

A JUBILEE JOURNEY

While the UK celebrated the Diamond Jubilee with bunting and brass bands, Paz y Esperanza Peru is expectant for a Jubilee of a radically different nature. Graham Gordon, Paz y Esperanza UK, reports...

'I've just returned from visiting Paz y Esperanza Peru, witnessing first hand their inspiring and important work with indigenous communities whose lands are threatened. Shawi communities have lived in the San Martin Region in the Peruvian Amazon for generations, using the land for fishing, hunting and subsistence farming. However their future is far from secure.

In 2006 Korean company ECOAMERICA asked the Peruvian government body responsible for land titles to inspect 70,000 hectares (about 70,000 football pitches) of supposedly "free land" with the aim of developing it for agricultural exports.

The initial report concluded that no one was living there, even though there are three indigenous communities, other populations and a proposed area of natural protection. The land wasn't 'free' at all.

At that time the state didn't do anything further with the report nor did they give the company any rights to ownership of the land.



Members of the Shawi Community

However, three years later the company applied through a local court to gain possession, arguing that they had gone through all of the necessary channels but had still received no answer from the government years later.

This process is permitted in Peruvian law, but can clearly have drastic consequences, especially when done in secret.

This way the company gained legal ownership of the land in May 2010. The communities in question still knew nothing. Not only had everything been done in secret without them being informed, but their very existence hadn't even been acknowledged or recognised.

Only a few months later did they find out about this process and immediately launched an appeal before a higher regional court in Tarapoto.

They won the case but the company wasn't satisfied and has appealed to the highest court of the land where they are awaiting a verdict.



Carlos Ching, Paz y Esperanza lawyer

The communities wrote an open letter to the government which stated,

‘We do not understand why the government would hand over our lands to this company without consulting us, in silence... we are not second-class citizens, and we are Peruvians, citizens with other customs, with a different culture. For years we have been asking for the titles to our land and the demarcation of our territory..

...And yet the requests of this company, which is not even based in the country, are being attended to because of its economic power.’

Many indigenous communities have not received formal titles for their land so Paz y Esperanza is accompanying the communities to seek both formal titles and clear demarcation of their land so that there is no room for dispute.

Paz y Esperanza accompanies the communities to protect their lands from being taken over by companies such as ECOAMERICA. By calling for a Consultation Law to be implemented, requiring indigenous communities to be consulted on all activities that affect their lands, they hope to affect change on a local and national level.

Carlos Ching, PYE lawyer says "This land has belonged to these people for generations. We will continue to stand with them to prevent the injustice of the state trying to give it to someone else." May 2012 be the year of biblical Jubilee for the Shawi community, with justice upheld, dignity restored, land returned to its rightful owners, and a right royal cause to celebrate!

PLEASE PRAY:

- For the on-going work of Paz y Esperanza in San Martin.
- For the protection of indigenous lands
- That the biblical principle of Jubilee, where justice is upheld, dignity restored and land is returned to it's rightful owners, would be experienced by the Shawi community in 2012.

Leviticus 25 v 13

‘In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.’

SPREAD THE WORD

Could you forward this to a home group, youth leader or vicar at your church, or simply to a friend?

A speaker from Paz y Esperanza UK will gladly visit your group to inspire people to use their voices to bring hope to those silenced by oppression and injustice across Latin America. Email gdavies@pazyesperanza.org if you would like to explore this option.

Thanks for taking the time to read this update. If you no longer wish to receive it email unsubscribe to updates@pazyesperanza.org

