

Mexican CSOs call upon federal non-discrimination authority (CONAPRED) to take measures against Coca-Cola for discriminatory publicity that threatens the health of indigenous populations

Mexico City, December 2, 2015.- Human rights organizations, indigenous rights organizations, consumer organizations, nutrition experts and members of the Mixe indigenous peoples called upon Mexico's National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) to take measures against Coca-Cola for the publicity carried out in the Mixe community of Totontepec, Oaxaca, for being discriminatory and posing a threat to the dignity, culture and health of indigenous peoples.

The publicity, disseminated on social networks until yesterday (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3XlcEdlBVE>), reproduces and reinforces stereotypes that present indigenous peoples as culturally and racially subordinate. The video commercial shows a group of light-skinned youth arriving to a Mixe village, laughing and playing on the streets of the town, while indigenous youth look on. The young people distribute bottles of Coca-Cola and install a Christmas tree built from wood and the bottle tops of Coca-Cola bottles; the tree lights up when indigenous people turn the caps on the tree. The light-skinned youth clap, in a paternalistic fashion, for the indigenous youth.

Elvira Constantina Pablo Antonio, a collaborator of the non-profit ASER Litigio A.C., says that in her experience as a young Mixe woman, "Reinforcing stereotypes of indigenous peoples as in this type of advertising, as the Coca-Cola company is doing now, contributes to two things: on the one hand, the position of privilege or entitlement of certain groups that identify with a culture created by the consumer market and, on the other, the subordination of indigenous peoples to these groups. In addition, this advertising reproduces an aid or assistance based vision and lacks a rights-based approach."

Moreover, she added, "This type of advertising is distant from what we truly do and our traditions as indigenous peoples and communities during the December holidays. In this time of year, Christmas has a sense of community and strengthening bonds among all people who are part of the community. In fact, the publicity of this kind promotes a rupture in our social fabric and the imposition of a culture of consumption and a culture distant to the communities."

Carlos Ventura, collaborator of the Fray Francisco de Vitoria Human Rights Center and member of the Nutritional Health Alliance, called upon CONAPRED to investigate the publicity that the Coca-Cola company circulated in mass media and social media, reviewing its content and messaging based on Article 1 of the Mexican Constitution, which establishes the obligation of the State to guarantee, prevent, protect and respect the human rights consecrated in the Constitution, but also all international conventions signed by Mexico, such as Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition, he explained, transnational companies are not exempt from ensuring that their actions do not constitute human rights violations. In this case, this advertising violates the human rights of indigenous peoples in Mexico and therefore, the State must investigate

and sanction companies that encourage the reproduction of stereotypes that constitute violations to the right to non-discrimination.

Alejandro Calvillo, director of the consumer rights organization El Poder del Consumidor and an Alliance member also stated, “This advertising from Coca-Cola has produced generalized indignation for the use of indigenous populations to promote their beverages that have harmed the health of the Mexican people, including indigenous populations. This publicity is discriminatory, clearly showing two types of people: light-skinned people and indigenous people. The first are the active parties, those who laugh out loud, those who run through a town that is not their own, those who are observed by the indigenous youth. They enter in distributing their drink that has harmed the indigenous population in particular. They build a Christmas tree, which is foreign to the local communities own festivities and invite indigenous youth to light the tree, by turning the tops of Coca-Cola bottles on the tree.”

Dr. Abelardo Avila, a nutrition specialist of Mixtec origin and a researcher at the “Salvador Zubiran” National Institute of Medical Science and Nutrition, added as an Alliance member, “It is outrageous that the indigneous community is used in this publicity and that the ad uses the phrase ‘Let’s stay united’ in the Mixe language when these drinks have become a threat and have caused catastrophic harm to the health of indigenous communities in the country. The vulnerability of these communities in terms of health is extreme; many of these populations are living in high and extreme levels of marginalization. Their needs are enormous. They do not need a Christmas tree: this is an affront to their culture. They do not need sugar-sweetened beverages: they are a threat to their health. They do not need to be shown as subordinate and inferior: this is an affront to their rights and culture.”

During the press conference, a video edition of the Coca-Cola commercial was presented in which Mixe youth expose the reality of their population and the risks that their indigenous communities face with this type of publicity. The youth also mention local beverages consumed in their communities. Link: <http://youtu.be/A6Nr4guMWrY>

Press contact:

Denise Rojas (52-55) 1298-9928
comunicación@elpoderdelconsumidor.org