

# TRADITIONS FOR TOMORROW



Newsletter 2003 - No.1

An international network of non-profit organisations, with no religious or partisan affiliation, created in 1986 to accompany the efforts of indigenous peoples anxious to protect their cultural identity. *Traditions for Tomorrow* is active in different countries of Latin America and acts as a partner of Amerindian communities. In the field, it receives cultural or educational projects chosen and entirely implemented by the beneficiaries. To fund them, the organisation presents these projects to donors: its members, public and private funding agencies. *Traditions for Tomorrow*, by helping toward revitalising confidence, self-esteem, dignity and life in harmony with its environment, contributes to the restructuring of communities that will thus better assume the responsibility for their development. It has a consultative status with UNESCO.

## "Culturecide" A crime against humanity

Through live television, the world watched the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan be blown up by the regime in place; a major contribution to the international consensus for the elimination of that regime. The organised looting of the Baghdad Museum and of other Mesopotamian treasures moved international opinion just as much.

Why do we all feel so concerned when few if any of us have any direct links with these sites and objects? Because they are an integral part of the greater humanity's heritage. As noted in the Preamble to the 1954 The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, "[d]amage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world."

Cultural diversity, the opposite of globalisation, is an ascending topic. Indeed, little by little – probably too slowly – we are becoming conscious that our survival as an individual, heir of our culture, is also linked to our capacity to carry on living in harmony with our own cultural parameters.

However, neither explosions nor lootings are necessary to

destroy civilisations. A more insidious, and perhaps more dangerous threat to our cultural heritage goes unnoticed. Every day, pieces of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, that which by nature is not visible -- knowledge, beliefs, languages, and techniques -- are disappearing.

Tangible heritage -- objects, monuments, and sacred sites -- is itself also endowed most often with these intangible values, which are inestimable, too.

While tangible heritage may be disappearing because it is subject to unscrupulous cupidity on behalf of the wealthy, dominant civilisation, intangible heritage is often the victim of slow and unavoidable erosion. "Culturecide" has on individuals and on local communities the same consequences as ethnocide does on peoples.

The disastrous effects of this sad reality on the most disadvantaged populations, especially indigenous peoples, are blinding. Will efforts undertaken, for instance by UNESCO, to maintain the intangible

cultural heritage succeed in slowing down the accelerated extension of these "culturecides", real crimes against our humanity?



Diego and Christiane Gradis  
Founders of Traditions for Tomorrow

## SOS Planet Earth : world music to save the planet

After the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, 14 blasting rhythms to restore order around the planet. Many thanks to the singers including Peter Gabriel, I Muvrini and Sting, Toure Kunda, Youssou N'dour, Sergent Garcia, Johnny Clegg, etc. Traditions for Tomorrow and nine other NGOs will share the CD's benefits. Purchase it in your records shop or, better still, order it directly from Traditions for Tomorrow. (25\$ postage incl., trad@fgc.ch, www.sos-planet-earth.com)



## SOME OF OUR RECENT PROJECTS

### Ecuador

**"...where we come from and where we are going to",  
in Yuracruz**

*"It is very good and very important for us to maintain our festivals with dances and songs because they come from our ancestors. It is the only thing we have, and we do not want rich countries to take them away from us with their television, their strange music, expensive clothing that are useless to us here. Our music, our dances, our tales, our legends give us an identity and make us feel united with one another. We are proud that our children can have cultural activities. That way, we will know where we come from and where we are going to."* This is what the Quechua Indians of Yuracruz wrote to us after we first met in their village.

Their determination impressed us at once. For instance, they realized that they did not have the means to buy building material for their community centre. Rather than using the money from the budget assigned to food purchase for meals, they asked a NGO providing them training in agriculture to give them the money needed to buy cement and blocks. They would supply their own potatoes for lunch.



This village with 1600 inhabitants is situated in a very isolated arid area at 3800 metres' altitude, North East of the Imbabura province of Ecuador. Set away from those regions accessible to tourists, such as Otavalo or Cotacachi, Yuracruz people fight alone to survive on ungenerous lands. Feeling marginalized, with no easy access to their village, the need for a community centre has become a priority. Every villager

### Panama

**The Casa de Cultura,  
a small fort for Tebujo's  
Ngobe-Bügle culture**

Reaching Tebujo during the rainy season is not easy. It is either a five hours' walk or a three hours' horseback ride amongst gorgeous landscapes of mountains and embanked gorges. The largest Indian group in Panama, the Ngobe-Bügles, is also the most marginalized. Their extended territory towards the border with Costa Rica was finally officially recognised by the State after years of struggle.

Geographical dispersal does not help these people's cohesion, which faces serious political and religious divisions. Mining companies have added to this division in order to access more easily the exploration areas they had been conceded. Perched on a ridge from which on clear days it is possible to see the Pacific coast, the small village of Tebujo, because it is more distant, has so far fortunately managed to avoid the disastrous effects of these conflicts. But for how much longer?

The installation of satellite telephones and the construction of a road practicable in all seasons will not avoid, notwithstanding some benefits they may procure, the defects of civilisation; an encounter they are not prepared for and that gives little credit to the wealth of Ngobe-Bügle culture.

And the Ngobe-Bügle culture is far from being nonexistent: it maintains its language, beliefs, medicine, the unconditional wearing of the traditional outfit by women; all of which is closely controlled by the village authorities.

The great fear of Tebujo's close to 2000 inhabitants is that upcoming contact with the Panamanian society might cause irreparable damage to this fragile equilibrium, and in the end sweep it away, with the foreseeable package of negative consequences that would result from it. By building the great traditional hut exclusively made out of local materials, they thus wished to demonstrate their preparation for this confrontation. Since then, the other villages in the area, at least one and a half hour's walking distance away, also want their *Casa de cultura*.

By contributing to the purchase of equipment, Traditions for Tomorrow has been able to encourage Tebujo's inhabitants to develop in the *Casa de cultura* numerous activities for awareness and revitalisation of their Ngobe-Bügle culture. The contribution consisted in solar panels, furniture and material for the workshops (sewing-machines, stationery, etc.).

marginalized, with no easy access to their village, the need for a community centre has become a priority. Every villager has had to bring one and a half dollars to purchase the land. They provide the labour force, but are unable to complete the construction for lack of materials.

The process they followed with Traditions for Tomorrow enabled them to become aware of their capacity to take up actions themselves without outside assistance. They invited us to visit them, and then presented, discussed with us and carried out this project, finishing the construction and equipping the building on their own. The modest support we brought them allowed the purchase of doors, windows, furniture, sound and electrical equipment and of course music instruments, since without music there are no festivals, and without festivals we do not know either "where we come from", or "where we are going to"!

## Costa Rica

### The Bribris from Cabagra will build their courthouse among the coffee bushes

Who would have thought that Cabagra, this small Indian village of 6000 inhabitants peacefully set on the mild slopes of Talamanca's Cordillera facing the Pacific Ocean and practically not reachable by vehicle, would have the first custom law court of the Central American isthmus?

This curious story begins in 1998, four years after Costa Rica ratified the 1989 ILO Convention 169 concerning indigenous peoples. With the village elders' impetus, the population decides to create a commission to resolve on the spot conflicts between Indians and outsiders -- mixed-blood settlers -- who keep invading their territory. Indeed official justice, remote, slow, expensive, rendered in a language foreign to them, and most of the time intimidating and humiliating, had long proven its inefficiency.



The result: three judges are appointed by the village assembly to provide a permanent service seven days a week to deal with conflicts between Cabagra dwellers. Of course criminal

construction consisted in solar panels, furniture and material for the workshops (sewing-machines, stationery, etc.).



the winds, surrounded by five chairs, utilising an old lent typewriter and a file cabinet with creaking drawers.

This is the reason why Cabagra solicited Traditions for Tomorrow some support to construct a two-room building and a file room on a piece of land given by the village, to purchase a photocopier and a computer connected to internet -- Cabagra having recently acquired electricity -- and a telephone line. Nothing too luxurious but certainly enough to provide foundations for this experience important to this village and its region, and bound to become a model for indigenous peoples elsewhere in Latin America.

#### Amerindian peoples, partners of Traditions for Tomorrow since 1986

<b>GUATEMALA</b>	<b>MEXICO</b>	<b>COLOMBIA</b>	<b>CHILE</b>
Aguacateco	Chinanteco	Chami-Catio	Huilliche
Axi	Mam	Afro-colombiano	Aymara
Kaqchiquel	Mazahua	Wayuu	Mapuche
Ixil	Mixteco		
Jacalteco	Mixe	<b>ECUADOR</b>	
K'anjobal	Huichol	Cañari	<b>PANAMA</b>
Quiché	Tojolabal	Quichua	Kuna
Mam	Choloteco	Saraguro	Ngobe-Bügle
Chalchiltecos	Chamula	Shuar	
Q'eqchi	Tzotzil	Afro-ecuatoriano	
	Triqui		<b>PERU</b>
<b>NICARAGUA</b>	Zapoteco	<b>EL SALVADOR</b>	Andino
Mayangna	Chol	Kakawira	Quechua
Rama	Chontal	Lenca	Aymara
Garifuna	Nahñu	Nahuat	
Criollos	Nahuatl		
Miskito	and Nahuat	<b>COSTA RICA</b>	<b>BOLIVIA</b>
		Bribri	Aymara
<b>HONDURAS</b>		Ngobe-Bügle	Quechua
Garifuna		Cabecar	Guarani
Chorti			

**Down from the Andes  
to collect a UNESCO Prize in Paris**

to provide a permanent service seven days a week to deal with conflicts between Cabagra dwellers. Of course criminal cases remain under the neighbouring town court's exclusive jurisdiction. If at first the judicial authorities looked unfavourably upon the setting up of an alternative justice apparatus escaping the laws of the Republic, they rapidly came to the obvious conclusion that this "bare feet justice" answered better and faster the needs of the population.

This is neither a popular justice, too often subject to drifting and abuse, nor the good old Salomon justice delivered by the wise men in traditional societies. Cabagra's court is actually a jurisdiction with its procedures, its witnesses, its audiences, defenders for those parties that wish so, sentences and minutes in good and due form. This justice relies on ancestral Bribri values and appeals to a reparations system that does not humiliate, but restores the litigants to their rightful places within the community.

This new justice system is working so well that the official court's judges, who followed a "training session" in Cabagra, now refuse to take on disputes related to that village, which would not have first been dealt with by the common law court. The Cabagra tribunal resolves 90% of cases presented, and the amount at issue is seldom over 50 dollars.

Where is the work of this inventive tribunal taking place? On a desk falling apart in a corner of the community hall open to

## to collect a UNESCO Prize in Paris

Juan José Galindo and Marcela Machaca are at the head of the Quechua village of Quispillaccta (Peru). Through its candidacy presented to UNESCO by Traditions for Tomorrow, the village won the 2001 Prize for rural communication. Quispillaccta radio disseminates among half a million people, the knowledge, values and traditions of Quechua peoples from the Andean central region. Operating with our support since 1999, it is the model of a culturally dedicated community radio.



Their visit to France to receive the Prize in April 2003, was an opportunity for a number of conferences and meetings.



## Madre Tierra !

Daniel Wermus

Traditions for Tomorrow's book, already available in French (Albin Michel Ed.) and in Spanish (Abya Yala Ed.), will also soon be published in English. Written by Daniel Wermus, journalist at the Infosud press agency, and prefaced by Professor Yves Coppens of the *Collège de France*, **Madre Tierra! For the Amerindian Renaissance** is the narrative of a trip from Mexico to Panama, packed with information for the reader to go travelling amidst the Amerindians; an encounter with incredible characters, a scrumptious guide illustrated with pictures, maps, statistics, etc. Somewhat a mirror reflecting our image!

On sale in bookshops and at Traditions for Tomorrow. (28\$ postage incl., trad@fgc.ch)

## Mexico

### Morelos Nahuatl children take advantage of cultural workshops during their holidays

There were only four of them when, in 1994, they got together to promote cultural activities in the villages of the small State

At the end of these workshops the two best pupils of each village are chosen and will, once a month during the rest of the year, each time in a different part of Morelos, join the other children selected. Through these visits to historical, ceremonial or amusement places, and through a cultural animation training programme, the Coordination guarantees its sustainability by allowing the continuity of a dynamics that retained its spontaneity, its informality, and also its close relation with the rural world.

**Giles Whitcomb**  
**Good-bye, our friend**

There were only four of them when, in 1994, they got together to promote cultural activities in the villages of the small State of Morelos, close to Mexico City. They had left their villages to study in the city. Fresh out of university, they are then convinced that these "campo people" from their own villages, need to be taught everything. Painters, actor, author -- their goodwill, however, rapidly confronts realities. They come to discover that "true" culture, popular and Indian, lies and lives within villages, not on art schools' benches.

Thus, little by little, year after year, the network of the Morelos Indian and Popular Cultural Groups' Coordination (CGCIP) spreads, present nowadays throughout the State. With the impetus of a small team of volunteers, real culture knights who all live from agriculture in their village, over forty cultural groups greatly diversified nowadays constitute the network. Among the numerous activities they organise yearlong, with no other support than their enthusiasm and their determination, are festivals, handicraft fairs, video workshops, popular theatre plays, painting contests, and exhibitions.

The attractive but misleading sparkles of city lights are reflected in the deforming mirrors of the ogre, Mexico City, and reach all the way to the Morelos villages. The network has always been concerned about its effect on the children: what will they do during the summer holidays, when they are not helping the family in the field or are not with the household? Thus with Traditions for Tomorrow's support, the network organises workshops during the holidays for about a thousand children between 8 and 14 years old, in some fifteen villages throughout the State. Handicrafts, artistic expressions, video, and also civic and moral values, are among the activities organised and voluntarily led by members of the network, together with the authorities and often the elders of the villages.

### **Good-bye, our friend**

***Out path shall continue without you. From day one you had understood us. For many years as member of our Board you shared your great experience of humanitarian action. This immense vacuum you left us with when you departed to early, on May 13, 2003, will forever be marked by your look and your smile.***

### **Traditions for Tomorrow**

**Traditions pour Demain - Tradiciones para el Mañana**

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