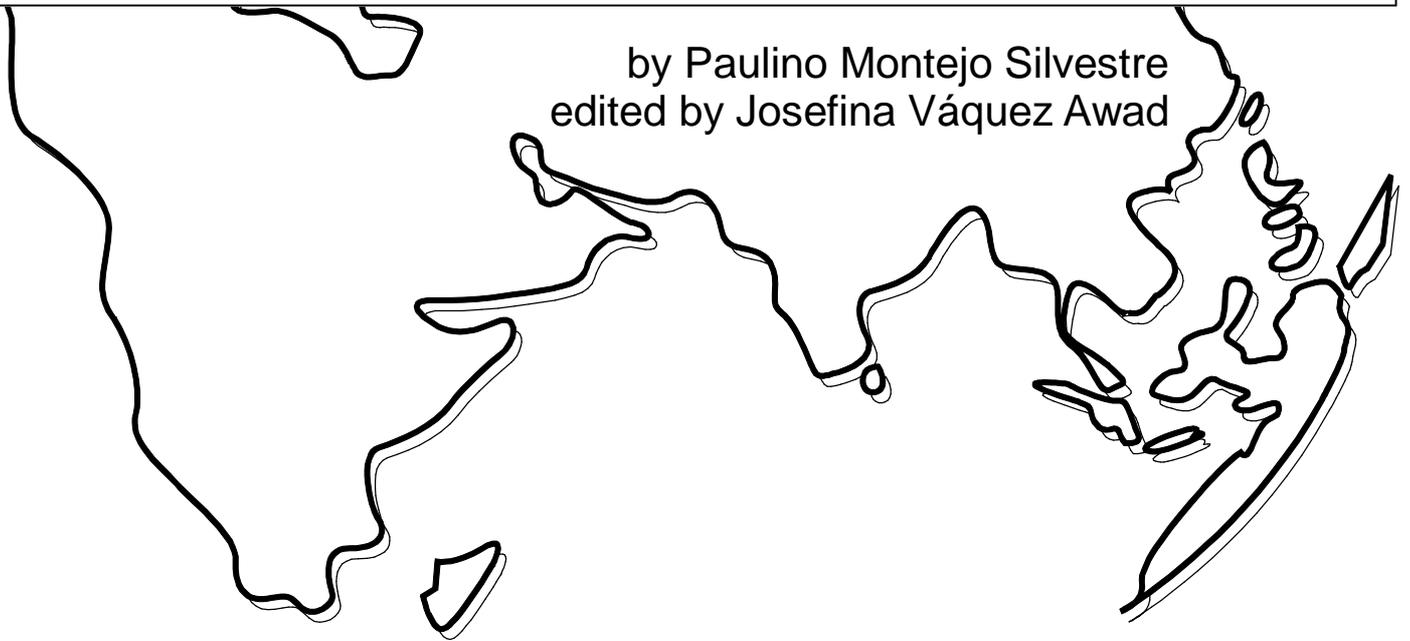


**From Protest to Proposal:**  
Policy Influence in Government Institutions

by Paulino Montejo Silvestre  
edited by Josefina Vázquez Awad



**NEW Tactics**  
in Human Rights

A Tactical Notebook published by  
the New Tactics Project  
of the Center for Victims of Torture

**Published by:**

The Center for Victims of Torture – New Tactics in Human Rights Project  
717 East River Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55455 USA  
Websites: [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org); [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org)

**Notebook series editor:**

Liam Mahony

**Editor:**

Josefina Vázquez Awad

**Graphic design:**

Marianella León

**Translated into English by:**

Bruce Campbell

**Photos:**

COIAB archive

© 2010 Center for Victims of Torture

**Attribution**  List “The Center for Victims of Torture - New Tactics in Human Rights Project” as the source for any information used in this document as well as any original attribution provided in this document.

**Noncommercial**  The information in this document is not to be used for profit.

**Share Alike**  If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same, similar or a compatible license.

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the New Tactics in Human Rights Project. The project does not advocate specific tactics or policies.

- 4 Author Biography
- 5 Letter from the New Tactics project manager
- 6 Importance of COIAB participation in commissions or government bodies
- 6 Background of this tactic
- 7 Specific government bodies with COIAB participation
- 8 Concrete cases of use of the tactic
- 10 Opening and occupation of positions on commissions and other governmental bodies by COIAB
- 11 Some results of COIAB's participation in governmental bodies
- 12 Determining factors in advancement and implementation of COIAB's demands
- 14 Political and legal framework for COIAB's participation in governmental bodies
- 15 Recommendations for implementation of the tactic in other contexts
- 15 Conclusion

## Biographies and Organizational Information

### Paulino Montejo Silvestre

Paulino Montejo Silvestre is Guatemalan, originally from the town of Maya-Popti' (known as Maya-Jacalteco), and has lived in Brazil since 1987. He graduated as professor of History and Social Studies from the Universidad del Valle of Guatemala, with an advanced degree in Administration in Ethnodevelopment through the Universidade Federal do Amazonas (Brazil). He has many years of experience as a journalist in Brazil and other countries of the region, covering the agendas of the social movements and writing for specialized publications about indigenous peoples and indigenous rights.

From 1989 to 1999, he was a representative in Brazil of the Latin American Information Agency (ALAI) for which he continues as an advisor. After a decade of following the process of articulation of the national indigenous movement in the country's capital, he is now a communication advisor for the Network of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon.

### About the COIAB

The Network of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) was founded officially on April 19, 1989. It brings together in its base nearly 100 indigenous organizations, associations, and federations representing 165 different indigenous peoples, of the more than 220 in the country. Together these groups comprise a population of 743,131, of whom more than 60% live in the Amazon.

COIAB's area of activities encompasses the nine states of the Amazon (Amazonas, Acre, Amapá, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins), which together encompass 5,109,812 square kilometers, more than 60% of the national territory.

By decision of the VII General Assembly held in May of 2001, COIAB's area of activities has been divided into 31 regions based on geographic, political, and socio-cultural differences, creating a Fiscal and Deliberative Council of 31 members.

Since its founding COIAB has been dedicated to the defense of the rights of the Amazonian indigenous peoples: indigenous land, health, and education; identity, culture, ethno-development and, more recently, territorial administration, protection of the environment and of biodiversity, as well as protection and defense of the traditional knowledge of the indigenous peoples. In the service of these objectives COIAB plans annually its activities, based on the deliberations of the General Assembly and of the Fiscal and Deliberative Council, the challenges of the domestic economy, and current demands of the indigenous peoples and organization of the Amazon.



Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebooks series!

In each notebook, a human rights defender describes an innovative tactic used successfully in his or her work. The authors have been pioneers in tactics that have contributed to human rights in their own countries, demonstrating also that these tactics can be adapted and applied in other countries and contexts in order to address a variety of issues.

All of the authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, representing governmental and/or non-governmental perspectives, educators, law enforcement, mental health workers and truth and reconciliation processes. Each notebook contains detailed information about the author or authors and their organization, what they have accomplished, and the methods and resources used to accomplish it.

We hope to inspire other human rights activists to think tactically and to broaden their range of tactics to include those that have successfully advanced human rights elsewhere.

In this notebook Paulino Montejo Silvestre relates the experience of the Network of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) and the process of its political transition "from protest to proposal," systematically capturing decision-making positions in order to participate in the formulation and implementation of public policies in favor of the lives and rights of indigenous peoples.

Working strategically with circumstances, and strengthening and training movement members, COIAB has managed to participate in more than 40 governmental and inter-institutional spaces in which governmental policy is discussed and formulated, including on issues of indigenous health and the environment.

Although indigenous people are only 2% of the Brazilian population, COIAB has been able to overcome the historical denial of the indigenous voice, and has won an impressive arena of agency in a very short period. Social movements – of all kinds – can learn from this experience in order to take better advantage of opportunities for public participation.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at [www.newtactics.com](http://www.newtactics.com). Other notebooks will be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners, and information about our workshops and symposia.

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and grew out of our experience as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position – one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that, in this sense, these informative notebooks will be useful in continuing to reflect together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Kelsch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Kelsch  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project Manager

## **COIAB's participation in commissions and other governmental bodies**

This work presents in summary manner the experience of the Network of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) in participating in commissions and governmental bodies (advisory councils and work groups), in which the goal is to ensure that the presence and voice of indigenous people is taken into account when developing public policies related to the respect of rights recognized by the current Federal Constitution.

COIAB's participation in governmental bodies is legitimated by the fact that it is the largest organization joining together and representing the indigenous peoples of the Amazon region. As such, COIAB's participation reflects a complex process of organizing and of articulation of demands – not a simple top-down decision – since it is not a matter of simply “inserting” individuals, experts or indigenous technicians into governmental bodies, but of inserting the voice of the Amazonian indigenous movement in order to be heard in the construction of public policies. COIAB's experience demonstrates that it is possible to make good use of official spaces without renouncing the political principles, the historical demands, and the autonomy of the movement.

In practice, this tactic of government participation functions in combination with lobbying, political pressure and other institutional dynamics that guarantee the inclusion and integrity of criteria at the core of the indigenous movement. Therefore, we will speak of this tactic separately from the totality of tactics used by the Amazonian indigenous movement.

After describing several examples of the use of the tactic, we will offer some reflections on possible results, the conditions for implementation of the tactic, the political and legal basis of this kind of participation, and the possibilities for application of this tactic in other contexts and movements.

### **Background for the tactic**

In a context of globalization, indigenous peoples and organizations – like many other social sectors – have had to discover new ways of being, acting, thinking, feeling, and imagining their presence in a situation where cultural pluralism and distinct way of life have often been threatened.

At the same time, other, mainly urban social movements have emerged visibly from the heart

of the indigenous peoples as active political subjects, protagonists in the defence of their own rights. This is demonstrated in the character of their organizations, the sophistication of their demands, and the level of their participation in discussing and defining the legal instruments and public policies that affect them.

In their search for autonomy, indigenous peoples and organizations – as ethnically and culturally differentiated collectivities – have fought for the right of egalitarian and democratic participation in defining the future of the nation of which they are part, without detriment to their differences and specificity, adapting their forms of struggle to specific historical moments.

The 1980s was for indigenous peoples and organizations a period basically of protest, while in the 1990s the challenge was centered in finding new forms of struggle and of political action in order to avoid being marginalized by the governmental bodies and dynamics instituted by neoliberal states. Leaders were convinced that it was necessary to adapt to the reality of the moment, and that without indigenous participation in the discussion, definition, and implementation of the policies that affect them, there would never be any real response to their demands.

At base, this was a decision grounded in ethnic constituencies, in indigenous awareness and pride of an identity and culture in control of its own history and its own social reality. An awareness grounded in the resounding failure of developmentalist, paternalistic, and welfare assistance policies practiced until then by the official indigenous institute, the National Indian Foundation (Fundación Nacional del Indio or Funai), by the religious missions, and by some non-governmental organizations. “Nobody knows better than us the problems and needs of our people,” was the most commonly heard phrase among the leadership, and at the same time was the point of departure for new challenges, toward a period of learning and political growth for the indigenous movement.

This turn gained strength in the period prior to the National Constituent Assembly in 1988, marked by mass presence, permanent pressure, lobbying, and activist pressure like the taking of Congress and other public spaces, finally making possible the inclusion of a specific chapter on indigenous rights in the Federal Constitution, proclaimed in October of that same year. This progress instilled in the movement greater determination to give authority to rights recently recognized by the Constitution.



*Indigenous Warriors of the Amazon in national mobilization.*

Then came the mass marches of 2000, when indigenous peoples and organizations, in alliance with other social sectors, contested and opposed the official festivities of the 500th anniversary of the so-called “Discovery of Brazil.”

In that process the indigenous movement joined together through the COIAB understood that practices marked by critique and protest actions were not sufficient, no matter how legitimate they were. It was necessary to turn from protest to proposal, creating conditions for exercising influence in the various spaces where the future of the indigenous peoples was debated, analyzed and decided upon. If indigenous communities were tired of others speaking for them, they were still unable to speak for themselves in any way, or even make their presence known in order to have a say on administrative, political, or legal acts and measures, many of which were contrary to their own interests. For this reason the movement chose to participate in commissions and governmental bodies.

Over time it became necessary to adopt other tactics, including, importantly, the improvement of the organization’s internal structure for representation and participation. Also included were requiring planning and evaluation of the organization’s work; dialogue and negotiation with the government; implementation of forums of support for indigenous struggles; and strengthening of the internal networking venues of the movement itself (courses, meetings, conferences, seminars, etc.), without abandoning lobbying work, direct action and political pressure on public power.

### **Governmental bodies in which COIAB participates**

COIAB currently participates in some 40 different bodies, 29 of them of federal, state, and/or municipal governmental character. The others are collaborative bodies with NGOs or spaces for regional, national and international networking proper to the movement, including the Network of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Valley (COICA) and the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, in whose boards of directors COIAB participates as a member organization.

The following are among the governmental bodies with COIAB participation:

**1. National Council on the Environment (Consejo Nacional del Medio Ambiente, CONAMA)**, with two representatives. The Council deliberates and advises the government on environmental policies. The Council has been a strategic space for overcoming dilemmas related, for example, to the overlapping of environmental preservation areas with indigenous lands. Representatives of the government and of the large environmentalist groups do not always have a clear understanding of indigenous issues.

**2. Joint Consulting Commission of the Integrated Project for the Legal Protection of Indigenous Lands and Populations of the Amazon (CPC/PPTAL)**. With eight representatives, four of them members and four auxiliaries. The

commission supports the process of regularization of indigenous lands conducted by the National Indian Foundation (Funai). The PPTAL is a subprogram of the Pilot Program of the Group of Seven (PPG-7), under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Environment (MMA) of the Brazilian government.

**3. National Biodiversity Commission (CONABIO).** The CONABIO is composed of eight representatives of the federal government and eight representatives from non-governmental institutions. Two representatives – one member and one auxiliary – are part of the COIAB. The CONABIO was instituted by the Ministry of the Environment to coordinate, support and evaluate the actions of the National Biological Biodiversity Program (PRONABIO), the agency responsible for the implementation of principles and guidelines for the National Biodiversity Policy. The policy seeks to implement the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CDB), including the knowledge, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, with the fair and equitable distribution of the benefits arising from the use of that biodiversity.

**4. Inter-Ministry Pro-Environment Working Group,** with two members. The Group discusses the search for alternative forms of technical advising and financial credit for the indigenous communities, in a manner similar to the National Program for the Promotion of Family Agriculture, which is aimed at small producers and rural workers. In a series of 17 workshops conducted in different regions of the country, the movement's grassroots diagnosed the need for and defined proposals for the implementation of sustainable economic alter-

natives. In a subsequent national seminar these proposals were integrated, but the establishment of a detailed public policy remains pending.

**5. National Council on Indigenous Education,** with two representatives. COIAB's involvement has served to demand and influence the definition of policies and the adoption of measures for providing indigenous school education at all levels. The government itself is currently discussing the need to create varied opportunities through special courses and programs for indigenous students in the universities. The legal basis for basic education was established in proposals that the indigenous movement presented to the legislature through this and other governmental and non-governmental bodies, commissions and forums.

#### Concrete cases of use of the tactic

**1. Administration, Monitoring and Executive Commission of the Indigenous People's Demonstration Project (PDPI).** The Indigenous People's Demonstration Project is an experimental project of the Secretariat of Coordination of the Amazon and of the Ministry of the Environment and is of special significance in the history of the movement since it marked the beginning of a new concept and practice of inter-relationship among the indigenous communities, the Brazilian government and international cooperation.

On the one hand, the project aims to abolish the superficial welfare practices originating from the state, and on the other, it seeks political maturity for the movement that worked on the project from its origins. The PDPI was, in fact, one of the first



*Indigenous advisors, in a working group, discuss the situation in the Special Indigenous Health District of Manaus, Amazon.*

gains in the early period of the programs financed by the Group of Seven and implemented by the Ministry of the Environment; a specific program was demanded, in view of differences from other initiatives more focused on the rubber workers, the traditional communities, and the small farmers and resource extractors of the Amazon.

The context of the tactic was marked by an understanding that the demarcation and regularization of indigenous lands is only one step in the process of guaranteeing these lands for the indigenous communities. Legal acts by themselves cannot secure the boundaries or the sustainability of indigenous lands in a market economy context, where agro-export monoculture tends to impose itself alongside other mega-projects that threaten biodiversity, territorial integrity and the natural and spiritual patrimony of the indigenous communities.

Thus, the PDPI seeks to improve the outlook for economic, social and cultural sustainability of the indigenous communities, and promote the conservation of natural resources through the financing of local subprojects planned and executed in a participatory manner. These subprojects can include different areas: monitoring of indigenous lands, sustainable economic activities, cultural recovery and development. The structure of the PDPI includes:

**Technical Management** is headed by an indigenous leader selected by COIAB. The member organizations select candidates, and the three with the most votes are approved by the Fiscal and Deliberative Council of the COIAB, which then forwards the candidates to the Ministry of the Environment so that one of them can be designated to manage the PDPI.

The **Management Unit** is the team of technicians and assistants who specialize in areas such as anthropology, communication, biology and forestry, whose function is to advise and consult with management and the communities that require training, guidance and orientation in carrying out their projects.

The **Executive Commission** is composed in joint fashion of 10 members: five indigenous and five representatives from governmental organizations. The central function of the commission is to evaluate and approve sustainable development projects created by indigenous communities.

**Reference Groups** are leaders selected by the base organizations and hired to be points of reference and support and liaisons between management and the communities or regions that develop

projects financed by the PDPI.

Monitoring is a role carried out by the COIAB, together with management, the Management Unit, the Executive Commission, the Reference Groups, and the Supervisory Mission of the PDPI (composed of members of the Projects, representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, of the cooperating international institutions, of the Brazilian Agency of Cooperation, and of the COIAB).

The projects supported by the PDPI can be large or small. The latter may cost up to 100 thousand reales (approximately 33 thousand U.S. dollars) and the large projects range between 100 thousand and 400 thousand reales (approximately 133 thousand U.S. dollars). The projects focus on fishing, poultry farming, beekeeping, forest management, cultural recovery and development, restoration of degraded areas or the revival of territorial limits.

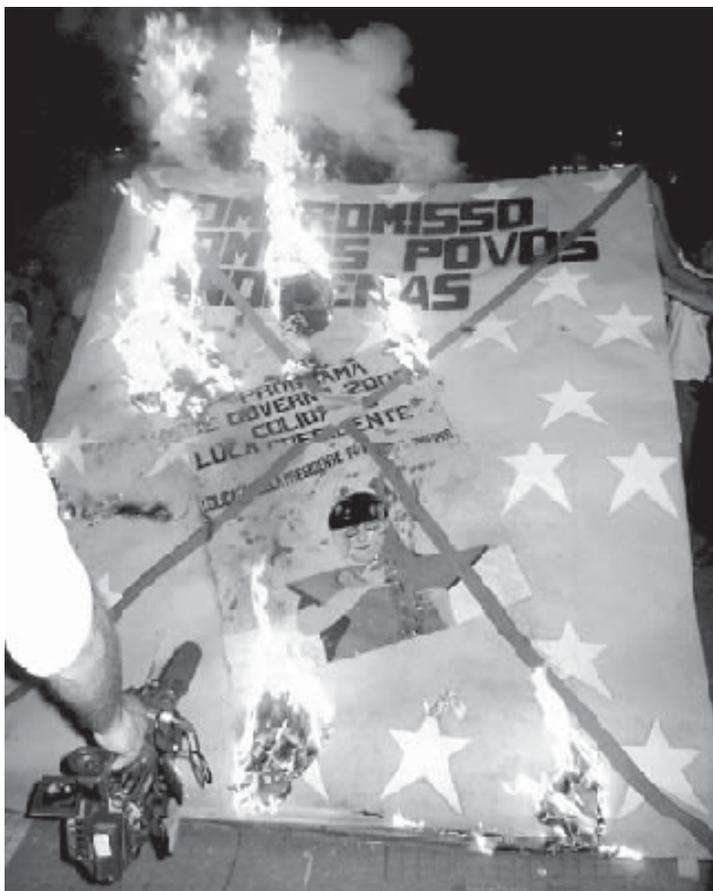
In 2004 the PDPI began a Program for Training Indigenous Project Administrators, which intends to provide to leaders selected by the organizations of the Amazon an ongoing course for negotiating, developing, managing, executing, monitoring and evaluating indigenous projects. The objective is to generate multiplier agents and trained advisors, capable of supporting technically and politically the organizations' initiatives, and thereby contributing to the strengthening of the indigenous movement in the region.

## 2. Indigenous health policies

COIAB has participated in various bodies dealing with health policy. Among them is the Inter-institutional Council on Indigenous Health (CISI), with two representatives, one of these a member and one an auxiliary. The other members are from different government bodies and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work in the area of health. The Council is a body that supports the implementation of health policy and offers recommendations for its improvement.

COIAB also is on the Consulting Committee for National Policy Addressing the Health of the Indigenous Peoples and the National Health Foundation, an organ of the Ministry of Health, with two representatives, one member and one auxiliary. The Committee, composed of representatives from government organizations and from civil society, serves to support the development of measures to ensure the supervision of indigenous health management, among other tasks.

But the body in which COIAB has participated most actively since 1999 is the Special Indigenous



*Indigenous people of the Amazon protest against the government, burning symbolically President Lula's Campaign Platform for the indigenous peoples.*

that the indigenous leaders and organizations supervised non-indigenous professionals, a category of professionals that historically had subjected indigenous people to prejudice and discrimination. Indigenous directors came to know the functioning of the state from the inside, the entanglements of bureaucracy, the role of technocrats, and the game of politics in the processes of planning, negotiation and dispute over public resources for basic services aimed at the population.

In 2004, the new government decided to take over once again the administration of most indigenous health services. In this new model the COIAB was left only with the hiring of health professionals and the so-called "social control," but the distribution of roles between the state and the indigenous organizations may improve the health services offered.

### **Opening and occupation of positions on commissions and other governmental bodies by COIAB**

In the latter half of the 1990s, COIAB began to demand participatory positions on long-existing and recently created bodies. On some occasions the government was a step ahead, calling upon COIAB and recognizing it as the largest representative body of the indigenous movement in the Brazilian Amazon; COIAB could not therefore be separated from the spaces of discussion of issues specific to the region.

COIAB dealt with the government opening in a variety of ways. The following are a few examples that illustrate this influence:

1. In early 2004 COIAB raised, together with the Ministry of the Environment (MMA), the need to create a National Policy for Environmental Management and Protection of Biodiversity on Indigenous Lands, for which a working group would need to be created, with the objective of discussing and formulating this policy. Six months later, on July 23, COIAB requested a meeting with the environment minister, Marina Silva, to discuss issues of common interest in-

Health District of Manaus (DSEI/Manaus). When the reformulation of public health policy led to the creation of the so-called Special Indigenous Health Districts (DSEIs), COIAB took over the administration of indigenous health. This responsibility meant, among other things, hiring and paying health professionals (doctors, odontologists, nurses, laboratory technicians, health auxiliaries and indigenous health agents or AISes); buying and distributing medicine for the indigenous communities, and planning, evaluating and implementing health services for those communities; training all of the hired staff. COIAB also organized and put in operation mechanisms of social control through the Local Councils and the District Council, which are audit agencies composed of representatives from the communities, from the administrative entity, from NGOs and other public institutions.

COIAB's work in the District of Manaus covers more than 14,000 indigenous people and 15 municipalities, but there are other indigenous organizations that promote health services in other regions and states of the Amazon.

Health administration brought serious problems to the indigenous movement, since it absorbed a great deal of time, energy and human resources, distracting from any form of political struggle and defense of other rights, but it was the first time

cluding this proposal and the problem of overlap between Natural Conservation Areas and indigenous lands. On August 10, a commission of 10 leaders from the COIAB met with the minister. Among the items negotiated, the most important was the creation of a working group composed jointly, with equal participation from both the indigenous peoples and from representatives of the government, including numerical equality. The purpose of the group would be to discuss proposals for the construction of a National Program for Management and Protection of Biodiversity on Indigenous Lands.

The meeting with the environment minister was useful for demanding the creation of another working group whose main function will be to discuss the overlapping of Natural Conservation Areas with indigenous lands. Indigenous representatives demanded compliance with a resolution of the National Conference on the Environment of 2003, which had determined an end to this legal conflict by recognizing the original right of indigenous peoples over the lands they traditionally occupy.

2. At the World Cultural Forum, held in São Paulo, Brazil, from June 26 to July 4, 2004, with participation from more than 10,000 delegates from 60 countries, leaders from the COIAB and from other Brazilian indigenous organizations publicly demanded the creation of a policy for development and promotion of indigenous culture. Three months later the Culture Ministry decided, through the Secretariat of Diversity, to create a working group, with broad indigenous participation, in order to discuss and systematize proposals along those lines. Two representatives of the COIAB form part of this group.

3. The Demonstration Project of the Indigenous Peoples (PDPI) is another way of exercising influence in governmental bodies. In a meeting of leaders of grassroots organizations organized by the COIAB, in the municipality of Tefé, Amazon state, in 2001, the decision was made to demand, together with the Ministry of the Environment, which is responsible for the Integrated Project for Legal Protection of Indigenous Lands and Populations of the Amazon (PPTAL), a specific program for economic sustainability. The proposal resulted in management responsibility, through an indigenous leader, of the PDPI. The process of construction and implementation of the Project in turn led toward other responsibilities like participating in the executive committee and the reference groups in the various regions of the Amazon.

What was novel about this experience was the

redefining of the PDPI as a Demonstration Project of the Indigenous Peoples, instead of a Project for the Indigenous Peoples, as many projects had been defined to date. As its name indicates, the PDPI is still an experimental demonstration project, which the indigenous movement hopes to convert definitively into public policy.

4. In 1999 the government chose to outsource certain social service functions. The administration of services for the indigenous communities (health services administration, among others) was shifted into the hands of the indigenous movement.

However, the decision was harshly criticized by organizations historically allied with the movement, such as the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI) that publicly accused indigenous leaders of being members of a militia at the service of the government, and "individuals without organic connection to the indigenous grassroots."

The indigenous movement responded indignantly to the accusation by criticizing the statutory tradition of controlling the indigenous population, with reference to the CIMI document that mentioned, behind its claim to be an ally, asking forgiveness for the many crimes committed in the name of God. The church, in fact, intended to manipulate the indigenous population by appearing to be the protector and savior of indigenous people, thereby ensuring its own political survival. The document ended by stating:

"...with the dynamics of the organizing process, the networking role of the CIMI was progressively taken over by the indigenous peoples themselves, who have to continue to find other forms of struggle and of organization..."

"The CIMI insists on being the voice of the indigenous peoples and on defining our future. Every indigenous person, whether or not they belong to an organization, can legitimately speak for themselves or for their people..."

Beyond these criticisms of the church, the indigenous movement demonstrated that it was possible to assume responsibility for indigenous health and deliver service to indigenous communities, which for centuries no one knew how to administer efficiently.

### **Some results of COIAB's participation in governmental bodies**

1. The mere presence of the COIAB in governmental bodies and commissions is an expression



*Indigenous leaders of the Amazon analyze the public policies of the government for indigenous communities, during the First Permanent Forum of the Indigenous Peoples of the Brazilian Amazon.*

of changes in the treatment of the indigenous question in Brazil, which by tradition has been integrationist, authoritarian, paternalistic, and homogenizing.

2. It signifies an end to the history of submission, dependency, and ignorance of civic and cultural rights, which marks also a difference in the terms of engagement, shifting from an indigenist policy to an indigenous policy: the indigenous peoples' policy.

3. While still very small, the approval of sustainable development projects by the PDPI and other governmental sources shows progress in the discussion, demand, and construction of a more integral, stable and permanent public policy.

4. In the field of health COIAB's activity has made possible gains that offer basic infrastructure and emergency medical treatment in the nearest seat of municipal or departmental government or in the state capital.

5. By taking over administrative responsibilities, indigenous leaders increased their self-esteem, their ability to question, critique and self-critique. They also learned new ways of practicing politics, combining pressure with dialogue and negotiation.

Participation in contexts outside the village permitted them to know other realities and cultures and strengthened their awareness of ethnic diversity, their ability to identify problems and challenges common to different groups, and their understanding that it is possible to build new horizons to-

gether by seeking collective solutions to common problems

6. The responsibility of co-administering programs with the government led to an inevitable comprehension and mastery of new institutional dynamics and bureaucratic procedures, which serve in understanding the totality of public policies, their reach and limitations, as well as the potential for capitalizing on them in the interests of the indigenous movement.

7. Participation at various levels – commissions, working groups or councils – allows for the exercise of so-called social control or auditing of the government's actions while avoiding the risk of simply approving the guidelines, blueprints, budgets, and reports of governmental organs.

### **Determining factors in the advancement and implementation of COIAB's demands**

Above all, it was fundamentally important to effectively put into place the organization's political and organizational structure. This includes the General Assembly, the Fiscal and Deliberative Council (CONDEF), the Executive Coordinating Committee, the Indigenous Working Group, and other mechanisms for direct and indirect consultation and participation.

The General Assembly, which meets every three years, deliberates and decides on overall priorities. The Fiscal and Deliberative Council, composed of representatives from the 31 regions of the COIAB in the Amazon, meets twice each year



*Participants in the Forum of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon hold a discussion with the Under-Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic, Cesar Alvarez.*

to discuss the implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly and to evaluate and decide upon the Strategic and Operational Plan, including its funding. The Executive Coordinating Committee, which consists of a general coordinator, a vice coordinator, a general secretary and a treasury coordinator, is responsible for operationalizing the work plan and responding to the demands of the grassroots. The other bodies and mechanisms of consultation and participation are sectoral and thematic meetings, courses in political and technical training, workshops, conferences, seminars and forums.

None of this process would be possible without the team of professionals and support staff from the central office that collaborates. The team includes: office administration, communication, logistics, finance, education, health, women, projects, ethno-environmental, transportation, maintenance, and management. In order to fulfill their role effectively, the indigenous leaders who are members of the governmental bodies and commissions must be very careful. For example, they must be alert to the risk of losing themselves in the entanglements of bureaucracy, administration and management, avoiding all the while institutionalism that can paralyze the indigenous struggle.

The level of influence is and must be constantly evaluated, so that it is possible to avoid being passive or simply legitimizing agents for government programs and policies. In order to address this challenge the movement reflects regularly about

how to improve its intervention. For this reason it secures its own forums of discussion, a constant flow in the exchange of information among representatives and the leadership of the COIAB, and resolute commitment to the political and technical training of its cadres.

The other principle, which has been clearly stated to the government, is that these activities must result not only in public policies but also in integrated programs and projects, coordinated with a policy body at the federal level, linked to the Presidency of the Republic through a Secretariat of Ministry, under the responsibility of a leader named by common agreement by the indigenous organizations and the government.

It is clear that the tactic of occupying positions on commissions and governmental bodies is only one among others, which in combination give greater strength and power to the indigenous movement's involvement. In that sense the COIAB also makes use of the following tactics: continuous planning and evaluation; lobbying; dialogue and negotiation; political pressure through direct action, like the occupation of the Congress of the Republic or of public offices; networking and diffusion of the indigenous movement's activities in the mass media; building and strengthening alliances and collaborative relationships.

To this list can be added mechanisms like the following:

1. Monitoring of the government's agenda in the different powers of the state, through the COIAB's office in the country's capital, and through contact with the indigenous movement's allies within the government itself. Monitoring allows COIAB to track the process of defining and adopting administrative, political or legal measures, and for a quick coordination of action to block any measures that negatively affect indigenous rights. The office in Brasilia has also allowed for greater visibility for COIAB's activities in the heart of government, together with social organizations, allied groups, and public opinion in general.

2. Organizing and conducting public forums, seminars, workshops, meetings with ministry officials, issue-specific commissions in the National Congress and with the Presidency of the Republic.

3. Frequent requests for the intervention of the Federal Public Ministry in defense of indigenous rights recognized by the Constitution of the Republic.

4. Visits and ongoing consultation by the leadership (Executive Coordinating Committee) with the organizations and communities that constitute the political base of the COIAB, participating in assemblies or conferences, assisting in the resolution of local conflicts or programming joint actions in favor of indigenous rights.

5. Publication of analyses of the government's indigenist policy, pointing out deficiencies, proposing changes and measures that respond to the demands of the indigenous communities, in accordance with the Federal Constitution and international laws such as Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.

COIAB's effective participation in governmental spaces depends at base on a careful selection of its representatives using criteria like, for example, interest, experience, and knowledge of the area for which one is named. In most cases the leaders designated are well known within the movement, are leader-directors of COIAB's base organization, or are responsible for some thematic area.

This participation, nonetheless, does not occur in an isolated or independent manner. The platform of demands and proposals is processed in discussion with the Executive Coordinating Committee, the Deliberative Council, or with the assistance of specialized advisors. The organization's evaluation of participation proceeds in the same manner.

The leaders are also in a constant process of training and education, and, while the movement

consolidates its own program of political and professional development – a program still under construction – the indigenous movement has demanded that governmental programs themselves include the indigenous leadership in annual plans for courses and workshops treating issues like social control, development and monitoring of sustainable projects, etc.

### **Political and legal framework for COIAB's participation in governmental bodies**

The indigenous movement articulated through the COIAB grounds its decision to participate in governmental commissions, councils or working groups on the broad knowledge that the indigenous leaders and organizations have of the reality and demands of their peoples and communities. Said decision is at the same time based on the Federal Constitution of 1988, which recognizes broadly the rights of indigenous peoples to their own social organization, identity, beliefs and traditions, and to the lands they traditionally occupy (Article 231). This text inaugurated a new framework of relationships between the state, Brazilian society, and the indigenous peoples, and put an end to integrationist, paternalistic, and supervisory indigenism by recognizing the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of Brazil and the right of indigenous peoples to difference and autonomy.

To this change were added the principles of "participation and prior and informed consent" of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (OIT), ratified by the Brazilian government. This new law establishes that governments must consult with indigenous peoples through appropriate procedures and, in particular, through representative institutions, whenever legislative or administrative measures might affect them directly.

This common perspective continues to be a matter of internal debate at the center of the Amazonian indigenous movement and is being elaborated within the framework of an improved coordination and networking of the national indigenous movement. The latter is a priority in the coming years for the COIAB, which will undoubtedly require adjustments to both political thinking and organizational structure.

## **Tentative recommendations for the implementation of the tactic in other contexts**

It is generally not possible to replicate an experience, but there are methodological and political aspects that can be used effectively in any context, for example:

1. It is very important to keep in mind the strategic objectives of the movement. It must be clear what will be presented and defended in negotiations without fear of moments of crisis. There will be moments in which relations may be cordial, but others in which they may be tense and even confrontational. Nonetheless, the stakes of the negotiations must never be forgotten because in some cases the government seeks only to legitimate its own actions by allowing participation. The indigenous movement's role, meanwhile, is to engage with arguments and legitimately defined proposals that respond to the concrete needs and demands of the grassroots.

2. Political actions may fail if they lack support and legitimacy from the indigenous movement's grassroots. It is therefore essential to have in place horizontal structures that facilitate the processes of consultation and participation so that decisions about the collective future are not made by the movement's leadership.

3. Involvement in governmental commissions, councils, or work groups can no longer adhere to the culturalist model where participation is defined by a folklorization and manipulation of the indigenous presence for populist ends.

4. It is necessary to keep in mind that in the current political context the power to obstruct and dismantle the welfare assistance models is not sufficient. It is necessary to move forward by presenting proposals for viable and substantive public policies, constructed professionally and technically by the cadres of the indigenous movement itself, or by specialists and advisors contracted specifically for this purpose and whose work or opinions are discussed and approved by the movement's leaders and organizational bodies.

5. Participation in governmental bodies must be viewed not as an end but as a means toward the recognition of rights; what is more, as a stage in the process of implementation of an ethno-political project for the autonomy of indigenous peoples and organizations.

6. In these processes, it is essential to regularly evaluate, plan, and monitor the shared activities of the government so that the efforts and intentions of

governmental policies become, in fact, integral and inter-related public policies.

7. The indigenous movement has to be extremely careful in defining its network of allies and collaborators. Autonomy is not only at stake in the context of collaborating with governmental bodies but also in the context of alliances. The movement must not fear the loss of certain supports if these do not fit the needs and demands of the collective. Substantive progress requires that it be indigenous people themselves who define the direction of the movement.

8. Political and technical training of the leadership is essential. It is necessary to demand that training be financed by the government but also by the movement itself; with a program for leadership training in mind and seeking collaborators in the universities and in various areas of interest to the indigenous communities.

9. The struggles of a social movement like the COIAB cannot become stuck in a particular conjuncture; a movement requires an ongoing reformulation that arises from collective deliberation and not from the head of an individual leader or a bureaucratic body.

10. Without abandoning the historical forms of struggle (protest, mass mobilization, and direct action), the indigenous movement must understand that it is possible to participate and exercise influence in governmental bodies, provided that it is done ably and efficiently.

## **By way of conclusion**

It is important not to lose sight of the full array and combination of tactics that have made significant gains possible over the history of the movement, but it is also necessary to avoid repetition of obsolete models. It is always possible to think of new tactics that do not mean abandoning either longstanding demands or the political principles of the movement, with an eye toward achieving effective recognition of the rights of citizenship for all indigenous peoples.

## Notes

## Notes

**To print or download this and other publications in the Tactical Notebook Series,  
go to [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org).**

Online you will also find a searchable database of tactics and  
forums for discussion with other human rights practitioners.



The Center for Victims of Torture  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project  
717 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
[www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org) / [cvt@cvt.org](mailto:cvt@cvt.org)  
[www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org)  
[newtactics@cvt.org](mailto:newtactics@cvt.org)



**newTactics**  
in Human Rights