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Healing our Spirit Worldwide

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Pan American Health Organization

Regional Office of the World Health Organization

Newsletter for Indigenous people

Editorial

It is an honor to present the first edition of this Bulletin produced as a joint effort of the participants who represented Latin America in the "IV Healing our Spirit Worldwide Global Conference". We have adopted the conference's title as the Bulletin's name. As a quarterly publication, the main objective will be to create a network in order to share experiences that contribute to the well-being of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala (name given by the Kuna people of Panama to all the American Hemisphere), and of the rest of the world. We believe that all of us share the same spirit granted by our Pacha Mama, our Mother Earth.

Each edition of this Bulletin will be a shared responsibility of a country or a group of countries. The persons who represented Panama at the Conference edited this First Issue of the Bulletin. We hope this initiative will contribute to the formation of a Unique, United and Strong People. With our affection

Margarita Griffith and Yuri Bacorizo



This indigenous Kuna mother and baby live in the territory of San Blas, on Panama's Caribbean coast.

Healing our Spirit Worldwide IV Conference: A summary of our experience

From September 2nd to September 6th, 2002, representatives of 16 indigenous Peoples and institutions from 10 Central and South American countries had the opportunity to travel to New Mexico, the United States, to participate with more than 3.300 people from 15 countries in the Healing our Spirit Worldwide IV Conference. The objective was to share our healing solutions to devastation brought about by cultural and political oppression manifested through substance abuse, violence, and alienation.

Healing Our Spirit Worldwide began in Canada in 1992, continued in Australia in 1994, and had its third gathering in New Zealand in 1998. Indigenous people from Latin America participated for the first time in the forth Conference in New Mexico. One of our greatest achievements was the preparation of a Covenant where we, indigenous peoples, manifested our position regarding the problems of alcohol and substance abuse and proposed comprehensive solutions specific to our cultural characteristics.

José Yáñez del Pozo, Quechua-Hispanic, from Ecuador and participant of this event, comments: "For me it is always a different experience to go to the southwest of the United States. I consider it as an extension of our Native Country

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ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Nilda Traipi
Margarita Griffith

Uprooting, extreme poverty, forced migration, and lack of autonomy are some of the issues that have triggered a series of social problems among Indigenous Peoples of the world, one of which is consumption of alcoholic beverages. In 1994-96, the age-adjusted alcoholism death rate for the indigenous population of the United States was 48.7, that is to say 7 times more than in the general population (IHS, 1999). This problem, which currently generates the leading causes of death among the indigenous population of developing countries, is increasingly present in our countries of Central and South America.

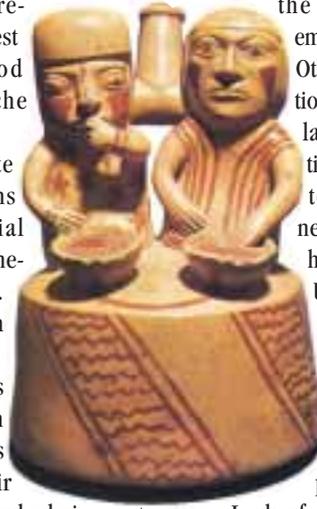
Within this cultural context, Indigenous Peoples traditionally have been known to consume fermented beverages and other substances such as medicinal plants in their rituals. In these religious and social celebrations beverage consumption is accompanied with collective singing and dancing thereby promoting unity of people and their cultural legacy. For example, Mapuche People continue to fer-

ment different crops such as wheat or kacilla, apple, and gearwheel. The collection of these crops is carried out jointly. Ceremonies are performed to request permission from the different newen or spirits to harvest and consume their fruits which are converted to chicha and muzay. These beverages are consumed daily but mainly in the nguilatun (ceremony that is carried out to request from the newen, fertility, good health, long life for the Mapuche People and wellbeing of Nature). These beverages do not generate addiction or physical alterations since no preservatives, artificial colors or extract are used that generates alteration or adulteration. This fermentation does not reach high degrees of alcohol. Consumption of these beverages has another purpose other than getting inebriated. These beverages are part of ceremonies where their consumption is socially accepted and administered. The conflict occurs when the natural fermented beverage is replaced with alcoholic beverages (rum, gin, beer, etc.) prepared and marketed by outsiders. The suppliers often provide payment plans to buy the alcoholic beverages, resulting in unbridled consump-

tion. Indigenous persons invest a large portion of their money purchasing alcoholic beverages. This, therefore, prevents them from using their limited financial resources to meet essential needs of the family, such as nourishment, clothing, and health. This is a difficult problem to control and to face in the communities, since the alcohol industry provides employment and income.

Other factors that affect this situation are: the persistence of poverty, lack of land, and work. In addition, the national educational system does not respond to the needs of adolescents who do not have higher levels of education. Undoubtedly, these are risk factors towards developing an addiction. Ignoring the terrible consequences that alcohol causes in the body and the family, mainly in children and young people can be detrimental.

Lack of concern by authorities is alarming especially when preparing policies aimed at combating alcoholism, exaggerated alcohol consumption, and clandestine sales in the communities. We need to organize ourselves in order to seek concrete solutions to this problem that threatens our people's life.



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because of the presence of indigenous peoples who are proud of their history and because this region was known as Aztlán since ancient times and especially since the struggles of the Chicanos against the oppression of the new occupants of this Mexican land. Therefore, participating in a meeting such as the one we had in Albuquerque, in addition to having the opportunity to know people from all over the world, it was really the opportunity to learn more about ourselves.

Although, sometimes the work was overwhelming and we could not always coordinate everything, as we wanted, the overall results were very positive. We were able to discuss in such a short time the groundwork to develop a document to create awareness among the participants and our leaders regarding the use and abuse of alcohol and other substances, a subject rarely discussed by our People. The discussion on alcohol and other substances, as part of a cultural reality and as a serious problem, has a starting point from which we can advance in these issues and other subjects of similar importance.

In such a short time, we, the people from the South had the opportunity to get to know each other. Each of us with his/her own interests, personalities, anguishes, hopes and longings is now a member of this network of friends. If we commit ourselves to our new friends, we will grow in our friendship and in the realization that some of those longings are based not only for our feelings awakened by the Conference, but also in our roots derived from our Americas."

For more information about the Healing our Spirit Conference visit the electronic site:

www.healingourspiritconference.com

or write to:

info@nihb.org

Standing—left to right: Jorge Ñancucheo (ARG), Betty Pérez (ELS), Ubiratán Moreira (BRA), Rita Jaimes (ELS), Lucia Willis (GUT), Craig Wanderwagen (U.S.A), Guillermo Tesorero (ELS), Margarita Griffith (PAN), Walter Álvarez (BOL), Pascual Kunchikuy (ECU), Rocío Rojas (ECU).

Siting left—to right: Magda Moeshler (GUT), Nilda Traipi (ARG), Marcela Gómez (CHI), José Yáñez del Pozo (ECU), Adriana Simbaña (ECU), Diana Terán (ECU), Mónica Aguilar (ECU).

MESSAGE OF A WISE JAIBANÁ

"A Nation without history, without language, without culture, without traditional healers, is a Nation without future, without Spirit, and without strength to continue to be developed as People."

"Death of Each Female or Male Elderly Person is as if wisdom were burned."

*Arcenio Bacorizo
wise Jaibaná*

In native language of Emberá people, the word JAI represents the spirit and the word BANA refers to a wise person who has the knowledge to counteract diseases and outbreaks of epidemics caused by bad spirits.

The Jaibaná or Emberá traditional healer has the necessary skills and powers to cure various diseases. In order to restore health, the Jaibaná needs to enter into communication with the spirits requesting the cure so that he may heal the sick patient. Depending on the type of disease, the Jaibaná utilizes different classes of plants and images carved in wood during ceremonies.

The Jaibaná receives wisdom which is traditionally handed down from generation to generation or from parent to child. This wisdom is not shared to strangers, but only among the members of a People. Due to the changing world, indigenous healers have seen the need for being more organized in order to protect their wisdom. They are struggling to be recognized by western medicine and hope that their healing practices gain value and legitimacy.

Traditional medicine should be understood as a social process of recognition and respect among several cultures. An effort needs to be made within the countries so that traditional medicine will continue to be developed in the indigenous populations.

*Yuri Bacorizo, Emberá people
Chief of the Traditional Medicine Section
Ministry of Health, Panama*



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INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES:



Alcohol is a substance that is bad for health because it causes loss of memory or even death. It also provokes suffering in the family. Well, drugs are other substances that little by little injure the person, he or she loses weight and becomes a lunatic; these substances eat the brain and cause dementia.

I recommend not taking alcoholic drinks or drugs such as tobacco because they can make someone crazy, and if someone is going to take an alcoholic beverage, it should be with responsibility and being aware of what it produces.

*Manipikikili Bill, 14 years old
Kuna People, Panama*



Drugs and alcohol are substances that contaminate people's health because they lead them to death. They damage the liver and cause the person to remain totally addicted to alcohol. In the current world there are many people infected by this vice and they die because of alcohol and drugs.

*Wagabialer Benítez, 11 years old
Kuna People, Panamá*

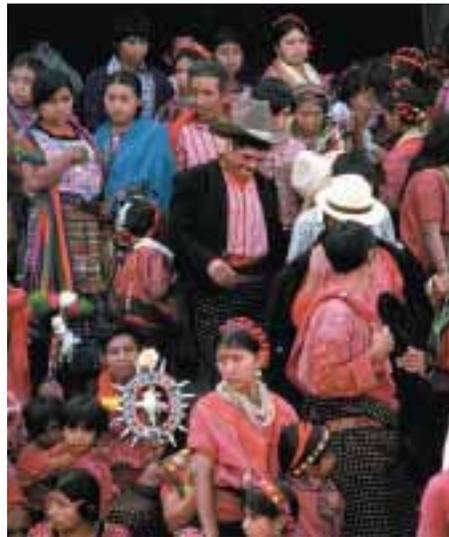


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Winds of America: activities and event schedule

The title of this section is conceived based on the information sent by Nilda Traipi, Mapuche People of **Argentina**:

"Our elders have a clear notion that there exist supernatural forces in their environment, which are represented by the winds (Southern-Northern and Easter-Western winds), that have a concrete space. For the Mapuche People, supernatural forces act in the form of wind. Winds orient us in daily life because the course of the wind both in dreams and in what is natural will predict if something is good or bad. In other words, winds guide and determine our life as Mapuche People and nature that is life itself; with every birth of a wind it is possible to maintain and give life to each element of nature."



Healing our Spirit Worldwide



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NOTE OF THE EDITORS

This Newsletter for Indigenous People will be published in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and in a Native Language.

In order to send observations, suggestions, articles, news, and opinions on the well-being of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, or if you wish to sponsor this Bulletin, write to the following electronic address:

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