

The Events at the “Curva del Diablo” on June 5th 2009

The story told through the photos of Thomas Quiryne and Marijke Deleu



Looking down at the Curva del Diablo in the days before June 5th.

These photos were taken by a two young Belgian volunteers who were working for the NGO CATAPA on environmental and humanitarian issues in Jaen. These pictures tell the story of what they saw and heard on 5th June 2009.

On the night of June 4th there was a meeting between the Police General, the Bishop of Jaen and indigenous leaders. The General was reported as telling the meeting that he had received orders to clear the road blocks on the road between Bagua and Jaen, where indigenous people had been protesting for over 50 days, demanding that new laws undermining their rights to territory be repealed. The General informed them that he was going to proceed with the orders on Friday 5th or Saturday 6th but that he would give the indigenous people until 10am on Friday 5th of June to leave the road peacefully, before using any force.

At 6am on Friday 5th June Thomas and Marijke received a phone call from an Awajun leader, telling them that the police had begun to clear the road before dawn and that there were already wounded. They got up immediately and went to the road, accompanied by two journalists from the national TV channel Frecuencia Latina. This is what awaited them at the “Curva del Diablo”.



Marijke and Thomas arrived at the Corral Quemado bridge, where the police stopped their car and wouldn't let them go any further. They left the taxi and advanced on foot and in a mototaxi to the "Curva del Diablo".

1, 2 and 3. The curve itself was already cleared, but the area was full of police and the protesters were 200m down the road, continuing the protest.

4. There was smoke everywhere, on the road and in the fields to either side, and fires were visible in the fields where grass was burning.

5. A group of people had stopped and gathered around an injured man, asking the police to stop advancing whilst they took him away. The police didn't stop but kept moving forward.



6 y 7: Marijke and Thomas managed to get past the police and reach the injured man. The people managed to take the injured man out, running with him away from the police.

8: Immediately after this the police started to open fire again and throw tear gas bombs.

9: The protesters ran, Marijke and Thomas also ran, escaping the bullets and tear gas.



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10, 11, 12: The police kept on advancing, throwing tear gas and shooting. Marijke and Thomas were separated from each other in the confusion. One policeman aimed a tear gas gun at Marijke. She screamed “I am European, press, foreigner” but the policeman fired directly at her face, and she only avoided being hit because an indigenous friend pulled her to the ground.

13: The police took at least one indigenous person captive.

14: They threw him to the ground and began to beat him, despite Marijke’s efforts to make them stop.

15: A policeman threatened Marijke, Thomas and the journalists with his gun.



16 y 17. Suddenly the police started to fire towards the left, responding to shots that came from that side. There was widespread confusion and everyone dropped to the ground to protect themselves.

18: The police took one man prisoner and threatened him.

19: Many police officers were carrying Awajun spears.



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20. Police in defensive positions.

21. The helicopter landed to pick up those arrested.

22. The police regroup and continue to advance.

23. The police started to throw tear gas from the helicopter.



24-27: The police stopped an ambulance. There were 4 people inside it. The police pulled them out, claiming they had hidden guns, and beat them.

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28-32: The police beating and kicking one of the men the took from the ambulance.

33: The police beating and kicking Martinez, an indigenous nurse who was in the ambulance.



35-36: The road had been cleared and the first trucks started to pass. Some of the trucks contained petrol and so the police stopped shooting until all the vehicles had passed.

37: A second ambulance went past containing two seriously injured, or dead, men.

38: Thomas saw this policeman aiming his gun at the indigenous man seen running away in the photo. However when the policeman realised that Thomas was taking a photo he dropped his gun and just pointed with his finger.



39 and 40: The people of Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande heard on the radio what was happening on the road and arrived en masse to support the protestors. They were furious. they burnt the fiscal's car. Marijke and Thomas didn't see any with guns, but saw them with sticks and stones, and some with machetes.

41-43: The people of Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande arrived, running in a crowd towards the police, that started shooting at them. Then they turned around and began to flee together with the indigenous people, carrying the injured. Everyone gathered together at the cross-roads called El Reposo. Marijke and Thomas were worried that they would be hit by police bullets and climbed up an embankment to protect themselves and so that they could see what was happening. But then the police started shooting up, towards them.





44-47: These photos show the injured and dead who arrived in the Reposo. These people were taken, in mototaxi, to the hospitals in Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande.



48-51: When the protesters were in the Reposo, the police continued throwing tear gas on them from a helicopter. These photos show the wounded people, and those drinking water to counter the effects of the tear gas.



52-55: Everyone started to run away from the Reposo, returning to Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande, to protect themselves from the gas and the bullets. Thomas and Marijke took a mototaxi to Bagua Grande.

56: The indigenous people gathered in the main square in Bagua Grande. They had not eaten all day and some got something to eat.



57-60: In the hospital in Bagua Grande, Marijke and Thomas were only able to take photos of those with minor injuries as the seriously wounded were being seen by doctors. The doctors told them that there were already two dead in the hospital. There were too many injured for the capacity of the hospital, but at that moment Maijke and Thomas counted 19 people officially entered on the hospital registers.

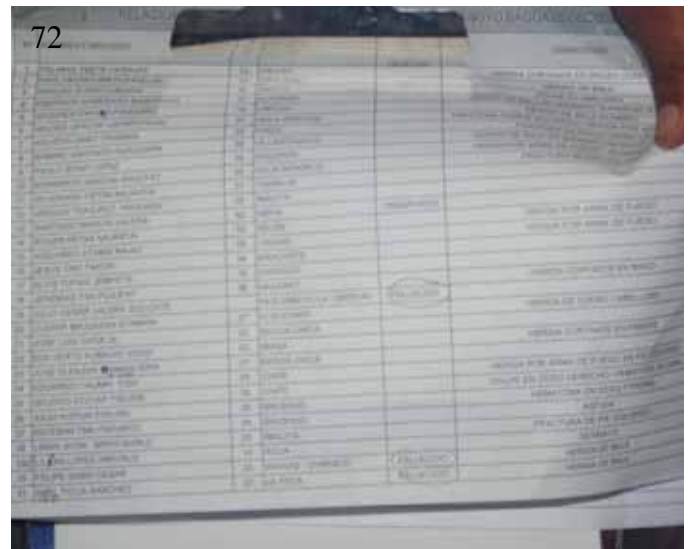
61: Afterwards Marijke and Thomas went out into the street and saw a crowd of people around the police station. Thomas approached them, but the police began to open fire and he left.



62-65: Then Marijke and Thomas went to Bagua Chica, where they saw cars and buildings burnt by the local population. The streets were full of stones and broken glass.



66-69: Marijke and Thomas went to the hospital in Bagua Chica. Forty seven people had been admitted to the hospital. Marijke interviewed some of those wounded about what had happened.



70-73: At that time there were three dead in that hospital. One indigenous man, one policeman and one local. The body of the local man was being washed and they were unable to photograph it. Marijke and Thomas saw the body of the indigenous man being taken out of the hospital in a car. They don't know why.

72: The registration list of the hospital on which the three dead appear.



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74-78: Marijke and Thomas met Carlos Navas, the mayor of Imacita, with the Fiscal of Utcubamba (Bagua Grande). Carlos Navas and the Fiscal told them that there were bodies on the road but that when they had tried to pick them up the police had shot at them and not let them past. Then Marijke and Thomas returned to the road. There were no longer any police there and they found two bodies together, under a makeshift shade. One of them, (photo 78) had gun-shot wounds in the back. Their bodies appeared bruised and burnt.



79-81: Further along, on the “Devil’s Curve” they found three more bodies. They were also bruised and burnt.

82-83: In the morning, a friend of Marijke and Thomas arrived at the Devil’s Curve at about 8am from Jaen. He tried to climb the mountain next to the road to see if there were any bodies or wounded. He told Marijke and Thomas that he saw a helicopter hover close to the ground for a while, and then fly off. The police did not let him past to see what was happening. In the afternoon Thomas and some other friends climbed back up the hill to look around. They didnt’ find any bodies nor wounded, but found many areas of ground covered with blood, gun cartridges, bullets, cartridges from tear-gas bombs, bloodstained clothes and extensive burnt areas.



84-86: Marijke and Thomas returned to Bagua Grande. They heard that the Fiscal managed to remove the bodies from the road. They bought some medicines from the hospital in Bagua Grande. They interviewed some people in the hospital and heard that many people from the town had been injured by rogue bullets from the police station. Then they returned to Jaen where they spent the night.