

Paez (Nasa) and Guambiano

Profile

The Cauca valley is the home of 200,000 Paez (Nasa) and Guambiano. The Paez language is spoken by 40,000 people and is related to Chibcha. The majority of Paez speakers are located predominantly in Cauca, and to a lesser extent in Tolima and Putumayo. The Guambiano are located in the central mountain range of Cauca, and are a young population with an average age of about 21. The Guambiano language is part of the greater Chibcha linguistic family, and is also known as Wampi-Misamera-wah. A traditional healer in the Guambiano culture is known as the Mirbik, who is chosen based on ability to interpret visions. Collective work and mutual respect are key aspects of the Guambiano culture.

Historical context

Guambianos have been active in the reclamation of their lands since at least 1980 when they joined with Paez and Cumbales from the department of Nariño to form the Indigenous Authorities of the South-west movement. They aimed to create an autonomous nation within the Colombian state, with the right to make their claims to Colombian authorities directly rather than through the traditional intermediaries. Although *resguardo* legislation theoretically protected their lands from usurpation, in the past this legislation has been ignored or bypassed through the falsification of titles and the declaration of *resguardos* as public land. The Colombian indigenous movement is pledged to *recuperación*, reclaiming land through repossession.

Paez and Guambiano lands have been extensively usurped for coffee plantations. While indigenous communities have always been active in reclaiming lands through judicial channels, land occupation enables them to reverse the process of land loss on a much larger scale. Retaliation against this method has been violent. In December 1991, 20 Paez, including four children, were killed and as many wounded. A gang working for local landowners or drug dealers are suspected of the crime. Paez land is wanted for growing the opium poppy which is replacing cocaine in the Cauca area.

Current issues

In 1994 the NASA KIWE Corporation was established to support the Paez communities impacted by an earthquake. This public corporation has documented the cultural and linguistic traditions of the Paez. The Paez and Guambiano like most indigenous groups face tremendous pressures because of the on-going violence in their region.