

Chile's indigenous people celebrate their new year

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WRITTEN BY SUMY SADURNI



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Piñera opens ceremony while Amnesty International denounces police brutality.

This Sunday marked the "Día Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas" in Chile, a celebration of the New Year of Chile's indigenous peoples characterized by storytelling, rituals and dancing. This year, it was also marked by a debate over the human rights of indigenous tribes in Chile.



Ritual in La Moneda. Photo courtesy of Gobierno de Chile.

During the ceremony of celebration at La Moneda presidential palace, President Sebastián Piñera proposed a new treaty for the country's indigenous people that aims to increase their integration in Chilean society by developing their productive capacities, providing quality education, encouraging their political participation and fomenting respect for their culture, identity, tradition and language.

"The purpose of establishing a new treaty with our native people has been strongly established," he said.

"The truth is they deserve this new treaty, and our country also needs it to be able to develop integrally and to really share a future prospect."

Amnesty International, however, said the subject of police brutality toward the natives has been wrongfully avoided, and called on the authorities to respect their human rights.

"Yes, there is progress," Executive Director Ana Piquer of Amnesty International Chile told The Santiago Times. "But the fact that he did not mention the violent incidents that are happening is, of course, a worry."

Piquer spoke of the violence natives face, saying nothing is being done to fix this problem.

"At least once a month we receive information that there is violence happening," she said. "We work with organizations down south who pass this on to us, but we also get contacted by the victims themselves, who send us e-mails and photos of injuries."

An Amnesty International statement said incidents included violence toward pregnant women, children and "people who have nothing to do with search warrants happening in the villages."

"We don't see that these incidents are being acknowledged," Piquer said. "It is almost as if they are not taking these problems seriously. The main issue is that there is nothing being done to investigate these incidents, let alone stop them. We want the violators of human rights to be sanctioned, the natives need justice too."

Amnesty International is now soliciting information on what the authorities are doing to investigate the claims. One of the main issues, according to Piquer, is the lack of legal counsel available to indigenous peoples in Chile.

"We are trying to take action in these sorts of cases all over the world," Piquer said. "The right to legal counsel is very relevant everywhere. And while is very difficult to compare Chile's indigenous problems with the rest of South America, they do tend to be the same: there is a lack of knowledge, legal counsel and protests that end in violence."

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About the writer



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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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