an indigenous shopping center in the south of Quito to serve former indigenous informal vendors.

Professor Mark Chernick, in his closing remarks, said that the international legal environment was also changing, and he was of the opinion that the decision of Ecuadorian indigenous peoples to use the US federal courts to challenge oil companies was “groundbreaking.” Roger Tissot said that if the indigenous peoples in Latin America “really want to have access to political power they need access to economic rent and to hydrocarbon resources. If they do not get this, they are not going to have political power.” The problem, he added, is that the political elites live from the rent of oil in Latin America, so it will not be an easy path.

Professor Aylwin provided a final comment on the theme of the panel by stating that despite the fact that law is not the only factor, it is nevertheless a “very relevant” one. And he observed that the laws have changed and improved regarding indigenous land rights, but not regarding the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources. The governments of Latin America retain the rights to the use of the sub-soil resources; and this, he said, is related to the right to self-determination. “That is the key issue,” he stated, “that we are debating here. The option of the indigenous peoples of Canada, those who are here, is a free option because they gained that right to self-determination; and, some of them choose not to enter into this type of economic activity, and that is their right, too. However, others choose to do it and they are capable of taking on these new types of economic and business activities. That framework does not exist in Latin America, and it is indispensable if we wish to achieve what the indigenous peoples want.”

Dr. Shelton Davis, a Senior Fellow at CLAS and one of the organizers of the December conference, closed the conference meeting by commenting on the wider importance of the conference for both CLAS and Georgetown University. He noted that the Washington-based Jesuit community of which Georgetown University

forms part had a long history of concern for issues relating to indigenous peoples, especially in terms of the traditional Indian policies of the government of the United States. He also highlighted the growing interest among students at Georgetown University in issues relating to the new indigenous movements in Latin America and the possible consideration of reaching out to a new generation of university-trained students of indigenous background from the United States, Canada and Latin America. Finally, he pointed out that discussions had recently begun in CLAS to organize a new program on “development and governance” which could potentially incorporate several of the issues concerning indigenous peoples’ poverty, land rights and natural resource control raised at the conference. It might also include a much deeper focus in terms of both teaching and research upon how indigenous peoples and their social movements are relating to democratic governance, political reform and economic development issues in some of CLAS’s current country-level programs (e.g., Brazil , Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela) as well as in other multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru.