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## The Bolivian CIDOB launches Sixth Indigenous March for autonomy & rights, 2007

7 July

2007

to: 17 July

2007

**Country:** Bolivia

**Location City/State/Province:** Santa Cruz

**Location Description:** *The march began in the city of Santa Cruz and was intended to end in the judicial capital of Sucre, the site of the 2006-2007 Constituent Assembly. While representatives from CIDOB member organizations were sent to Sucre afterwards, the official march was suspended in the town of El Torno (located within the Department of Santa Cruz)*

### Goals:

CIDOB goals for changes to be incorporated into the new Bolivian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly:

- Full recognition and guarantee of the political, participatory and collective rights of the original indigenous nations and peoples in all levels of government
- Autonomous indigenous territories are to have an equal legal status alongside other territorial entities
- Natural resources located within indigenous territories are to collectively benefit the indigenous communities
- There must be direct representation of the indigenous peoples and nations within the legislative branch

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 011. Records, radio, and television

**Notes on Methods:**

While the physical marching and self-exposure to the elements (#38 and #158) halted on certain days, they are treated as constantly ongoing for these purposes because the overall march itself was in progress. Methods #3, #5 and #122 may have occurred in more than the time segments in which they are listed, but their listing reflects estimated moments in the campaign when they were of greatest importance.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice  
National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- Peasant unions
- farmers
- indigenous peoples

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia, CIDOB)

Adolfo Chávez Beyuma, President of CIDOB

Pedro Nuni, Vice President of CIDOB

**Partners:**

There are eleven regional indigenous organizations that comprise CIDOB. While not comprehensive, the following list includes the majority of them (from CIDOB website):

- Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní
- Central de Pueblos Nativos Guarayos
- Central de Pueblos Indígenas de Beni
- Central Indígena de la Región Amazónica de Bolivia
- Central Indígena de Pueblos Amazónicos de Pando
- Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Trópico de Cochabamba
- Central de Pueblos Indígenas de La Paz
- Organización de la Capitanía Wehenayek Tapiete

Other Partners:

Pacto de Unidad (Unity Pact)

NGO coalition of Constituyente Soberana

Other groups in support of similar demands of indigenous autonomy

**External allies:**

President Evo Morales' Administration (in certain respects)

Permanent Assembly of Human Rights based in La Paz, ADHLP (La Asamblea Permanente de los Derechos Humanos de La Paz)

Local communities that funded and donated food for the marchers as they passed through

**Involvement of social elites:**

A coalition of NGOs called Constituyente Soberana, which includes CENDA (Center for Andean Communication and

Development), CEJIS (Center for Legal and Social Studies) and CEDIB (Center for Bolivian Documentation and Information), which did research and advocacy on behalf of the proposals of indigenous-campesino groups and indigenous autonomy demands, particularly in the process around the Constituent Assembly.

Members of the Bolivian media elite, including the Bolivian Information Agency (ABI), spread news about the march during the days in which it was occurring.

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Permanent Assembly of Human Rights based in La Paz (ADHLP)
- Unity Pact (see “Partners” for the Pact’s member social groups)

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

- The MAS-led government as represented by Vice-Minister of Lands Alejandro Almaraz

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- Key members of five commissions within the Constituent Assembly and the President of the Assembly (Silvia Lazarte)

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1 day 16 hours*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Departmental Autonomy movements within Media Luna (the more conservative, less indigenous, resource-rich departments of Eastern Bolivia, including Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija). [See “Additional Information” section for more details]

The political party “Poder Democrático Social” (Podemos)

The Santa Cruz Civic Union

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not Known

**Repressive Violence:**

Attack on the president of CIDOB in the airport, Adolfo Chávez on July 10, 2007

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

4 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

1 point out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

CIDOB claimed at the end of its Sixth March that 75% of their demands were met in the drafting process of the Constitution that the Constituent Assembly developed. However, their single unmet demand was significant: the direct representation of indigenous peoples and nations within the legislative branch.

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In July 2007 the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia, which goes by the Spanish acronym CIDOB (La Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia), launched their Sixth Indigenous March campaign.

CIDOB is a national organization representing most of Bolivia's eastern lowland indigenous groups. Included under the CIDOB banner were regional Amazonian indigenous groups, Guaranís, Guarayos, and others.

According to the latest available census data taken in 2001, 62% of the Bolivian population self-identifies as one of the over 30 indigenous nations in the country. Nonetheless, Bolivian indigenous communities have long been excluded from the political system. Noteworthy is the passage of the 1874 *Ley de Ex-Vinculación* that abolished Bolivian indigenous communities' communal land rights, after which most of their lands were lost to encroaching elite-controlled *hacienda* plantations. Indigenous peoples made noteworthy but still limited political gains in the 1950s, but it was not until the 1970s that the communities began to reconstruct their collective identities. In the late 1980s and since, indigenous groups have articulated specific demands to regain autonomous control over their ancestral lands. In 1989, Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the International Labour Organization (ILO) recognized indigenous peoples' rights to "retain their own customs and institutions." In 1990, the Bolivian central government ratified Convention 169 of the ILO. CIDOB was a leading indigenous organization at the forefront of this movement, which began staging cross-country marches in 1990 to demand autonomous control of indigenous territories. The ratification of ILO Convention 169 was one of its early successes, and it has made significant gains towards its goals since.

The Sixth March in July 2007 sought to sway the proceedings of the concurrent Constituent Assembly, which had been formed by President Evo Morales' governing MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) Party in 2006 with the intention of rewriting the national constitution. Members of the Assembly were specially elected representatives drawn from across the country.

The new constitution was intended in part to more adequately address the interests of indigenous peoples. However, different commissions within the Constituent Assembly had different proposals regarding the nature of the changes, and so CIDOB sought to advance its demands against that uncertain backdrop.

In their *Manifiesto de la VI Marcha Indígena*, CIDOB described its demands for greater indigenous rights and autonomy that it sought for the new constitution. Many indigenous peoples were particularly adamant about the demand for a more just allocation of their territorial economic resources. The CIDOB demands included the following, translated and paraphrased by the author:

- Bolivia must be a unitary plurinationalist state recognizing the pre-existence of the original indigenous nations and peoples, and assuring their participation at all levels of government.
- Autonomous indigenous territories are to exist without subordination, equal in hierarchy to other territorial entities.
- Natural resources located within indigenous territories are to collectively benefit the indigenous communities.
- There must be direct representation of the indigenous peoples and nations within the legislative branch.
- There must be a guarantee of collective rights as indigenous peoples.

The march originated in the CIDOB center at Santa Cruz and was initially intended to reach Sucre, the city hosting the Constituent Assembly. The more than 300 marchers endured days of difficult weather conditions, including rain and cold. Among the marchers were an estimated 170 women and 68 children below the age of 12, including babies, in addition to men

and the elderly. Some mothers within the group of marchers who were interviewed by the Bolivian press emphasized that they had no means to leave their children behind, and that it was part of their culture and community to bring everyone along for the march. After its start on July 7, the march stopped for several days in the town of La Guardia before continuing on in the direction of Sucre.

As the Sixth March was in progress, on July 10, 2007, the president of CIDOB, Adolfo Chávez, arrived at the Sucre airport for a personal visit to present his organization's demands to the Constituent Assembly. While being interviewed on national television, he was insulted and then physically attacked by right-wing opposition, resulting in his internment in a local hospital. The attacker was identified as a Constituent Assembly member, Fernando Morales, who was part of the leading opposition political party in Bolivia, *Podemos*.

The event caused a media stir, and strengthened the hand of the CIDOB and other indigenous and peasant coalitions in the Constituent Assembly that were grouped together around common interests under a "Unity Pact" (Pacto de Unidad). The Unity Pact included CSUTCB (a highland peasant union), CONAMAQ (an organization of indigenous peoples from the western highlands), MST (a landless movement of the eastern lowlands), and CSCB (the former name for an organization representing a union of highland indigenous peoples who had migrated and settled in the eastern lowlands). While the member organizations shared some internal differences, their Unity Pact jointly condemned the attack on Chávez, demanded the expulsion of Fernando Morales from the Constituent Assembly, and called for the government to initiate an investigation and bring justice to bear. The CIDOB leadership, meanwhile, distributed a document accusing Jorge Quiroga, the national head of *Podemos*, and Branko Marinkovic, the president of the Santa Cruz Civic Union, of being the masterminds behind the attack. For its part, the *Podemos* party tried to distance itself from the incident, claiming it was an issue between two persons.

The Unity Pact toughened its language at the Assembly, ratifying and re-affirming its demands for a plurinational state, indigenous control of natural resources within indigenous communities, and indigenous autonomy with equality of hierarchy. The powerful CSUTCB peasant union, led by their Executive Secretary Isaac Ávalos, emphasized the Pact's rejection of a referendum vote requirement to establish indigenous autonomy. He called for a national march in solidarity with the ongoing CIDOB Sixth March, and threatened hunger strikes, in order to maintain pressure on the Assembly, particularly in the face of the opposition political parties coalesced around the conservative departmental autonomy movements.

Meanwhile, condemnations of the attack on Chávez surged in from outside groups, too, noticeably from the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights based in La Paz, ADHLP (La Asamblea Permanente de los Derechos Humanos de La Paz), which called for an investigation. The MAS-led government, as represented by Vice-Minister of Lands Alejandro Almaraz, weighed in and verbally condemned the attack as well, calling on the *Podemos* party to explain its purposes and intentions.

The incident did not produce any swift consensus in the Assembly, as there was continuing disagreement and limited political will for compromise between the majority and center-right opposition parties. Many indigenous leaders abandoned dialogue they had opened with the Santa Cruz Civic Union leaders in the wake of the attack.

In the immediately following days, Chávez returned to the site where the CIDOB Sixth March was gathered, arriving when they were in El Torno, a locality about 33 kilometers outside of Santa Cruz. The march stopped here on Wednesday July 11 as the leadership decided whether to continue towards Sucre. Locals in El Torno turned out to help feed the marchers as they determined a plan.

On Saturday, July 14, Constituent Assembly members from five of its commissions, along with the president of the Assembly, Silvia Lazarte, traveled to El Torno to meet Chávez and CIDOB leadership and discuss their demands. They spent extended sessions in meetings that ran through the day and night, some of these back in the city of Santa Cruz to avoid interruption.

In the end, it was clear the Constituent Assembly was responsive to many of the Sixth March's demands. The CIDOB leadership, carefully analyzing reports by these commission members, emerged from the meetings on July 16, 2007, claiming that 75% of their demands had been incorporated into the plans for the new constitution. On this note, CIDOB decided to

suspend its march ten days after it had started.

Specifically, CIDOB listed its support for the following reports and pronouncements by the Assembly (translation and paraphrasing by author):

- Complete backing for the *Comisión Visión de País*, whose report called for a plurinational state.
- Agreement with the majority report of the *Comisión de Autonomía* that made many overlapping demands, in particular that of indigenous autonomy.
- Satisfaction with the *Comisión Tierra y Territorio* that recognized, protected, and guaranteed the integral right of indigenous peoples to indigenous territories.

The CIDOB marchers stated that their primary unmet demand was for direct representation in the legislative branch. They reiterated that their demands that had been met were to be crosschecked with the reports of other relevant commissions at the Constituent Assembly. To specifically assure the Constituent Assembly's follow-through, each of the eleven regional organization members of CIDOB sent ten representatives to Sucre on July 19, 2007 to maintain pressure behind their demands for incorporating greater indigenous rights in the new constitution. If necessary, CIDOB pledged, it would take up its Sixth March again until its demands were met.

CIDOB's campaign certainly contributed to the final outcome of the new Bolivian Constitution as ratified in 2009, including provisions that for the first time in history recognized indigenous groups' pre-colonial claims to their ancestral lands, and to indigenous autonomy in political, legal, economic, cultural and territorial terms. Nonetheless, indigenous groups were required to exercise their pre-colonial right to autonomy only through the "framework of state unity" and territorial boundaries that often did not conform to natural boundaries of indigenous lands. This remained one of the core tensions between indigenous groups and the MAS-led government, and one of many areas for further research.

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**Additional Notes:**

Background on the opposition by departmental autonomy movements: Conservative sectors within these regions have made claims for departmental autonomy alongside the CIDOB and other indigenous groups' separate and distinct claims of indigenous autonomy. Departmental autonomy groups make demands beyond those of indigenous autonomy. Some argue these threaten the nation's overall well being, with demands including territorial secession and rights to subsoil resources like natural gas, and also lack the rootedness in ethnic identity and cultural preservation that demands of indigenous autonomy rely upon. The departmental autonomy movements have been a leading source of opposition to the indigenous autonomy movements, as the demands of each have often existed in a "mutually exclusive" manner, according to many scholars.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Thomas Scharff, 23/11/2011

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