
Chile: Mapuche indigenous peoples' march to the capital city

Mapuche Press Release. The national march for the recognition of the Mapuche Nation and its rights is advancing towards Santiago and more than one hundred Mapuche have walked 200 kms in seven days.

After seven days, more than one hundred Mapuche have walked some 200 kms from Temuco, Wallmapuche -Mapuche Territory- heading towards Santiago de Chile with the aim of achieving the recognition of the basic rights and freedoms of the Mapuche People.

This march includes the participation of Mapuche of all ages, including boys and girls, aged men and women. In spite of the harsh conditions, none of the demonstrators has renounced to the objective of reaching Santiago, keeping up the good spirit with the strength stemming from the strong conviction of their legitimate demands and the historical memory of the struggle of the Mapuche People. The logistic difficulties regarding shelter and food supplies for the demonstrators implies that the number of participants cannot increase and thus remains unmodified.

The departure from Temuco was particularly harsh due to the intense rain which fell during the first 25 kms. As a result of the low temperatures, many participants are beginning to fall ill, which makes medical attention and the purchase of medicines urgent. Lodging during the night supposes a great deal of spirit of self-sacrifice, having to sleep in schools, churches, communal centres and other places on cement floors and to have to wash with freezing cold water. Walking on asphalt with inadequate shoes is resulting in wounds which increase the demonstrators' suffering.

Until now, the march has crossed the provinces of Cautin and Malleco (9th Region) and today entered the province of Bio Bio (8th Region). The distances walked are on schedule and the date of arrival to Santiago remains as established for June 20th.

The national march for the Recognition of the Mapuche Nation and its Rights is on its way receiving the sympathy of the Chilean people and demonstrations of solidarity. However, it is also possible to perceive opposition from those who support the perpetuation of the oppression of our People, which makes it necessary to be permanently on the watch and to extreme security measures. Even the Chilean police force is putting pressure on the marchers, maintaining more an attitude of surveillance and control than one of cooperation to ensure the participants' security.

In sum, the harshness of the material conditions combines with the happiness and fraternity which are characterizing our demonstration. We remind everyone that this march, coordinated by the Mapuche organization Council of All the Lands, is being self-funded and we cannot but express our concern regarding the obtention of the necessary economic resources to guarantee the success of the march. In this sense, it is essential to maintain a food provision in accordance with the effort carried out, to obtain adequate footwear for the participants, medicines, fuel for the vehicle which carries the equipment and attends to emergencies and other minimal requirements. Until now, donations have been limited to food to partially cover some of the days of the march.

Such situation is risking to affect the physical integrity of the participants which continue to firmly maintain their purpose of reaching Santiago -still 500 kms away- and we therefore call for solidarity, bearing in mind that any contribution can be of assistance to improve the conditions of the march and therefore the struggle of the Mapuche People for the recognition of our political rights. The bank account number opened exclusively for this purpose is: Banco del Estado de Chile, Sucursal Temuco, núm. 62964869630 (for bureaucratic reasons it has not been possible to open the account in the name of our organization and that is the reason for having the names of Pablo Huenteleo C. and Segundo Adolfo Antilao M. as account holders). Contributions in non perishable food products, footwear or other can be sent to the headquarters of our organization in Temuco: Lautaro, 234 o to the following addresses in Santiago: Concha y Toro, 53 ; or Chile España, 555.

We reiterate that the participants in this march are Mapuche Communities involved in a process to recover their lands currently occupied by national and transnational forestry corporations, non-Mapuche individuals and the Chilean State, under the following main mobilization central themes:

- 1.- To reassert the right to self-determination of the Mapuche People as a collective right of peoples.
- 2.- The constitutional recognition as a transitory measure until full self-determination is achieved.
- 3.- The ratification of international instruments applicable to Indigenous Peoples, especially ILO Convention 169.
- 4.- The right to participation through institutional mechanisms which establish a new relationship between the Mapuche People and the Chilean State.
- 5.- The establishment of an Autonomous Mapuche Parliament.
- 6.- The restitution of lands and territory.
- 7.- To denounce the massive presence of transnational forestry corporations which operate under neoliberal policies which impinge the collective rights of the Mapuche People and to demand their withdrawal from the Mapuche Territory.
- 8.- To review the policy of judicial reform announced by the government, which does not take into account the Mapuche People's own cultural procedures.

Wallmapuche, Temuco, 2 June 1999

Consejo de Todas Las Tierras. Lautaro 234, Casilla 448, Temuco, Chile.