

## **A Brief Synopsis of the Political Situation in Bua de Los Tsachilas**

### **1: Esc. Abraham Calazacon & Esc. Kasama**

One of the major issues that we have come up against is a continuing political and social contestation between various groups in the village. One of the reasons that we could not begin the recycling project with the Kasama school, also located in Bua, was because the leader of the '*Direction intercultural bilingüe de Santo Domingo de los Colarados*' and its Director, Marco Aguabil, did not like the fact that we were working with the Abraham Calazacon School. What we can best garner from our consultations with various people is that it seems this is mostly a personal issue of antagonism between the Director Marco Aguabil & the director of the Abraham Calazacon School. Director, Marco Aguabil is especially angry at the fact that Abraham Calazacon School has opted out of the Tsachila Intercultural Education Administration and has sought funds and resources from the Cayambe Intercultural Education Administration located at a great distance from Santo Domingo itself. Moreover Kasama School is backed by Manuel Calazacon, who has declared himself president for life, while Abraham Calamanco School is supported by Hector Aguabil, who has been democratically elected. These two governors do not talk to each other and have sought supporters all over the Tsachila nation causing a deepening political and social divide between the different groups. This antagonism has seemed to also spread over to the parents of children at Kasama School, some of who do not speak to the parents at Abraham Calazacon School. Moreover, it has been brought to our attention that Marco Aguabil, also, does not have good relations with the 'Hispanic' schools in Atahualpa or Umpechico. In order to not further exacerbate present political tensions we decided to initiate a process of participatory development, including the recycling project, with only the Abraham Calazacon School. Now that we have more concrete projects we hope this situation can be bridged.

### **2: The Tsachila National Leadership and its relation to Bua**

A representative of the Yanapuma Foundation has met with the two governors or presidents of the national Tsachila Government. There should be only one but presently we have two, this will be explained. The Tsachila Nation comprises seven villages around Santo Domingo. In 1971 The Tsachila nation was legally recognized, giving the seven communities a legal autonomy. Since that time there have been various governors of the nationality serving for various amounts of time. According to law, the governor must be elected by vote from each of the seven communities. The voting is based on a majority. He then is supposed to serve four years. It is not completely clear if he can serve more than one term. In addition to the governor, there is a national assembly which is more or less chosen by the governor himself. The governor also chooses a representative from each community to be something of a personal advisor to the governor during matters of special importance in that respective community. From here each of the seven 'comunidades' has its own general assembly, comprising all the members of the community. In addition each community elects a 'directive' comprising up to seven people. This deals with all internal issues for each specific community.

Presently there is a conflict between the two national leaders or governors. The democratically

elected governor, elected in 2006, Hector Aguabil, as mentioned, has an allegiance with the Abraham Calazacon school. During the month of August he came to the school to give various electronic items for the school. Manuel Calazacon, the other governor, has declared himself governor for life after serving a term from 2002-2006. Apparently he was not in agreement with various reforms that Hector made in 2006. Sr. Calazacon has since splintered some communities, as he seeks his own supporters. For example he gave a new classroom and various other items to Kasama School, which has only bolstered the divide between the two schools. As mentioned this has created internal divisions within the community. The foundation hopes that this divide can be bridged through an apolitical stance and concrete important projects that are simply for the betterment of the community.

### **3: Mestizos and Tsachila in Bua de los Tsachilas**

Through interviews, observation and group meetings we have found that there is a complex social and political situation in Bua. Although all the land in the 'comuna' is legally owned by the Tsachila under both Tsachila law and Ecuadorean law, that does not mean that the Tsachila can not rent their land out to non-Tsachilas. Many Tsachila have done just this. Although technically not legal according to Tsachila law, it seems that everyone from the governor down to the normal people have or are renting some land out to non-Tsachila. Since this custom has grown, some 30-50% of the 'comuna' is actually non-Tsachila. Many of these people are poor farmers who may only have 1-3 hectares of land while many Tsachila have 10-20 hectares of their own land. Some do not have electricity or wells. Many also live off the main road in 1-2 room houses made out of wood. Although we do not know an exact average, they seem to pay some 50 dollars per year for each hectare of land. Moreover some don't have great opinions of the Tsachila. Some see them as lazy and not very friendly, only having meetings between themselves and not bringing them on board for various projects. The Tsachila often say it is the Mestizos that are at fault. It would be incorrect to say that they just don't speak to each other. In reality many Tsachila are married to Mestizos so there is dialogue between the two groups. In general what has been found is a palpable fear that the Mestizos who are renting their land will declare after some time that it is in reality their land. This fear stems from an institution called INDA (The Institute for Agricultural Development of Ecuador) which according to some Tsachila have a law that states that after five years of renting land a person may apply for a legal ownership of the land. Still, this would seem to come in confrontation with national Ecuadorean law. Moreover there is a palpable fear that as more and more Mestizos come in to Bua the Tsachila will continue to be marginalized and pushed out. The intermarriage between Mestizo and Tsachila is also having serious effects on what some Tsachila see as the 'purity of Tsachila blood.' In response many villages have responded with cultural groups to try and preserve the Tsachila customs. Many have tried to rescue the painting of the hair, music, language and dress. But with a rising Mestizo population and Bua's proximity to Santo Domingo it is still a culture at risk from the very real effects of globalization.