A NEW ALPHABET HAS BEEN ‘BORN’

February 11 was a red-letter day for the Ashéninka nation of Peruvian Amazonia. All these years, linguistic evidence notwithstanding, this ethnic community has been grouped with speakers of the related Asháninka language to their great disadvantage economically and educationally. Although the populations are roughly equal (around 15,000 each), to this day only five young Ashéninkas are known to have graduated from high school, while numerous Asháninkas are graduating from universities.

In November, a historic Alphabet Congress affirmed a separate alphabet for the Ashéninkas, and on February 11, the following Decree was published as law. Today, with the alphabet settled, the first Grade One primer written by a member of the Ashéninka community can be published, and I have the privilege of formatting it. We hope this week to present it to a District mayor for consideration and printing. Below you can see the alphabet which has been approved, but you can’t begin to imagine the delight this edict brought to our author. An alphabet validates your language…makes you as an individual and as a people equal with the rest of the world. An alphabet opens the doors to education…to tools for coping with the ‘outside’…to Scripture reading… Juana laughed with pure delight all afternoon.
Apologies for not writing last week. With District Mayors and the local Regional Education Office requesting print-ready Grade One readers in the Asháninka, Ashéninka, Shipibo, and Yine languages, as well as the Early Childhood Education Teacher’s Guide, our small staff was ‘way overloaded, completing final checks. I worked all weekend and still missed several deadlines. This, of course, has been in addition to the workshop where six teams are working on Grade Two readers, and practice teaching sessions so that the authors will know how to teach the lessons they have developed.

The rains and mud continue; teachers still have to take off many days to attend to documents, and, by turn, almost all have been down with colds. Still they persist doggedly, determined to finish their books and see their children reading in their languages. Since more official interest is being shown in the books than ever before, we have hopes of their being published and will appreciate your prayers that this will actually happen for this school year.

Pushing the deadlines but encouraged,

- Pat

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