
Latin America: Redmanglar International Assembly

Between 8 and 13 October, fisher-folk organizations, artisanal gatherers, environmentalists and academics from 10 Latin American countries organized in Redmanglar International, met in the locality of Cuyutlan, State of Colima, Mexico.

During a whole week of work, it was reported that a policy for appropriation and use of coastal and marine spaces is being reaffirmed and strengthened worldwide, placing the economic interests of a few before ecosystem conservation sustaining the life and fundamental rights of local communities.

During the first day, representatives from each of the Redmanglar International member countries presented the current local situation of marine-coastal ecosystems and the work carried out in their defence. The efforts made by countries such as Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela are noteworthy as they have achieved, over the past year, to set up national networks of organizations linked to the Redmanglar International mission: that of defending mangrove ecosystems and marine-coastal ecosystems, guaranteeing their vitality and that of the ancestral user populations who live in association with them and are faced by threats and impacts likely to degrade the environment, alter the natural ecological balance and/or violate the local communities' human rights.

On the following days the presentation by Fernando Lopez, Professor at the Central University of Ecuador on the present political and economic situation and on the natural and cultural heritage of Latin America, launched the discussion of general issues affecting the region. "The situation we are facing is enormously complex due to the intertwining of powerful global interests, the magnitude of the hazards threatening populations and the environment and to the political and social communities and organizations' scant capacity for resistance," explained Fernando Lopez. He also made an analysis of the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA), showing how this implies market integration and a serious threat to the peoples.

Subsequently, at the University Picture Gallery in the city of Colima, a talk was given on "Marine-Coastal Ecosystems, Water and Food Sovereignty" by Jorge Varela Marquez, delegate of the World Forum of Fisher-Folk Peoples, Dolores Gonzales of the Central University of Venezuela and Alberto Villarreal from Food and Water Watch. Sessions continued throughout the week, with reports on the network's participation at international fora, campaigns, mobilizations and signing of declarations as effective and legitimate tools for ancestral coastal peoples. A statement was also made against coastal privatization and governments were required to guarantee access by fisher-folk and artisanal gatherers to their territories. At the same time, joint rejection of the commercialization of environmental goods and services was proclaimed.

An analysis of shrimp farming certification made by Jeovah Meireles from the Federal University of Ceara, Brazil, moved the Assembly to ratify its position against organic certification of industrial shrimp farming, regarding it to be a green masquerade, which attempts to conceal environmental, social and economic crimes committed by the shrimp industry.

Furthermore, the Assembly made statements on various specific issues regarding the member

countries of the network. One of these was a request to the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, to cancel the project for the Manzanillo Liquid Gas Terminal, considering it to be highly hazardous for the Cuyatulan Lagoon ecosystems. As a result, during their last day in Mexico the participants at this III General Assembly of Redmanglar International paid a field visit to the Cuyutlán Lagoon and also met with the fisher-folk from the community of Ventandas to find evidence of how this project is a threat to the lagoon system and mangrove ecosystem.

Lider Gongora Farias, outgoing Executive Secretary and the Ecuadorian C-CONDEM team installed Juan José López, in representation of the Colombian Association of Producers for Community Development of the Bajo Sinu Cienaga Grande (ASPROCIG), as new Executive Secretary of Redmanglar International for the three-year period 2008-2010. The Declaration of Cuyatlan was signed at the end of the Assembly and it's available at:

http://redmanglar.org/imagesFTP/8221.declaracion_cuyutlan.pdf