**US STATE DEPARTMENT REPORTS ON PERU 1912**

**Stuart Fuller (US Consul Iquitos)**

The strong arm of the law and the sole protection to the defenseless Indians in the whole of this vast region seems at present to be found in one justice of the peace, an employee of the company which has fathered such reprehensible practices in the past, and one comisario, [[Page 1256]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1256) who draws, in the face of strong temptation, the munificent salary of some $1,500 a year (United States currency), about the same as a clerk gets in Iquitos, together with a handful of soldiers shut up all the time in La Chorrera and possibly El Encanto. There may be more troops, but I have been unable so far to get exact information. I believe, however, that there are not enough in any case to be a factor in the situation.

The justice of the peace for the whole Putumayo basin is a man named Manuel Torrico, an employee of the Peruvian Amazon Co. Dr. Paredes denounced the appointment of this man as a scandal, and a clear proof that the local authorities had no real intention to bring about an improvement in the state of things on the Putumayo. When Sir Roger Casement was on the river in 1910, Torrico was a subagent of the company, a subordinate at Occidente to Fidel Velarde, one of the leaders in the atrocities (and one of the first to “escape”). He has since been promoted to be a chief of section for the Peruvian Amazon Co. Sir Roger Casement said of Torrico, “From him no more than from his predecessor could any public service be expected.”

The comisario is a man named Juan Garcia Buenaño. He is fairly well spoken of as a man, but stated by many to be in a position where he can do little or nothing to better things, even though he might wish to. I expect to see and talk with him when I go up to this district, and will report further on my return.

[See also on Fuller voyage: *ÁLBUM DE FOTOGRAFÍAS Viaje de la Comisión Consular al Río Putumayo y Afluentes.*  Published on Jan 15, 2014

El Album de fotografias tomadas en Viage de la Comisión Cónsular al Rio Putumayo y afluentes-Agosto á Octubre 1912 es el único ejemplar que se conserva de los que, presumiblemente, Julio César Arana envió a todos los miembros de la Comisión Consular, acompañantes y autoridades, como testimonio del viaje realizado a las estaciones y explotaciones de la Peruvian Amazon Company en la cuenca del río Putumayo. Las 187 fotos que contiene, todas copias fotográficas en papel, son inéditas en su gran mayoría, por lo que poseen un valor excepcional como memoria visual y testimonio histórico del período al que corresponden, más aún considerando la probable destrucción de los negativos originales. <https://issuu.com/jorgeluischavez/docs/album_de_fotografias_viaje_comision> Jorge Luis Chavez Marroquin [pincen@yahoo.com](mailto:pincen@yahoo.com)]

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/comp26>

In the Peruvian-Amazon Co.’s sphere: Chorrera, Encanto, Union, and Puerto Militario Peruano.

On Brazilian boundary: Tarapaca. On Colombian border: Pto. Delicias and Pto de los Monos.

Interior but not in Peruvian-Amazon Territory: Molino and mouth Rio Jueveneto (2).

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**The Acting Secretary of State to the American Consul at Iquitos, Peru.**

No. 1.]

Department of State,  
Washington , April 6, 1912 .

Sir: In arriving at the decision to reopen the American Consulate at Iquitos, Peru, the Department has had primarily in view the advisability of securing information as to the labor conditions along the affluents of the upper Amazon, and particularly the Putumayo River. Reports transmitted to the Department by Mr. Eberhardt, formerly American Consul at Iquitos, during 1907 and 1908[1](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fn:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.14.4) indicated that those directing the gathering of rubber in the territory claimed by Peru to be within her jurisdiction were responsible for practices of exploitation of the native Indians which threatened the complete extinction of the primitive races. Subsequent to the receipt of the reports of Mr. Eberhardt by the Department the British Government, which was in possession of information concerning the horrible condition existing in the forests of the Putumayo within the concession of a British corporation, directed His Britannic Majesty’s Consul General at Rio de Janeiro, Sir Roger Casement, to make personal examinations of the situation. Previous to this time this Government had been in consultation with the British Embassy at Washington, with a view to cooperation in representations to the Government of Peru in order that the Peruvian Government might undertake a thorough investigation of the subject and obtain such list-hand information regarding the brutal extermination of the native inhabitants of one of the important outlying Provinces of Peru as would impel it to take the remedial measures that the circumstances, appeared imperatively to demand. Owing to the imminence during the early months of 1910 of an outbreak of hostilities between Equador and Peru because of conflicting claims of these countries regarding the territory of which the Putumayo region was a part, the Government of the United States at that time deemed it wise to postpone communication with the Government of Peru on the matter until the outstanding dispute, which it was then hoped was approaching settlement, had been terminated. It was felt that, the international situation having become tranquilized and the question [[Page 1244]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1244)regarding the title over the upper Amazon region decided, such representations as the Government of the United States might determine to make in the matter would more certainly produce the results which it was desired to bring about.

During the early part of 1911 the Department was informed, through the British Embassy at Washington, that as a result of the efforts of the British Minister at Lima, acting under instructions from his Government, the Peruvian Government had appointed a commission to proceed to the Putumayo region and report on conditions there found to exist. The Department, to which the cause of the defenseless natives of the Putumayo had so strongly appealed for humanitarian reasons, had received information from time to time of the views of the British Government in the matter and in regard to the steps which the British Minister at Lima had been instructed to take. During the months of April and May of the past year the British Ambassador at Washington transmitted, for the confidential information of the Department, copies of three reports of His Britannic Majesty’s Consul General at Rio de Janeiro, which presented the horrible details collected by personal observation of the methods employed in the collection of rubber by the employees of the rubber company in the Putumayo district. These reports relate the appalling brutalities and atrocities from which the native rubber gatherers of the forest of the Putumayo were suffering. Copies of these pamphlets and other reports of more recent dates are attached for your information and for the files of the Consulate.[1](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fn:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.16.2)

On the 17th of July last the American Minister at Lima was instructed to express to the Peruvian Foreign Office, at a favorable opportunity, the pleasure that was felt by this Government upon learning of the steps initiated by Peru, inspired by the high ideals of serving humanity, to put an effective end to the excesses in the Peruvian rubber forests of the Amazon Valley by dispatching a judicial investigating commission to the Putumayo. The Minister was also directed to express the hope that adequate and vigorous measures would follow to put an end to the reported barbarous system in vogue, which threatened to accomplish the complete extinction of a defenseless people. It was at this time pointed out that Peru would undoubtedly understand the friendly spirit prompting a mention of this matter by the Government of the United States and would realize that there was no disposition or intention present to offend by referring to a matter concerning the internal affairs of Peru.

It has subsequently developed from information before the British Government, that the action taken by the Peruvian Government in organizing this commission has almost entirely failed of its object. The corrupt influence of those responsible for the conditions in the Putumayo has been seemingly so powerful as to defeat the laudable ends of the Central Government. As a result a few of the underlings have been arrested while no serious effort has been made to apprehend [[Page 1245]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1245)or punish the leaders. It is alleged that the local administrative and judicial authorities residing at Iquitos have afforded such improper protection to those guilty of the atrocities systematically practiced upon the natives as to make it impossible to bring the criminals to justice without a thorough carrying out of drastic administrative local reforms. Unless the Central Government of Peru takes a vigorous and earnest stand it is to be apprehended that the practices which, it is understood, have been temporarily suspended as a consequence of the measures already taken by the Government, may be resumed in all their former intensity until the native tribes will have become completely exterminated.

The Department has been in recent close communication with the British Foreign Office, following several personal conferences with Sir Roger Casement at the Department. It appeared that the British Government was seriously contemplating the publication of the evidence on the Putumayo in its possession in the belief that such publicity might provide an effective remedy to the shocking situation. However, at the suggestion of this Government, the publication of the reports was withheld pending further representations to the Government of Peru on the subject. The Department therefore informed the American Minister at Lima of the apparently well-founded rumor that no really serious efforts are being made to prosecute those responsible for the atrocities in the Putumayo, and to instruct the Legation to cooperate with the British Legation in taking the matter up again unofficially and informally with the Peruvian Minister for Foreign Affairs. In these representations the American Minister was directed to advise the Government of Peru that it was understood that the official reports on the situation in the Putumayo probably could not be withheld much longer from publication, the details of which inevitably would be exploited in all parts of the world by the press. The American Minister was directed to say that unless drastic and effective action demanded by the circumstances was taken by Peru previous to the publication of this evidence, which appeared imminent, such an exposure of the situation as almost surely must follow might induce public opinion of the world to believe that Peru had shown herself unable effectively to exercise sovereign rights over a region to which Peru lays claim and the ultimate rights to [sic] which Peru desires to submit for determination to arbitration.

The British and American representatives at Lima had a conference during the early days of February with the Peruvian President and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Peruvian Government stated that it was endeavoring by all means within its power to bring to justice those charged with the crimes in the Putumayo, and welcomed suggestions as to a system of reforms which would guarantee adequate protection to the Indians within its jurisdiction. The difficulties of the problem presented to the central administration were emphasized—the unsatisfactory communication between Lima and I quitos; the difficulty of finding men worthy of being intrusted with administrative functions in that outlying region the barrier presented by the topographical character of the wild region of the upper Amazon; and the almost absolute impossibility of counteracting the influence of those identified with the continuation of the present iniquitous system.

[[Page 1246]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1246)

Under the circumstances at present existing and after careful consideration of the reports which were received from the American Legation at Lima and the information transmitted by the British representative, kindly furnished through the British Embassy here, the Department has informed Ambassador Bryce that it deferred to the judgment of the British Government in fixing the time for the publication of the Casement reports. The Embassy at the same time was informed that the Department could not but believe that the Peruvian Government should properly regard any publicity given to the matter as in accord with the purposes so frequently enunciated by the Peruvian Government of doing everything within its power to put an end to the inhuman treatment of the Indian populations. Further, it was felt by the Department that the publication was strongly recommended in view of the efforts that are being made to procure funds by public subscription making it possible to establish in the Putumayo region missions for work among the Indians. The British Government now states that it will proceed with the immediate publication of the reports in its possession regarding the situation on the Putumayo.

You will make yourself thoroughly conversant with the local situation upon arriving at your post and keep the Department fully and promptly informed regarding this subject, in which the Department is taking the keenest interest.

You will, upon consultation and cooperation with the British Consul at Iquitos, make arrangements to visit, at intervals which may in your judgment appear advisable, the rubber stations along the Putumayo region in order that the Department may have before it your views based upon personal observation. For this purpose a special allowance of not to exceed $500 is hereby granted you.

I am [etc.]

Huntington Wilson.

[Inclosure 1—Extract.]

[1](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fn:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.38.4)

**The American Consul at Iquitos to the Secretary of State.**

American Consulate,  
Iquitos , November 30, 1907 .

Sir: The difficulty I experienced after receiving my appointment to this post in obtaining reliable information relative to conditions in general in this region leads me to believe that the results of certain studies I have made regarding the Indians of Peru may be of some practical value and interest to others, as well as to the Department, more particularly as the most of these tribes live across the Andes, or in that part of Peru which would seem naturally to form the territory of which this consular district is comprised. An extra copy is also sent, with the idea that ‘there may be some item of interest to the National Museum. I had hoped to make a more thorough study of this interesting subject from actual observation among the different tribes, securing specimens of their weapons of warfare, clothing, utensils, etc., but ill health has prevented any systematic work along such lines. I have been fortunate, however, in being able to make several trips among different tribes with Mr. George M. von Hassel, thus gaining first-hand a limited amount of information [[Page 1247]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1247)on the subject, but the greater part comes from Mr. von Hassel himself, who, it seems to me, is probably the best authority on the subject and better qualified than any other person to give reliable data, and talk knowingly regarding the matter. \* \* \*

The average Peruvian would no doubt show resentment at the statement that slavery exists in Peru, yet such is in reality the case with most of the Indians who come in contact with the whites. For the most part, however, they are not treated harshly, and in their submissive way, with enough to eat and drink, seem to be contented and probably as well as when roaming the woods. Their existence might be termed a system of peonage. The Indian enters the employ of some rubber gatherer, often willingly, though not infrequently by force, and immediately becomes indebted to him for food, etc. According to Peruvian law, a person so indebted to another can be held and obliged to work till that debt is paid, and in these instances the employer sees to it that the employee never receives sufficient wages to pay off his indebtedness, and he is therefore always practically a slave. A person can, by paying off this indebtedness, secure the servant, who in this way becomes similarly the slave of the payer of the debt. However, the scarcity of labor and the ease with which the Indians can usually escape and live on the natural products of the forest oblige the owners to treat them with some consideration. The Indians realize this and their work is not at all satisfactory, judging from our standards. This was particularly noticeable during a recent visit I made to a mill where “cachassa” or aguardiente is extracted from cane. The men seemed to work when and how they chose, requiring a liberal amount of the liquor each day (of which they are particularly fond), and if this is not forthcoming or they are treated harshly in any way they run to the forests.

The employer has the law on his side, and if he can find the runaway who is at liberty to bring him back; but the time lost and the almost useless task of trying to track the Indian through the dense forests and small streams makes it far the more practical that the servant be treated with consideration in the first place. It is not uncommon for launches returning from trips up the river to bring Indians who have been taken from their tribes and sell or present them to households in Iquitos, where they are kept as servants. They are usually quick to learn what is expected of them and may often be said to be better off than in their former state. During a recent trip which I made an Indian woman and child, who had been sold for $80, was brought aboard the launch and the woman seemed less concerned about leaving her people, her new surroundings or probable fate than an intelligent dog might have done. On another trip a little girl of about 8 years was brought aboard by her father and sold for a small amount of silver and a half dozen cans of sardines.

Through intermarriage with the whites, disease, and battle, the Indians of Peru are rapidly disappearing, and I am told that statistics compiled for a given period during recent years show that their numbers are diminishing at the rate of 5 per cent per year; that in 20 years the wild Indian of the Upper Amazon will have disappeared almost entirely, and it seems only a question of time when the dying races of South American Indians must meet the fate of their brothers of North America, and the two in common, once the rulers of two continents, become only scattered remnants of their former greatness, if not entirely engulfed by the wave which seems sweeping over them.

I have [etc.]

Charles C. Eberhardt.

[Inclosure 2—Extract.]

[1](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fn:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.40.4)

**The American Consul at Iquitos to the Secretary of State.**

American Consulate,  
Iquitos,

December 3, 1907.

Sir: In view of certain articles which have appeared in different periodicals at home at different times during the past few months (India Rubber World, of May, September, and October, and New York Times of September 6 and [[Page 1248]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1248)19) regarding the exploitation by an American company, under concession from the Colombian Government, of a large tract of rubber lands in the Upper Putomayo (or lea) and Yapura (or Caqueta) Rivers district, a territory which is now in dispute between that Government and Peru, the results of a trip of inspection which I recently made to that part of the district at present controlled by the company which has a complete monopoly of all Putomayo rubber shipments through Iquitos may be interesting. Out of an absence of eight weeks from Iquitos, six weeks were spent in the Putomayo River and its two branches, the Igaraparana and Caraparana (sometimes written Carapanama), where the two principal posts of the local company of J. C. Arana y Hermanos are located, and while it is by no means presumed that a thorough knowledge of existing local conditions could be gained in so short a time, it is presumed that one could gain a knowledge of many phases of those conditions—such as the manner of extracting rubber, the class of work, conditions of the Indian, health conditions, feeling between the Peruvians and Colombians of the district—which a promoting company would probably not make public, and which the Department, at least, might be interested in knowing. \* \* \*

The business is conducted from Iquitos, where a considerable office force is employed, though a resident manager is stationed at both posts, each of whom has complete charge of a given territory and to whom the foreman of certain specified tracts of territory, or sections as they are called, must report. These foremen, together with their assistants, all of whom are armed, number approximately 200, and they have control, by “rule of the rifle,” over approximately 10,000 Indians—men, women, and children, principally of the Huitoto, Bora, Ocaino, and Andoque Tribes. \* \* \*

These foremen work on a commission, and while their contracts are not all alike, the men are all making a great deal of money, at the same time spending it most freely and gambling much of it away during their three visits a year to the post, when they come from the forests with their hundreds of Indians laden with rubber, the results of some three months’ work. \* \* \*

When the Indians flee to the forests, expeditions headed by armed whites and made up of Indians of neighboring tribes toward whom the runaways have always been hostile go in pursuit, and so, hunted by the whites and surrounded on all sides by hostiles of their own race, they are eventually killed or brought back captives to work as slaves of the whites, though of course some do escape. The word “slavery” is used advisedly, for the condition of the Indians is in reality nothing else. \* \* \*

In the vicinity of Chorrera considerable land has been cleared and it is an interesting, yet withal a sad sight, to see these Indians—once the owners of this vast region—men, women, and children alike, now slaves, filing along in the distance over this clearing, heavily laden with rubber from their native forests, which they lay at the feet of their conquerors. As has been said before, these overseers are in reality armed guards who compel the Indians to work, and who are usually illiterate whites, receiving the equivalent of from $25 to $50, United States currency, and board per month, and capable of most any brutal deed. About two years ago a number of negroes were brought from Barbados for these positions, but they soon sickened of the brutalities they were obliged by their superiors to inflict upon the poor Indians, and practically all have worked their way back to Iquitos or Barbados. They have frightful stories to tell and have no hesitancy in telling all they have been through.

As before mentioned, the foremen receive a percentage on the product delivered at the post, and naturally drive the Indians as hard as possible, which has been responsible for much of the ill treatment of the Indians. One negro told me that he had been compelled, under penalty of receiving the same punishment himself if he did not carry out the orders of his superior, to punish Indians by all sorts of cruelties; in fact, he showed me a scar which he said he had received when he first began work for having interfered with the foreman, who was beating and kicking an Indian woman. He told me, further, (hat he had seen a foreman shoot an Indian through the foot for not having brought a satisfactory amount of rubber from the forest, and he was told to return to the forest, wounded as he was, and bring more, or he would be killed. Women and children are also obliged to work, and the same negro told of a woman whose baby seemed to interfere with her bringing in a sufficient amount of rubber, and the baby was therefore killed by dashing its brains out against a tree and the woman told to go to work again or she would be similarly treated. A man of standing here in Iquitos says he saw a woman, pregnant, [[Page 1249]](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/pg_1249)disemboweled with a stroke of a sharp machete. Such stories, almost without number, could be cited, and I have no doubt they could be proven, for it is common rumor here that such conditions do exist there, and from what I myself saw I am convinced of it. For example, a negro from French Guiana brutally beat and bruised an old Indian in my presence till I went beyond my right and interfered. Another employee, a Spanish clerk in the storehouse, knocked down his little servant (they all have boy slaves to wait on them), broke a rib and two teeth with brutal kicks, and I also saw poor Indians, mere skeletons, in chains, living on farina (dried yucca meal) and water, thus detained as examples to others because they had tried to run away and be free again in their own native forests. The foremen themselves at first talked very freely with me about the severe and even brutal measures which they considered necessary to adopt to keep the Indians under control, but later, evidently having been instructed by the manager, they tried to persuade me that such talk had all been an exaggeration. Of course as consul of another Government, I had no comment to make, nor as a plain American citizen could I have had anything to say on the subject. The Peruvians are seeking to get the benefit of the Indian’s labor before he disappears entirely, and to that end do not hesitate to perform the most outrageous acts of cruelty.

It at first seems incredible that so many Indians can be kept under control by so few armed men, and there seems little doubt that they could successfully resist for years to come the invasion of the white man, poorly armed as they are in comparison, if they had any sort of organization or union, but the different tribes and subtribes, enemies for centuries, will not lay aside their jealousies and differences to unite and fight against their common enemy. Thus it is that, as often happens, when numbers of them run away, expeditions made up of Indians of another tribe who have been lifetime enemies of the fugitives are sent after them and, in the end, the runaways are usually recaptured. Not infrequently the leader of a certain group, or captain, as he is called, will even hunt down his own people who may have tried to escape, in this manner further ingratiating himself in favor with the whites and receiving more than ordinary consideration and good treatment from them for his traitorous action toward his own kind. Naturally the poor chances the Indians have with their inferior arms (lances, spears, etc.) of any successful resistance and the rough treatment they have received from the whites have cowed their spirit to a certain extent. \* \* \*

I have [etc.]

Charles C. Eberhardt.

1. Inclosures 1 and 2.[↩](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fnref:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.14.4)
2. Those reports and related correspondence (not printed here) were gathered into a folio volume of 163 pages, which is referred to hereafter as the “British Bluebook”; it was presented to the two Houses of Parliament in July, 1912; the reports are signed by Sir Roger Casement, British Consul General at Rio de Janeiro. This Bluebook is reprinted in Document 1366 (from which the most of the correspondence here given is extracted—see heading of first paper) at pp. 215–443.[↩](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fnref:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.16.2)
3. This paper is printed at pp. 99–110 of Document 1366, and is also published in Vol. 52, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, October 28, 1908; the portions here omitted are descriptions of the various tribes of Indians in the regions concerned, and of various preparations made by the Consul for his investigations.[↩](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fnref:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.38.4)
4. Printed at pp. 111–117 of Document 1366; published also in Vol. 52, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, October 28, 1908.[↩](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/d1613#fnref:1.5.4.104.18.14.8.40.4)

* [Address of the President, annual](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/address-of-the-president)
* [List of papers, in chronological order, with subjects of correspondence](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/papers)
* [Circulars:  
  Correspondence.](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/comp1) (Documents 1-15)
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  + [Slavery in the Putumayo region; joint investigation by the Governments of the United States and Great Britain](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/ch106) (Documents 1611-1626)
    - [Papers Accompanying the Foregoing Letter of Submittal.](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1913/ch106subch10) (Documents 1613-1626)

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