

## Afro-Peruvians

### Profile

Afro-Peruvians live primarily in the southern coastal region, in cities such as Ica and Nazca, and have contributed a special blend of religion, language and cuisine to Peru's cultural heritage. Estimates of the country's Afro-Peruvian population vary greatly (depending on sources) and black civil rights groups contend that official censuses and surveys do not accurately reflect their numbers. These estimates range from 6 to 10 per cent of the total population (for example, the World Bank estimated 1.4 million in 2000). Generally, Afro-Peruvians do not hold leadership positions in government, business or the military, and it is a common criticism that blacks are discriminated against in the job application process or relegated to low-paid positions. In 2004 there were three Afro-Peruvian representatives in Congress.

### Historical context

The first slaves arrived in Peru in the sixteenth century. Many came via the Caribbean or Brazil and had already lost touch with their African identity. The majority lived in Lima. By the nineteenth century, slaves formed the heart of Peru's plantation labour force. Despite opposition from local slave owners, José de San Martín - the 'liberator' of Peru - ordered that slave trade be abolished in 1821. Slavery itself, however, was not finally abolished until 1854.

Afro-Peruvians had little sense of ethnic identity until the 1950s, when there was a reaffirmation of Afro-Peruvian culture with the emergence of dance and theatre groups, such as the Grupo Cumananá. Influenced by the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, social groups formed to trace their African roots. Although these groups were short-lived, other groups have taken their place, including the Asociación Cultural de la Juventud Negra, the Instituto de Investigaciones Afro-Peruano, and the Movimiento Negro Francisco Congo. The Asociación pro Derechos Humanos del Negro, founded in the 1990s, provides legal aid and human rights support.

### Current issues

Afro-Peruvians suffer urban poverty and its accompanying problems of alcohol and drug abuse. The poor relationship, which has existed in the past, between the country's Afro-Peruvian and indigenous urban populations can be partly accounted for by the marginalized situation of both groups. (Even within INDEPA Afro and indigenous organizations do not work closely together.) Afro-Peruvian households in rural areas also suffer extreme poverty and dire living conditions; here there are often no basic services or social programmes.

The Afro-Peruvian movement in Peru has been far weaker and less successful than its counterparts in Brazil and Colombia, but anti-racism working groups have been formed in Lima, and organizations such as the Asociación Palenque and the Asociación pro Derechos Humanos del Negro have managed to make their voices heard. In 2004 many events were organized to mark the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Peru. The media has recently shown reports about discotheques in Lima denying

access to people of African descent, and in 2005 a consumer rights court fined one establishment for such discriminatory practice.

In 2007, following repeated incidences of the same practices, the consumer protection agency went even further and issued a ruling which led to the shutting down of an 'upscale' restaurant located in the affluent suburb of Miraflores. Café del Mar was forced to comply with the agency's request to close for 60 days and was fined \$76,000 for its discriminatory entrance policy. According to Associated Press (AP), several daily newspapers in Peru reported that the majority owner in the chain of restaurants is Chelsea striker Claudio Pizarro. AP reports that on both occasions when it tried to inquire about Pizarro's role the restaurant refused to comment.

Despite the high level of black group identity, Afro-Peruvian citizens are not officially recognized as a distinct cultural group and they have no special collective rights.

The continuing marginalization and difficulty experienced by Afro-Peruvians was once again demonstrated in 2007. This was very evident following the 8.0 magnitude earthquake that hit Peru's southern coast in August 2007 killing more than 500 people, injuring over 1000 and destroying some 34,000 homes.

One week after the disaster Minority Rights Group International (MRG) expressed concern that crucial humanitarian relief was still not reaching the Afro-Peruvian population who made up the majority of the worst affected among the hundreds of thousands left homeless.

Peruvian Afro-descendants' rights advocate Jorge Ramirez Reyner of ASONEDH criticized the government for doing nothing to help the mostly rural Afro Peruvian communities and for excluding them from the relief process especially since all humanitarian aid was channelled through the government.

In keeping with the all-pervasive national climate of deep discrimination and prejudice there were also charges that the Peruvian media chose to ignore the plight of the disaster-affected Afro Peruvians - who had lost everything - and instead preferred to portray them as looters and thieves.

Additionally, critics pointed out that severely damaged road systems made it particularly difficult to deliver relief to the rural zones where most of the Afro Peruvian communities are located. They charged that this was another indication of an ongoing pattern of infrastructural under-investment and official neglect that has characterized the relationship between successive Peruvian governments and the Afro-Peruvian population.

Unlike efforts in neighbouring countries, the Afro-Peruvian presence is still not adequately addressed by the country's statistical instruments causing Afro-Peruvian communities to remain officially invisible as well as deprived.