



Government proposes consultation law for Chile's indigenous Mapuche

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Law will improve dialogue between government and native communities, government says.

Chile's National Corporation for Indigenous Development (Conadi) presented a new proposal for an indigenous consultation law to the Senate's Human Rights Committee on Thursday. The proposal falls on the U.N.'s "International Day of the World's Indigenous People" and follows weeks of unrest in southern Chile between government authorities and indigenous Mapuche protesters, who have called for more autonomy in their communities.



Social Development Minister Joaquín Lavín (left) presented the proposal Wednesday at the ILO headquarters in Santiago. Photo courtesy of Ministerio de Desarrollo Social

The proposal was first presented by Social Development Minister Joaquín Lavín and Conadi Director Jorge Retamal on Wednesday at the U.N.'s International Labor Organization (ILO) headquarters in Santiago. The proposal would allow prior consultation between the government and indigenous communities and associations on land uses, based on the ILO's Convention 169 which states that natives should be consulted on measures "which may affect them directly".

"This document is very important for the country and for our native people," said Retamal.

Retamal said the new consultation law would replace the current consultation law, Decree 124, which Mapuche groups and human rights organizations have deemed insufficient.

"This new ruling, which we hope to have approved by the end 2012, will abolish the 2009 Decree 124, which was not consulted by the indigenous communities and associations."

Ana Piquer, Executive Director of Amnesty International Chile highlighted the importance of consultation between governments and natives.

"It is essential that all policies affecting indigenous people are determined within the frame of a dialogue with them," she said. "These policies range from the social aspects, to security to development."

"The right to consultation is very relevant in our country when we consider all the projects with are currently being executed, or plan to be," she added. "For example, in the context of the Mapuche conflict, the right of consultation is crucial when solving conflicts such as the long term problems of land restitution."

The proceedings of how the law will be passed have not yet been confirmed. According to Marcial Coll, president of the Conadi Consultation Commission, this is "due to the fact that the convention is a human rights treaty."

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About the writer



Sumy Sadurni

Sumy is studying at Westminster University, in London, UK. Having lived all over the world has sparked a strong interest in international journalism, with a particular passion for South America. She has written for music and travel magazines, but her main goal is to report on current affairs, both foreign and national.

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