



# CHAUPIESTANCIA CHRISTIANS

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There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents, but here on earth things tend to be rather different. Isabel Criollo accepted Christ in 2001, the first in her village. Before, Isabel had participated in the religious feasts in her community that included loud music and much drinking. Her new profession put an end to that behavior. Her husband, Nelson Tutillo, and a relative, José Cepeda, also received the Gospel. They made no secret of their faith. In fact, they invited Christians from other communities to visit their home in Chaupiestancia. As a result, Isabel and her relatives soon became known as “disassociates and non-collaborators” in the community, although they continued to pay their dues and participate in the “mingas” (community work groups). Their neighbors now complained about their music and singing. The community even cut off their water supply and denied them community rights.

Things came to a head in September of 2004 when the village leaders issued an expulsion order, giving Nelson and Isabel three days to pack up their things and leave the community, threatening to burn them and their home. The chief of police could not guarantee their safety and advised them to leave. The next day their home, containing a small store, was ransacked. The door and boards protecting the windows were set alight and the windows smashed. Since then they have lived with relatives in the town. A lawyer tried to make a case against the village leaders, but this only seemed to make the situation worse and brought a counter-charge of “defamation of character”. The local newspaper also took up the story and it became a thorn in the side of the community leaders, who prefer to conduct their affairs out of the public view. Finally at the end of 2005, the family presented their case to the Association of Evangelical Indigenous people of Pichincha (AIEP).

AIEP was formed in the late 1970's to give solidarity to the newly-forming evangelical churches in Pichincha province. CRWRC began to partner with the organization in 1998 and has helped them implement and improve community transformation programs. This includes justice education programs.

AIEP immediately took up the case with the Indigenous People's Advocacy Directorate

(DINAPIN) in Quito, which was also dealing with a similar case from another community involving eleven families. The Constitution of Ecuador upholds freedom of religion, but there is also a section that gives the indigenous communities certain “collective rights.” This includes the right to administer indigenous justice “within the bounds of the Law.” This is often wrongly applied.

On Friday, March 10, the leaders of Chaupiestancia were summoned to attend a session in the DINAPIN headquarters. They showed up in strength - some 20 persons in all, including a lawyer and the parish president. On the other side were members of the two affected families - only three humble indigenous people. This time, however, they had the President and Director of Programs of AIEP plus a representative of CRWRC at their side. The opening remarks made by the village leaders' lawyer reminded me of Tertullus in Acts 24. But eloquence is no substitute for truth. When Pedro Lincango, president of AIEP, simply stated the petition of the two families - to be allowed to return to their ancestral homes and have their water supply and rights restored so they can live in peace in the community, the very same lawyer said to his group, “You cannot deny them these rights under the law”. There was still much resistance on the part of the community president, but he agreed to let the People's Advocate visit the community on March 18 to discuss a proposed agreement. This was a tremendous step forward.

Pedro took part in the community visit and related to us afterwards that at first there was a lot of opposition from community members, but finally they agreed to allow the families to return to their homes. The communities also pledged to restore their water supply. The first weeks will not be easy but we pray that their good testimony will restore relationships and be a witness for Christ. AIEP will help Nelson and Isabel to rebuild their home and store. AIEP is also helping to draft an article for the local newspaper, saying that the issue has been resolved and Chaupiestancia is now at peace.

Your prayer and financial support of CRWRC-Ecuador makes AIEP's justice work possible. Thank you.

*Rob and Betty Wood*

