

Quichua

Profile

Belonging to the same linguistic group as the Quechua of Bolivia and Peru, the Quichua are Ecuador's largest and most diverse indigenous group. They are a diverse group inhabiting both the highland and lowland regions. Since Quichua has historically served as the lingua franca among indigenous communities, speakers of this language represent a variety of different ethnic groups.

Historical context

The Quichua are arguably the single largest indigenous group in the world. They are known for their important contributions to architecture and elaborate roads from the pre-columbine period. In Ecuador alone, there are at least 15 sub-groups of the Quichua. With a unique tradition of making textiles, starting in the 1920s the Otavalo Quichua created a model of indigenous capitalism that has afforded them a better socio-economic status than other minority groups in Ecuador.

Current issues

Although the Quichua have enjoyed some political power through the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, sectors of this population continue to face serious socio-economic challenges. In the highlands, Quichua farmers have been compelled by their worsening economic situation to earn their livelihood as day labourers in commercial agriculture or as seasonal migrant workers. Similarly, lowland Quichua continue to suffer from high rates of poverty, little access to education and adequate health services. The growth of the eco-tourism industry has benefited the Quichua community to some extent. However, international companies without indigenous representation continue to dominate the tourism industry.

In 2004, representing 18 Quichua organizations of the Napo region, the Network of Quichuan Nationalities of the Amazon opposed a series of policy talks aimed at increasing oil production. In May of 2006 Quichuan organizations were instrumental in a series of protests and road blocks leading to President Palacio's ordering of Oxy to leave Ecuador. Oxy subsequently sued the Ecuadorian government and won in July, 2006.