

**Amérindiens: des traditions pour demain
Onze actions de peuples autochtones d'Amérique Latine
pour valoriser leur identité culturelle**

Sous la direction de Geneviève Herold
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The Swiss **Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'homme** and the network of non-governmental organizations **Traditions pour Demain** have joined to produce this valuable publication with very interesting materials about the cultural renewal of the indigenous populations of Central and South America. What we have before us are testimonies of the natives, who have been given an opportunity to speak for themselves and present their views and thoughts on their daily lives and their struggle for survival.

Some ten years ago, *Traditions pour Demain* began to stimulate the cultural revitalization of indigenous communities in about a dozen countries, putting at their disposal its moral and financial support without any ideological or denominational preconditions. Endogenous projects in over a hundred communities, from the island of Chiloé in southern Chile to Sierra Madre mountains in Mexico, have benefited from such support. Eleven of these projects are presented in this volume. The publication makes it unmistakably clear that these people are willing and able to safeguard their individuality and dignity. It is perfectly obvious now that nobody else can do it for them. Only they can preserve their languages and only they can link up their villages with amateur-designed radio transmitters, reconstruct their history from the collective memory, revive their customs, formulate demands regarding their needs and rights to the local and central authorities, defend their world views, preserve their lands and beliefs attached to them, collect and arrange their traditional knowledge and skills, etc.

Data and information about the lives and positions of quite varied indigenous communities in Latin America, as presented in the preface by Diego Gradis, President of *Traditions pour Demain*, provide a good framework for an understanding of what such an effort really means. The Indian peoples of Central and South America have for centuries now been isolated and subjected to the societies of the countries to which they geopolitically belong. According to offi-

cial statistics, they number some 40 million people, or 8 per cent of the total population. Unofficial estimates put their number at twice that figure. In view of the systematic suppression and political violence to which they are exposed, it is not very desirable to be one of their numbers. Being a native Indian is synonymous with being impoverished and oppressed, not only in the material sense. Out of more than two thousand languages that were at one time spoken here, less than four hundred still survive. The great majority of the Indian population (over 70 per cent in Peru, for instance) remain uneducated, without primary education, and without a chance to learn the official language of the country in which they live.

There have been some signs recently showing that the international community is beginning to understand the situation a little better.

