



# UNITED NATIONS

## Press Release

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XXXXXXXXXX **UN Special Rapporteur expresses concern regarding recent events in Bolivia** XXXXXXXXXXXX

10 April 2008

*The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Mr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, announced today that he had transmitted to the Government of Bolivia the report on the mission he undertook to the country last December, to be subsequently presented to the Human Rights Council. With reference to recent events that have taken place in Bolivia after his mission, and which directly impinge upon the human rights of indigenous peoples in this country, the Special Rapporteur has made the following statement:*

*The attacks have occurred as the Guarani people are in the process of recognition of their territories.*

"I note with concern the intention of the authorities of the Department of Santa Cruz to promote a unilateral referendum on departmental autonomy at the margins of the Political Constitution of the State. The draft statute of autonomy includes a number of provisions of a racist character, including article 161, which would be highly harmful for the indigenous peoples of the department. The human rights of indigenous peoples are guaranteed by the laws of the country, which also include ILO Convention 169 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These norms must be respected by the government at all levels, especially within the ongoing debate on autonomy. I call on the authorities and the people of Santa Cruz in order to ensure that the legitimate aspiration to departmental autonomy does not lead to abuses of the rights of indigenous peoples".

"I also note with concern, and I strongly condemn, the recent attacks suffered by government officials and members of the Guarani people in the Chaco region of Santa Cruz. The attacks have taken place in the context of the ongoing process of recognition of the traditional territories of the Guarani people, many whose members still live under conditions of serfdom, as I have denounced in the report on my recent mission to Bolivia. The authorities of the Department of Santa Cruz have the obligation to ensure the respect of the rule of law and to prevent and sanction any act of violence that may hinder a pacific solution to old-standing problems related to indigenous peoples' rights to freedom, autonomy and the land".

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The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people carried out an official visit to Bolivia from 25

November to 4 December 2007. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur visited the Department of Santa Cruz, and met with members of Guarani communities that had been recently released from their condition of servitude. The complete report of the mission will soon be public. A preliminary note on the mission is available at:  
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/rapporteur/visits.htm>