

Report on Special Address by Sônia Guajajara

By Falina Enriquez

Sônia Guajajara, the vice-coordinator of Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira (COIAB) astutely synthesized themes from the conference's panels, including economic development policies and ecological sustainability. Speaking not only as an expert, but also as a member of the indigenous Guajajara community in Maranhão, Guajajara explained that Maranhão and the Legal Amazon (Amazônia Legal) are undergoing an important transitional period. COIAB is a key player in this process, defending indigenous rights and re-envisioning what 'development' entails, including its economic, technological and ethnic aspects. Throughout her lecture, Ms. Guajajara emphasized that policies affecting Amazonian development must be cooperatively discussed between Amazonian residents and policy-makers. Moreover, policies must benefit society at large, ensuring a symbiotic relationship between Amazonian residents and the forest itself. In other words, capitalist interests, such as agribusiness should not be privileged. Finally, while the Amazon is highly visible as an international exemplar of conflict surrounding ecological resources, Ms. Guajajara emphasized that policy-makers, researchers and grassroots organizations must also consider and valorize every Brazilian ecological zones in Brazil since these ecosystems are biologically and socially interdependent.

Given that indigenous Brazilian groups have long been excluded from actively participating in political decisions, Ms. Guajajara focused on voicing indigenous opinions about current national and international policies affecting the Amazon region. First, Ms. Guajajara critiqued the Programa de Aceleração de Crescimento (PAC). This is President Lula da Silva's program to accelerate economic growth through investing in infrastructure such as transpiration and energy. Ms. Guajajara explained that while the indigenous people with whom she works are against PAC, they are not against progress per se. Instead, these groups disagree with PAC because they perceive that it only works in the economic interest of few people while impoverishing many more. In other words, PAC is not a holistic or inclusive solution.

REDD (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Degradation), is an international program led by the United Nations to reduce carbon emissions in developing countries. COIAB supports REDD because of its emphasis on preserving the Amazon. Ms. Guajajara emphasized

that REDD must be discussed in a manner that includes all Brazilians, and invests in the collective benefit, especially in education, health and culture. Programs such as REDD and PAC need to foster indigenous cooperation in policy-making and to acknowledge indigenous groups' ability and desire to speak for themselves. In summary, Ms. Guajajara maintained that international and national policies should not keep the indigenous community in a dependent relationship, but should instead compliment their existing practices and rights.

Part of complimenting indigenous community's practices and rights is to see development in a more holistic manner. Ms. Guajajara asserted that development should be more than financial growth; it should also entail sociocultural growth in the form of *etnodesenvolvimento* (ethno-development). This kind of development fosters indigenous rights to autonomy, self-determination and participation in the public sphere. Currently, illicit activities often impede indigenous self-determination and autonomy. Although some indigenous groups have legally-demarcated land, their ability to benefit from and preserve their territories is imperiled by illegal logging and agribusiness. Defending indigenous territorial rights and ensuring safety is thus a vital aspect of economic and ethno-development.

Ms. Guajajara also cautions that policy-makers need to acknowledge indigenous cultural practices and knowledge. Indigenous Brazilians have often been excluded from discourses on environmentalism and sustainability. However, deforestation threatens the indigenous traditions and rituals that characterize many groups' identities and life-ways. Amazonian indigenous groups are therefore actively concerned about the environment. They have felt the impact of global warming firsthand, which has resulted in food scarcity, water scarcity and the decimation of rivers and lakes. Indigenous rituals such as puberty rites that center around bodies of water are being abandoned because these resources no longer exist. Ms. Guajajara convincingly argued that creating sustainable ways to use land not only promotes indigenous economic development, but it also maintains and enriches cultural practices and self-determination.

Report on Closing Discussion and Remarks

By Falina Enriquez

The final discussion of the conference circulated around several themes, mainly Amazonian economy, institutional intervention and transportation in the Amazon. First, discussants agreed the Amazon must be better integrated to the rest of Brazil through the development of an *economia florestal* (forest economy). This proposed economy should rest on sustainable extractive practices. Moreover, the value (economic and otherwise) of the Amazon should be attributed not only to materials such as wood and water, but also to more abstract components such as CO₂ levels (in the form of carbon credits) and to indigenous cultural practices and knowledge. Additionally, knowledge about the Amazon and technologies to maintain it need to be systematically pursued through research and education.

Second, a forest economy needs to be actively nurtured by large-scale national and international intervention. In other words, activists and policy-makers cannot assume that the global market will passively act to further include the Amazon. In other words, government, non-governmental institutions and consumers must work to create markets that benefit the Amazon.

The conference concluded with the consensus to stop the development of a new proposed Amazonian highway (BR-319). While the road is meant to promote economic growth and Amazonian integration to the Brazilian nation, its environmental effects would be disastrous. However, the plan highlights a contradiction within the Brazil's current administration, which pledges a 70% reduction in deforestation *and* the construction of BR-319. Conference panelists agreed that rather than spending resources on a destructive highway, alternatives modes of transportation need to be created. River transport may prove to be a viable system, but the amount of research and investment in this potential is greatly lacking. Finally, conference participants unanimously agreed to create an official declaration in condemnation of BR-319, addressed to the Brazilian government. The document will include a summary of the research presented at the conference along with participant signatures. Jorge Viana, the ex-governor of Acre agreed to transmit the declaration to President da Silva and the University of Chicago's Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS), will post it on the conference website.