



BOLIVIA INFORMATION FORUM

Bolivia Information Forum Bulletin

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CONTENTS

[1] Cochabamba: Scenes of Street Violence

Report and analysis of unrest and violent demonstrations in the city of Cochabamba that took place in January. The violence centred around the prefect of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, and can be seen as a culmination of many of the key issues of conflict that are currently being played out in Bolivia.

[2] Reyes Villa, Prefects and *Autonomías*

Detailed and historical analysis of the issues of prefects and *autonomías*, and how these themes relate to the recent events in Cochabamba.

[3] Morales' Speech to Congress

An overview of Morales' speech to congress of 22 January, marking his first year in office, in which he outlined future priorities for the MAS government.

[4] New Cabinet Appointments

Details of recent changes to the cabinet, with profiles of the seven new ministers.

[5] Point of View - Evo's Government: An Evaluation of 2006

Appraisal and critical analysis of the first year of the MAS government by Bolivian Human Rights advocate P. Gregorio Iriarte.

[6] Interview with César Navarro: Social Progress in Bolivia

An interview with MAS majority leader in Congress, César Navarro, conducted during his visit to the UK at the end of last year.

[1] Cochabamba: Scenes of Street Violence

The television news on the evening of 11th January projected scenes similar to those typically in the violent videos of movies shown on inter-provincial buses in Bolivia. One was almost expecting to find it had only been a film; if only it had been ...

Police sources estimated that between 25,000 to 30,000 supporters of the prefect of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes, had overwhelmed flimsy police cordons to attack *campesinos* and coca farmers who had occupied the central Prado paseo area. The television showed a woman police officer gesticulating with those leading the demonstrators and how, once the order to advance was given, the police line simply dissolved under pressure. The supporters of Reyes Villa, mainly from middle-class districts in the north of the city, were armed with baseball bats, golf clubs, sticks wrapped with barbed wire or studded with nails. Many wore helmets, some carried home-made shields. This was hardly a peaceful demonstration.

In the end, 216 people were treated for serious wounds, mainly *campesinos*. There were men, young women, older people, children. They were brought to the Viedma Hospital, some walking, some carried in on blankets. Most were bleeding profusely, many with head wounds. In the confrontation, two people were killed: a coca producer, Juan Ticacolque, who was shot, and a 17-year old, Cristián Urresti, who had gone to the demonstration with his parents and was lynched by angry *campesinos*.

In the following days, evidence emerged that members of the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC) had come to Cochabamba to train the so-called Jóvenes por la Democracia who had orchestrated the clashes with the *campesinos* and *cocaleros* in Cochabamba. The UJC is a well established group of militant right-wingers, close to the civic committee of Santa Cruz and noted for its violent tactics and white racist views. No fewer than three people were detained with guns, of which one -- according to ballistic examinations -- had killed the *cocalero*. The role of the prefect in helping to organise the Jóvenes por la Democracia is unclear, but some employees of the Prefecture were seen handing out sticks and clubs to people going on the march. The Human Rights Assembly (APDH) and the Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo) were amongst many who strongly condemned the racist nature of these attacks.

Background to these events

Cochabamba is in the middle of the country, geographically if not politically, and is caught in the midst of the conflict between the largely pro-Morales Andean departments and those of the *media luna*, the four lowland departments (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija) whose economies have benefited from the development of the oil and gas industries, and which want greater autonomy from central government.

Cochabamba voted overwhelmingly for Evo Morales in the December 2005 elections, the new president having risen to prominence as leader of the Cochabamba *cocaleros*. He won over 60% of the vote in the department. In July 2006, 63% of the department's population adhered to Morales' stance and voted 'no' in the referendum on autonomies. Manfred Reyes Villa, ex aide-de-camp to General Luis García Meza -- military dictator of the early 1980's -- who as mayor of Cochabamba had carried out many public works projects, received 47.6% of the vote in the election to chose the prefect, held simultaneously with the presidential elections.

The prefects and civic committees, particularly those of the lowland departments, but also those of La Paz and Cochabamba have increasingly assumed the leadership of opposition to the MAS government during its first year (see next article). Opposition parties, particularly the Podemos coalition, have shown themselves less effective in rallying opposition. They conjure up the old party system, which has been badly discredited in recent years.

Since November, the opposition has adopted an increasingly confrontational position against the government. Departmental prefects and civic committees have been particularly strident. The opposition has rallied around four main issues:

- 1. Land. In November, Congress approved changes to the land reform law, allowing land that is not being used for economic and social purposes to be expropriated by the state. The changes to the law mainly affect large-scale lowland landowners (*latifundistas*). Land concentration is particularly acute in Santa Cruz and the Beni, where the size of farms has never been subject to agrarian reform. A march of *campesinos* and indigenous people from the lowlands arrived in La Paz to put pressure on parliament to approve the changes to the law. The landowner lobby groups in Santa Cruz, especially the Camara Agropecuario del Oriente (CAO), have made clear their unflinching opposition to the prospect of land reform in the lowlands.
- 2. The Constituent Assembly. So far, no agreement has been reached over the margin by which decisions in the Constituent Assembly should be made (See Bulletin No 4). The MAS has revised its position six times, but has so far failed to satisfy the opposition. The Assembly is supposed to finish its work within twelve months, and so far its substantive work of revising the constitution has yet to begin. In November and December, a large hunger strike on the issue plus large rallies, notably in Santa Cruz, further polarised positions. This raises the question of whether the opposition is willing to engage with the Assembly at all, fearful of the changes it might bring.
[Note to readers: As the Bulletin 5 went to press, there were press accounts that a final agreement was in the offing, following an agreement between the MAS and the UN and the desertion of a number of Podemos Assembly members]
- 3. Regional autonomies. The lowland departments have threatened to proclaim de facto autonomy. Rubén Costas, prefect of Santa Cruz, has recently outlined his departmental plan. This establishes its own health and education programmes. Costas has proclaimed himself as governor. These moves towards greater autonomy seem designed to pre-empt any decisions that might be taken in the Constituent Assembly.
- 4. Oversight of local spending. Evo Morales has announced proposals to oversee public expenditure at departmental level (for which the prefects are responsible), given the vastly increased funds available due to increased taxation

on oil and gas production, and the fact that the Constitutional Tribunal has disallowed departmental councils (members named by municipal councils) to oversee and censure prefects, since these are now elected.

Reyes Villa has decided to pitch his support in favour of the opposition, even though support for the government in Cochabamba is strong. The prefects, acting in concert (minus the three that belong to the MAS) are seeking to challenge the government and test its hand. In December, Reyes Villa called for a fresh referendum on autonomy in the department of Cochabamba for 1 April, despite the outcome of last year's referendum on the same issue. The social movements that support the Morales government have called for his resignation as prefect. So far, he has refused to heed these calls. The government has intimated that it will seek to introduce legislation enabling recall referendums where prefects have lost their public support. In praising Santa Cruz's move towards "independence" (as opposed to autonomy), Reyes Villa appears to have joined the campaign to question and provoke the government.

The confrontation seen in Cochabamba last month may be a sign of things to come. Most of the opposition seems increasingly unwilling to negotiate with a government which it sees as motivated by a radical agenda that threatens to upset a number of elite interests.

[2] Reyes Villa, Prefects and Autonomías

As the previous article mentions, last month's street violence in the city of Cochabamba arose from the prefect Manfred Reyes Villa's attempts to demand a referendum on autonomy in the department.

Ever since the fall of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in October 2003, the departments of the so-called *media luna* (Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando) have been banging the 'autonomy' drum as a way of distancing themselves from the left-wing, pro-indigenous movements that have gained political ascendancy throughout much of the rest of Bolivia.

But whereas the demand for autonomy is a matter that enjoys strong popular support in the departments of the *media luna*, this is by no means so clear-cut in Cochabamba. In Cochabamba – in particular in the Chapare region, the birthplace of the Evo Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) – there were strong suspicions as to the motives and objectives of those pushing for autonomy, whether in Cochabamba or in the *media luna*, believing that autonomy is synonymous with disguised separatism.

The demand for regional autonomy in Santa Cruz has a long history with roots stretching back to the time of Independence or before. But demands for autonomy became more assertive as the natural wealth of the Bolivian *oriente* became manifest. The first wave of regionalism took place around the demand for 11% royalties on oil production, a concession made in the late 1950s after a campaign waged against the then government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR). Both then and since, the MNR

sought to curb the power of regionalism. Its most recent president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, introduced his Popular Participation programme in the 1990s to strengthen municipal government at the expense of the departments.

Since Evo Morales became president a year ago, the prefects of the *media luna* have become key figures in the struggle for greater autonomy, in conjunction with civic committees. Up until the 2005 elections, the prefect was simply an executive appointee, the representative of the central government at the local level whose main responsibility was for law and order and departmental development. However, the changes made in December 2005, making prefects an elective office, have given them the legitimacy and support to turn themselves into powerful local leaders. It has also tilted the balance between centralism and regionalism.

The change in the status of the prefect came about in 2004, a consequence of the regional pressures faced by the then president, Carlos Mesa (2003-05) from Santa Cruz and elsewhere in the *media luna*. Under duress, Mesa agreed to prefects being made elective, albeit subject to the constitutional proviso that they be ratified in the last instance by the president.

The importance of the election of prefects was partly obscured by the scale of the MAS landslide in December 2005. In selecting its candidates for office, the MAS focused more on the congressional contests, failing to come up with a strong list of candidates for prefects. In the end, the MAS won in only three of the country's nine departments (Potosi, Chuquisaca and Oruro). Other than the four departments of the *media luna*, opposition candidates also won in La Paz (José Luis Paredes) and Cochabamba (Reyes Villa), both relatively successful ex-mayors.

However, the significance of the prefectural elections was not lost on the opposition parties, many of them traditional parties whose national standing had been badly undermined by the MAS. They saw these as a way of keeping a stake in the political system and rebuilding ties with their electorate. So it was that Mario Cossío, the former MNR president of the Chamber of Deputies, became the new prefect of Tarija. Leopoldo Fernández, of the Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), became the prefect of Pando. Paredes, a former leader of the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) became prefect of La Paz, and Reyes Villa (the former leader of Nueva Fuerza Republicana, NFR) became the prefect of Cochabamba.

Reyes Villa had been the NFR candidate in the 2002 presidential elections. Although at one point he had been touted as a possible winner, he ended up in third place, narrowly behind the MNR and the MAS. His powerbase had always been in the city of Cochabamba, where he had twice been the mayor. Beyond the city limits, however, his support is limited, this now being a MAS stronghold.

It was only to be expected that his bid to jump on the *autonomías* bandwagon against the Morales government would provoke a hostile response among the MAS's core supporters in and around the city of Cochabamba. For them, Reyes is far from being a genuine representative of the people of Cochabamba. Pressure on him to resign as prefect is therefore unlikely to diminish.

[3] Morales' Speech to Congress

President Evo Morales delivered his annual speech to Congress on January 22. Lasting over four hours, the speech highlighted many of the government's achievements during its first twelve months in office. However, it conspicuously did not make much mention of regional tensions (specifically the disturbances of previous weeks in Cochabamba) or the future of the Constituent Assembly. Proceedings in Sucre remained at an impasse with neither the government nor the opposition prepared to give way on the system of voting (See BIF Bulletin No 4).

Morales mapped out four priority areas for government policy in 2007. These were:

1. *Re-imposing majority state control over the firms capitalised in the mid-1990s.* The government would seem to give priority to those in the hydrocarbons sector, namely Chaco, Andina and Transredes. To achieve majority control of the two former would involve purchasing the 2% shareholding required to give the state 50% plus one of the shares. In the case of Transredes, in which Shell and Ashridge (a UK company) hold 50% of the shares, it would mean acquiring 14%. Chaco, Andina and Transredes were all companies formed out of the part-privatisation in 1996 of YPFB, the state hydrocarbons company. The other state companies that were 'capitalised' were ENDE (electricity), ENFE (railways), ENTEL (telecommunications) and Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB). The government has intimated that it wants to restore state control over ENTEL, currently run by Telecom Italia..

2. *Raising the tax burden on mining.* Under the current tax regime, mining companies pay very little to the Treasury. Last year tax payments totalled US\$58 million (US\$45 million in ICM (Impuesto Complementario Minero) plus US\$13 million in corporate income tax), when exports are expected to have reached a record US\$1 billion. Changes to the mining code had been due to be introduced last October, but were postponed in view of the conflict at Huanuni between unionised workers and members of mining cooperatives (See BIF Bulletin No 4). As a result of Huanuni, a new mining minister was appointed, Guillermo Dalence. The government is now determined to push ahead with reforms to the tax arrangements for mining to ensure that the state fully benefits from the current high prices for most minerals. The ICM is likely to be put on a sliding scale that reflects increases in the world price of minerals. Extending the tax net seems likely to run into opposition from the cooperatives which do not currently pay tax.

3. *Taking steps to boost employment.* The government is concerned to reduce high levels of unemployment and under-employment. In particular, it will take steps to provide cheap credit to small-scale businesses through the Banco de Desarrollo Productivo.

4. *Road building.* Road construction is likely to receive a boost. In particular, this will include construction projects to improve Bolivia's land links with neighbouring countries. It will also include road building projects to improve land communications between La Paz and the Beni.

[4] New cabinet appointments

On January 23, a day after the government's anniversary of its first year in office, President Evo Morales swore in seven new cabinet members from a total of sixteen.

Several ministers who had been criticised by social movements were replaced, and given other functions, the most important being Alicia Muñoz (ex-interior minister), Félix Patzi (Education) and Casimira Rodríguez (Justice). Ministers from Santa Cruz (Salvador Ric and Hugo Salvatierra) experienced difficulties in acting as a bridge between the two parts of the country. Generally, the balance of women in the cabinet has been maintained (4), people from unions and social organisations maintain a presence (6), with four people of indigenous background.

Rumours of a cabinet reshuffle had been circulating for weeks, but at a top-level meeting of the MAS in Cochabamba in early January, Morales had sought to scotch these. He said that he was unwilling to accept a major cabinet reshuffle on the argument that the cabinet was one which bore collective responsibility for the policies pursued. In the event, however, the resignation of Salvador Ric in mid-January prompted changes. In resigning, Ric had argued that the government had given insufficient attention to meeting the needs of Santa Cruz.

The new appointments are:

Alfredo Rada. Rada replaces Alicia Muñoz as **interior minister**. Previously he had been the vice-minister with responsibility for coordination between the government and social movements. He says he will give priority to issues of citizen security.

Celima Torrico takes over as **minister of justice**. She replaces Casimira Rodríguez, the main author of reforms to the justice system that incorporate indigenous customary law at the local level. Torrico is from Cochabamba and from a *campesino-cocalera* background. She was previously a leader of the Federación Departamental de Mujeres Campesinas in Cochabamba.

Walter Delgadillo. He replaces Alex Gálvez as **minister of labour**. Delgadillo was previously a leader of the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) in the 1980s until he broke with Jaime Paz Zamora to form the MIR-Masas. He was also general secretary of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB)

Jerjes Mercado. Mercado replaces Salvador Ric as **public works** minister. Previously he was vice-minister with responsibility for electricity. Like Ric, he is from Santa Cruz. He has said he wants to be the 'nexus' between east and west.

Susana Rivero. Rivero is the new minister with responsibility for **agriculture and rural development**. She replaces Hugo Salvatierra. From the Beni, she used to work in Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social (CEJIS) in Santa Cruz, an important NGO whose work focuses on issues of agrarian reform and indigenous land rights. Her immediate task will be to come up with detailed regulations for the new Agrarian Law, passed at the end of 2006.

Víctor Cáceres. He becomes **education minister**, replacing Felix Patzi. Patzi had been a controversial minister, and identified himself closely with the government's *indigenista* wing. Cáceres is a teacher and belongs to the union of urban teachers. He is also a lawyer. The teachers' union is one of Bolivia's more militant and articulate unions.

Gabriel Loza. He becomes the new minister with responsibility for planning and sustainable development. He replaces Hernando Larrazábal. He was formerly head of UDAPE, the government's economic and social policy 'think tank'.

The other ministers in the cabinet were ratified in post, namely:

Minister of the Presidency: Juan Ramón Quintana
Minister of Finance: Luis Alberto Arce Catacora
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship: David Choquehuanca
Minister of Health and Sport: Nila Heredia
Minister of Hydrocarbons: Carlos Villegas
Minister of Mining: Guillermo Dalence
Minister of Defence: Walker San Miguel
Minister of Production and Small Business: Celinda Sosa
Minister of Water: Abel Mamani

[5] Point Of View: Evo's government: an evaluation of 2006

By P. Gregorio Iriarte OMI

This is a summary of main points of an evaluation made by Gregorio Iriarte. Gregorio is a priest who came to live in Bolivia in the mines of the Siglo XX area, where the Oblate priests ran the Pio XII radio, in the early 1960's; he was one of the founding members of the Bolivian Human Rights Assembly (APDH) and continues to provide insightful analysis on themes of current importance from a perspective of ethics, social justice and democracy.

To show how easy it is to get it wrong, the majority of analysts thought a year ago that the government's main problems would be in the field of economics. People talked of the limited experience of the new president and his team, of capital flight, of international trade isolation, of devaluations, of the expropriation of properties, of the likelihood of a socialist sort of economic system being imposed; in short that it would lead to disaster. At the same time, they said that all would be well on the political front, owing to the scale of the electoral landslide, that the degree of public support would mean there would be no need to fight with obstructionism of the traditional political parties... Well it turned out the other way round: all has gone very well with the economy, better than what the most optimistic would have predicted. On the political front, however things have gone from bad to worse. The latest opinion polls give Evo's government 52% support, compared with 77% a year earlier. The drop has much more to do with politics than the economy.

Objectives met

Even though one year is not much, some achievements are obvious. The government took advantage of a favourable economic situation, maintaining monetary stability and the fiscal balance, increasing government revenues by more than 40%. This was mainly the consequence of the so-called 'nationalisation' of hydrocarbons, in practice a successful renegotiation with powerful petroleum companies.

Currently, national GDP stands at nearly 10 billion dollars, with exports of over 4 billion dollars yielding a surplus on the trade balance. Not only has the fiscal deficit vanished, but it is now in surplus by around 5% of GDP. Taxes are now being paid, administrative corruption has diminished, customs controls have improved, although there is still much to be done.

In the social sphere, the rights of the most disadvantaged have been enhanced, and levels of self-esteem among the least privileged have risen. The *Bono Juancito Pinto* (Juancito Pinto bond) has benefited more than a million poor school children. Some 44,000 women and 11,000 men have undergone literacy courses. A free health security benefit has been created for those under 21 or over 60. There has been a law passed to achieve a more equal distribution of land. These are some of the significant successes of the present government.

Of course it is true that the international economic situation, especially with respect to high world prices for hydrocarbons and minerals, has helped. And to this should be added another factor that has benefited the economy: remittances from Bolivians living abroad. But this does not detract from the government's efficiency in the area of economic and social policy.

Tensions, mistakes and mishaps

It is often said that the good macroeconomic situation belies a bad microeconomic one. This is true. Unemployment levels remain very high (around 11%), under-employment has risen, and with it the size of the informal economy. The result is clear. The number of Bolivians who go to Europe or the United States in search of work is ever increasing. We are increasingly losing trained workers.

Large-scale mobilisations reveal the fact that the main political actors are social or regional movements, with an almost total absence of political parties. The media complain of threats to free speech, of limits being placed on civil and political rights, of discrimination and exclusion. There are many who detect authoritarian and centralising tendencies in the government, attempts to frustrate the opposition. This has been most in evidence in the confrontation in the Constituent Assembly over the MAS's refusal to accept two-thirds voting and preference for a simple majority (with which it can win outright).

The demand for 'autonomies' in the so-called Media Luna (Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando) is becoming the axis around which opposition to the government expresses itself, an amalgam of regionalist designs, political purposes, separatist tendencies and even racism. The polarisation between 'east' and 'west' is in the ascendant and it seems that the government has not given much priority to this dangerous threat. President Evo

keeps up an aggressive and provocative discourse, accusing people indiscriminately of being oligarchs, separatists, large landowners...

We face the serious danger of fragmentation. This has enabled the right-wing parties, such as Podemos, to take advantage of the situation to mobilise prefects and civic committees in these departments. A project for decentralisation along the lines of autonomies has turned into the country's chief political challenge. The right has orchestrated itself not around well-known political personalities but around localist leaders who manipulate the easy and attractive option of regionalism.

It is deeply worrying that the government has lost control of an important part of the country. Rather than the government bringing the regions, the prefects and the civic committees into the framework of a coherent and viable national plan, a process directed by itself, it has entered into a sort of struggle for power. Instead of directing, orienting and governing, it has become involved in discrediting and verbally attacking others; rather than driving the autonomies forward, it seems to have been overtaken by them.

It is quite clear that attitudes in the eastern departments, especially in the civic committee of Santa Cruz, have been arrogant, obstructionist, lacking in national vision and refusing to acknowledge the positive attributes of the government. But it is the government that has the primary obligation to preserve, by whatever means, the unity of the country. It is incumbent on the government to change its stance, since not infrequently it seems to be inciting confrontation. It needs to define what sort of country we want to create and the sort of development required to achieve it.

Some analysts think that Evo's biggest error was to support the 'no' position in the referendum. The project that needs to take place – and which the government should pursue with energy – is to overcome the centralisation that has absorbed the country from its origins. One of the main keys to this is regional autonomy. But this has become the catalyst for discord. The government has to pursue this, since the four departments that voted 'yes' have the will and the right to make it happen.

[6] Interview with César Navarro

Social progress in Bolivia

César Navarro, the head of the parliamentary group of the Bolivian Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), the party led by President Evo Morales, visited the UK in November where he addressed a conference at TUC Congress in London. He also met with senior parliamentarians and individual British trade unions.

This as an interview by Socialist Campaign Group News who spoke to him about the progressive social changes taking place in Bolivia since the election of Evo Morales.

SCGN: What is the background which led to the victory of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS)?

César Navarro: After a period of very strong mass mobilisations, which began around the issue of water privatisation in 2000, then over gas and the expulsion of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and the social, economic and political model that had been imposed by neo-liberalism on Bolivia, MAS campaigned for a political alternative that could build a new nation.

The ten points of the MAS government programme are the demands that the social movements were developing and which had been constantly rejected by the existing state. Under neo-liberalism, Bolivia had lost sovereignty over its natural resources — particularly energy — and the state utilities were privatised. There was a loss of sovereignty vis-à-vis the US, with all the decisions made by the Bolivian government conditioned by decisions of the World Bank and IMF.

There was a widening poverty gap and the export of Bolivian capital. Neo-liberalism was backed up by a state of siege and throughout this period about 300 friends and comrades were assassinated. Bolivia is now going through a very important historical and political moment, the content of which is the profound transformation of society led by Evo Morales, a left wing, indigenous person.

SCGN: What are the priorities for the MAS government?

César Navarro: The number one priority is that the Constituent Assembly completes the process of writing a new constitution and then the immediate implementation of the reforms that come from this, in terms of reforming the structures of the state.

At the economic level, it is to increase the revenues accrued to the state through the nationalisation of the energy industry and national resources. Land reform will allow us to redistribute millions of acres to the peasant and indigenous communities. There is also the eradication of illiteracy, the widening of free healthcare and consolidating our relationship with all the neighbouring countries in Latin America.

The opposition to this comes mainly from the privately owned media in Bolivia. Some are linked directly to land-owning interests. Others are linked to presidential candidates from previous periods. The second block of opposition are four governors, who represent the political right. The third block are the land owners who illegally own millions of hectares.

SCGN: What international alliances are the Bolivian government developing?

César Navarro: Fundamentally, it is a strategic alliance with Cuba and Venezuela, who are providing all sorts of resources — especially human resources. Cuba has offered grants to train 5,000 Bolivian doctors. Venezuela has offered grants to train people in the field of energy and is offering \$100m to support small communities. The objective is solidarity, where the asymmetries between the countries will be taken into account and will be compensated for.

We have also consolidated our alliance with Argentina, widening the external market for the selling of gas. We expect to do the same with Brazil. We want to develop similar commercial relations with any other country that requires our energy. We are seeking

various relationships with the European Union and with North America, but with no strings attached of any kind.

Up until now a great deal of the foreign cooperation with Bolivia was conditional on the implementation of neo-liberal reforms in our country.

We need a better relationship and insist on the right of differences and diversity. The Bolivian model is totally Bolivian, but which positively values the progress being made in many countries in Latin America, and the rest of the world.

We want to break and do away with the internal colonial structures, and those externally dominating us, so in future we can have a state that does not exclude anyone. All nine departments of Bolivia should have the same human development, without any difference. This is quite a big undertaking.

SCGN: What is the significance given to the situation of the indigenous population?

César Navarro: This is very important. The political aspiration we have is that the representation in parliament of the original inhabitants is guaranteed, and that their territory, languages, means of communication and organisational forms are recognised in order for them to make decisions in their society and culture. The original inhabitants resisted the Spanish invasion, and represent the greatest moral reserve that Bolivia has both politically and historically.