

Dear friend:

The following letter has been written by a collective of individuals and institutions based in Cochabamba who promote active nonviolence as a means of conflict transformation.

We strongly believe that the current situation in Bolivia must be addressed starting with a broad sharing of perspectives and critical analysis of information. What is needed is the active participation of *all* Bolivians in defining their country's future, not just of those who are highly educated and have easy access to the mass media and other resources.

The proposed Regional Autonomy Referendum, to be held this May 4th, is a sad example of how a country may end up broken into quarreling factions by purposely promoting and deepening unnecessary divisions. Bolivia is not the only example of a low intensity war strategy in the world, but it might become the latest.

WHAT DOES MAY 4TH MEAN: AUTONOMY or SEPARATISM?

An open letter in solidarity, from Cochabamba to Santa Cruz

This May 4TH a referendum will be held in the department of Santa Cruz under the responsibility of Prefect Rubén Costas. We, as representatives of institutions and organizations in Cochabamba, are concerned about how **a rightful demand for AUTONOMY is being used to promote SEPARATISM.**

Working and struggling for autonomy and decentralization is perfectly legal and legitimate. But this referendum is illegal, illegitimate and treasonous. Last Friday April 25TH, Rubén Costas publicly announced that: "on the 4TH of May a new republic will be born, a second republic which is not centralist but rather governed by its regions". **What Costas proposes is not autonomy; but rather the DISMEMBERMENT of the COUNTRY.**

The object of the Referendum is to put the text of the Autonomy Statute of Santa Cruz to a vote. However, if you carefully read the Statute you will realize that it does not propose to break with centralism in any way. Rather, **the Autonomy Statute CENTRALIZES all the powers in the departmental authority**, placing local legislative and executive powers above National Law.

Santa Cruz is much more than a few families looking to impose their own criteria upon the rest of the department's and the country's population; and who have serious conflicts of interest in their dealings with the Departmental Electoral Court, whose President, Mario Parada, is married to Julia Gutiérrez, President of the Women's Civic Committee. So much for impartiality! **By confusing personal interests with public policy, the Autonomy Statute and the Referendum are illegitimate.**

The Statute defines as "exclusive capacities" of the Departmental Government: use and tenancy of land, electric power policy and the use of forest resources (art. 6). These are **issues of vital importance** for the country; the legal norms of the national government would be simply rendered "supplementary", that is to say: applied at the discretion of the Prefect. Did you know that in Santa Cruz 15 families possess 512 thousand hectares of land? **By usurping powers, the Autonomy Statute and the Referendum are TREASONOUS.**

The Statute proposes a "Constitutional Control" (art. 13) in order to resolve legal conflicts between municipalities, the Department and the Nation. But, this Referendum has been called without the support of the Country's Political Constitution. The text of the Statute was written with no respect for the Constitution. **By attempting to replace the National Constitution by a Departmental one, the Autonomy Statute and the Referendum are ILLEGAL.**

The Autonomy Statute and the Referendum are aiming to divide the country. The Prefect of Santa Cruz is attempting to replace the country's legal capacities with the Referendum. Why? **The main reasons that stand out are: the protection of large estates and the control of natural resources.**

But behind these selfish individual interests of a group of Bolivian elites are hidden other less visible interests. The change which Bolivians voted for in December of 2005, is not looked upon kindly by those who consider themselves owners of the WORLD ORDER (represented by the government of the United States).

We mustn't forget that the primary proponent in Bolivia of these other people's interests, Philip Goldberg, Ambassador of the United States, participated actively in the dismemberment of the ex-Yugoslavia. This diplomat specialized in the promotion of a country's internal conflicts, a strategy of "divide and conquer" (over natural resources) that is now being applied in Bolivia.

In conclusion: neither Santa Cruz nor Bolivia will benefit from this Autonomy Statute. What is really needed is a frank dialogue between all Bolivians; between sectors, departments and peoples from east and west. We shouldn't fall for false ethnic divisions! **We express our solidarity with all the people of Santa Cruz and encourage their voice to be heard throughout the nation.**

We emphasize that autonomy is not a blank check, which will be used in the interests of a few. **Bolivia needs autonomies that strengthen the entire country, by way of national unity.**

That is why, citizens of Santa Cruz, before voting in this Referendum:

- We encourage you to become well informed about the Autonomy Statute proposed by the Santa Cruz elites;
- We invite you to reflect on the implications and dangers of what a vote in favor of this text would involve;

- We invite you to work for another autonomy that is inclusive, democratic, and is mutually respectful of all Bolivians.

Cochabamba, 28 of April of 2008

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1 The Balcanization of the ex Republic of Yugoslavia has lead to the creation of seven independent states, including Kosovo.