

Summary of “Territory and Power in the Constitutional Assembly”, by Mr. Carlos Romero

Camilla Brattland, Tromsø Conference 5th of October 2006

Mr. Carlos Romero, Director at the Centre for Social and Juridical Studies (CEJIS) and member of IWGIA’s Advisory Board held a speech with the title: “*Territory and Power in the Constitutional Assembly*”.

Mr. Romero spoke on the background of the situation in Bolivia, which suffers from a crisis of social inequality and extreme poverty, at the same time as there is an enormous richness in natural resources. The ownership of land is uneven, where a few percents belong to indigenous peoples and the large landowners own most of the land. In Bolivia, an increase in the informal economy betrays a fracturing of society, but at the same time a strengthening of the social movements where indigenous identity and class identity are key characteristics. An example is the koka leaf movement, which has not been spearheaded by the cultivators themselves, and from which Evo Morales gained much of his experience and power before becoming president in Bolivia. The socialist movement in Bolivia has gained a political hegemony, and the political power resides in the Andean region while the economic power lies in the east/west regions of Bolivia. Mr. Romero pointed to three main topics as future challenges for Bolivia both politically and socially;

- 1) Gas and hydrocarbons: Bolivia must regain control over this sector and close the inequality gap resulting from the insustainability of the energy policy. Both Argentina and Chile are looking for Bolivian gas, and the energy policy will define the faith of the country, said Romero.
- 2) Land policy: an issue of concern is collective indigenous rights and restructuring of the land policy into a new management of resources jointly between the state and social management. Strengthening of indigenous peoples and reconquest of territories are also key words here.
- 3) Legislative assembly: this issue is about reconfiguring the power situation in Bolivia to be able to apply and respond to demands and avoid civil war.

In response to a question on indigenous identity in Bolivia, Mr. Romero responded that indigenous identity in Bolivia is indeed very strong, where respect and fear of nature are central values. Bolivia has ratified the ILO Convention 169, and a central question is ownership to subsoil resources such as oil and gas since indigenous peoples do not have any such rights. A process of redistribution of land has been initiated in Bolivia, and so far around 15% of the acclaimed land has been allotted, a process also causing commotion and openings for guerrilla wars.