
Panama: Land dispute and violation of the Naso people's Human Rights

The Naso people, also known as the Teribe or Tjer-di, live in the Bocas del Toro province in northeast Panama, in a territory spanning 1,300 km² and covering most of the river Teribe and river San San basin.

This indigenous group, which historically defended itself from colonizers and was already established in this territory when the first Spanish conquistadores arrived in the region, continue practicing subsistence agriculture and fisheries in close relationship with the surrounding nature which provides them with food, shelter, health, occupation and leisure.

Today these people are facing a struggle for survival. The Ganadera Bocas (a cattle-raising group), brandishing deeds granted by the State and overriding the previous rights of the Naso communities living there, entered the territory with police forces using teargas to evict this native people from an area of at least 200 hectares claimed by the Naso as part of their ancestral territory and who aim at incorporating this area in their Naso Tjër-Di region.

The extensive cattle-ranching carried out by Ganadera Bocas is threatening to destroy the Naso's traditional economy and thus wipe them out as an ethnic group because it has totally deforested the basin of the two rivers and has sunk in muddy dung the community's roads.

For several months now the Naso have been living in protest camps, both in Panama City (in Cathedral Square) and in San San Druy, seeking a solution to the land dispute. They have been arbitrarily evicted from all their camps.

On 19 November "without any court order and only supported by the arbitrariness of the Governor of Bocas del Toro, Simon Becker and the arrogance of the Panamanian Minister of Government and Justice, José Raúl Mulino, the State violated all the laws and left without shelter, in the middle of the rainy season, some 200 people who, according to witnesses in the area "are almost without food and have nowhere to shelter from the rain." (1) On 20 November anti-mob police with the use of teargas bombs again evicted over 200 Naso indigenous people who were living in communities in San San and San San Druy in Changuinola, Bocas del Toro province. Following this eviction, employees of the Ganadera Bocas Company entered the area with heavy machinery and proceeded to demolish the indigenous people's homes. (2)

The Naso have been claiming their land since the seventies and in particular asking to create their own region on their traditional lands. However, after all this time they still have not obtained legal recognition of their traditional lands.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur condemned the eviction of the Naso communities in Panama and pointed out that "article 10 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples establishes that 'Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of

return.”

In addition to being a land dispute, this is a human rights issue. In this respect, the UN Special Rapporteur declared: “In particular, I urge the Government to immediately re-establish dialogue with the affected Naso indigenous people in order to reach a peaceful solution to this situation.” (2)

Shi Nasoga Unkon – We are all Naso.

(1) <http://www.panamaprofundo.org/boletin/pueblosindigenas/gases-lacrimogenos-y-violencia-en-comunidades-naso.htm>

(2) Relator ONU condena desalojo de comunidades Naso en Panamá y exhorta al diálogo (UN Rapporteur condemns eviction of Naso Communities in Panama and urges for dialogue), <http://tiny.cc/OG2qt>