

**REPORT ON DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN
INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN**

**THE PANDEMIC, A GLOBAL CRISIS,
AND STRENGTHENING THE
VOICES OF WOMEN AND YOUTH**



MAY 6 TO 7, 2021



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PREFACE

On May 6th and 7th, 2021, our voices joined together in prayer, song, dialogue and reflection for two magnificent days, in an exchange between indigenous and Afro-descendant women (MIA).

The songs we sang often made us tremble. The music accompanied us, like a festive element that awakened memories, strengthened our resistance, and stimulated sisterhood. It also helped us to acknowledge the life stories and realities of the women who sang. We joined with their voices, since like many of us, they are confronting complex situations and struggling to have their individual and collective rights respected. The songs are life stories, denunciations, cries of pain, hymns of struggle and hope. We are grateful to the women who are re-writing their own history, singing with dignity. We are grateful for the life that lets us meet in this virtual space, to enjoy, work, and resist together.

Each day began with a ceremony to position our spiritualities at the center of our activities. The sign of the Mayan calendar for our first day was the Nahual Tijax, which represents an obsidian, double-edged knife, healing through the strength and power of the warrior. The second day was the Nahual Kawog, representing the strength of women, healing women, midwives. They are dates and signs that are suitable for generating big changes, seeking success, abundance, and prosperity from the earth.

Candles were lit to illuminate us with their clean, warm and serene light. We invoked our ancestors and remembered brother Luis Fernando Arias (ONIC) and all of the victims of the global crisis and pandemic. These have been horrible times in Colombia, Brazil and Honduras. We demand an end to criminalization and violences, and ask for peace in the world.

We are grateful to be together, building our present and future through understanding, through words and affection. We have concluded this encounter with much learning, and continue moving forward together.

This report includes excerpts from the main presentation, and comments made by different participants during the two-day meeting.

It provides links and summarizes areas of overlap that need to be strengthened: the Afro-indigenous partnership as a strategy of resistance; inter-generational dialogue as a means of sharing knowledge; generational changes in leadership to ensure continuity of peoples and cultures; and some conclusions and suggested directions for the future.





“ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLES AND AFRO-DESCENDANT AND INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN THE TIMES OF PANDEMIC”



by Dr. Juliet Hooker

Juliet Hooker (juliet_hooker@brown.edu) is Professor of Political Science at Brown University in the United States, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Caribbean Central American Research Council (CCARC). Her areas of research include critical race theory, multiculturalism, Latin American political thought, and Afro-descendant political and social movements in Latin America.

As a Creole woman from Bluefields, on Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast, it is an honor to be part of this dialogue about the leadership of indigenous and Afro-descendant women during the current global socio-health crisis, which adds to other ongoing crises such as climate change, racism, patriarchy, state repression, authoritarianism, the violation of human rights, and more. The pandemic has caused incalculable losses, including the most everyday kinds of losses we must live with, like a kiss on the cheek or a hug.

The inadequate responses to the pandemic from nation states have exposed, to an even greater extent, the existing patterns of precariousness and inequality rooted in statuses defined by citizenship, race, class, gender, sexuality, and others. Afro-descendants, Latinos, and indigenous peoples are the groups with the highest incidence of infection, hospitalization and death. The impact of the enormous inequalities associated with race, gender and social class on the pandemic have shown, without doubt, that we are not “all in this together,” as politicians tend to affirm during times of national crisis. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated systemic and structural inequalities that are the bedrock of our societies, and that already affected the most vulnerable groups such as indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, immigrants, women. The unequal impact of the pandemic is the result of public investments in the lives of some, and the corresponding failure to invest in the lives of others.

To understand this context, I want to speak of “Black and indigenous resistance in the Americas: Multiculturalism and racist backlash.” In this book, contemporary racial policies in seven countries of the hemisphere are analyzed: Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States. It explains how we arrived at the current moment of resurgent racism in the American continent and outlines the road that anti-racist activism in the hemisphere needs to follow. Our research project shares something very important with your undertaking. Unlike the way that Afro-descendant and indigenous movements in Latin America are generally studied separately, we use the same analytical lens to focus on the indigenous and Afro-descendant experiences and perspectives.



Until more recently, racial inequality in Latin America was often attributed to class differences. However, beginning in the 1980s, almost all countries in the region adopted multicultural policies that led to the institutionalization of a wide range of guarantees for the rights of indigenous peoples and black communities. The multicultural rights conferred during this initial phase did not include rights specifically aimed at addressing racial discrimination. In the decade of the 2000s, Brazil and Colombia began to adopt public policies to combat institutionalized racial discrimination. These two phases of achievements for indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples—which certainly did not eliminate existing racial inequalities—culminated in a violent reaction and setbacks in policies aimed at remedying racial inequality.

Thus, the definition of anti-racist strategies capable of taking on the huge task of confronting resurgent racism is urgently needed. We believe this requires moving beyond strategies that are centered on rights guaranteed by the State. Instead, a critique of racial capitalism must be a central component of the anti-racist struggle.

Two of the cases that we analyze—Bolivia and Brazil—focus on the struggles of indigenous and black women. They illustrate the centrality of women's ideas and political practices, not only in the anti-racist struggle but also in providing a guide for living beyond the current pandemic crisis, and other crises that preceded it.

In Bolivia, indigenous women are leading the struggle against extractivism. In confronting the militarization of the spaces they inhabit and the criminalization of their protests, they have reformulated their notions of autonomy, with emerging notions about the body-territory relationship. Their struggle is mainly inspired by the question of the land, and oriented toward "a struggle for land as a system of reciprocal relationships and obligations that can teach us how to live our lives, in relation to others and the natural world, in non-dominating and non-exploitive terms."

In Brazil, black women found themselves without a government interlocutor with the victory of a right-wing government, ushered in by racist backlash. Despite this, it is black women who are defining an expansive political vision that encompasses a future for all: "the promotion of racial equality; the right to work, to employment, and the protection of black workers in all professions; the right to land, territories and housing / the right to the city; environmental justice, defense of shared resources, and the non-commercialization of life; the right to a health network (medical care, social assistance and social security); the right to education; and the right to justice."

I want to emphasize the following. To fight States that employ genocidal policies that threaten life, we need States that promote public policies of welfare, aimed at generating common good. In other words, a vision of life in common, centered on the ideas of taking care of the planet and the lives of all. At the same time, it cannot be only women who are responsible for the work of reproducing the world and life. This task should be the commitment of all.

What do we do to protect our territories and lifestyles when laws are not enforced?

In these ongoing incursions and violations of rights, a view prevails regarding what development means and how economies should function, which is not in harmony with the way that indigenous and Afro-descendant people live. It is important to recognize that we have many differences, but there are also many connections.

One point of coincidence and connection was the criminalization of protests. When indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples tried to protect their communities and their lands, to demand their rights, the State response was violent and militarized. We saw this in many cases. The racist response went hand in hand with a rejection of democracy. What prevailed was the idea that the an authoritarian model had to be imposed, in order to brush aside what indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples think and want.



The implementation of quarantine policies has been driven by an expansion of the State's presence. Many governments have used such policies to sabotage democracy, while others have used them to strengthen and favor authoritarianism. We see this in some populist leaders who have not been able to contain the pandemic but have used such policies to extend their power. Democracy was already in crisis in many countries, and in many cases the pandemic has exacerbated this situation.

The question of fundamentalist religious support and authoritarian leaders who employ a combined racist, patriarchal and sexist discourse is a huge problem evident in the United States and in many Latin American countries. There is a connection between racism and sexism. It is a reaction aimed at preventing the possibility of equality, of gender equity, of more rights for women, based on a nostalgic idea and a traditional view of the family. This connection between racism and sexism can be seen in current political projects.

The pandemic reveals that investments made in certain things coincides with divestments in others, although this was something already underway. There is investment in militarization and security policies, while there is divestment in life, health, education, protection of the earth and territories.

Comments from:

Margarita Antonio (Entre Povos), Paola Yañez (RMAAD), Mireya Peart Vásquez (VOMAP), Galio Gurdíán (Entre Povos/CCARC), and Elodia Castillo (COMUNDICH).



SISTER PAOLA YAÑEZ INOFUENTES. DISCUSSION FACILITATOR. COORDINATOR OF THE NETWORK OF AFRO-LATIN AMERICAN, AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN, AND WOMEN OF THE DIASPORA (RMAAD).

The dialogue we are having today began in Mexico. We speak about the need to build something more structured between indigenous and Afro-descendant women. We are natural partners, and we are strategically allied. In these two days, we are going to discuss what we have been doing in our organizations. We will talk about resilience and how we have confronted the crisis. We will try to concretize what we would like to achieve through this initiative and outline some agreements for the Second Convening.

Three meetings have taken place so far. In the meeting on Mesoamerica, the study "Oral histories about the COVID-19 pandemic, and resilience among indigenous organizations in Guatemala, partners of the BUILD Program" was presented. The study was conducted by compañeros Galio Gurdíán and Edwin Matamoros (the CCARC Team). This meeting took place on April 7- 8 and was facilitated by sister Silvel Elías. At the second meeting, we discussed Afro-descendant organizations and movements, facilitated by Giselle Dos Santos (CEERT) and Filippo del Gato (Entre Povos), on April 26-27. Today, I am facilitating the discussion about indigenous and Afro-descendant women. It is the last discussion prior to the Second Convening scheduled for June 16- 17.

Two of the women's organizations we had planned to include today will not be attending. Unfortunately, sister Norma Don Juan (ECMIA Mexico) is in mourning, and sister Cledeuza Bezerra, coordinator of the regional organization Pará (MIQCB) has experienced technical problems and has a very weak internet connection. Tomorrow the video "Women" will be screened, and the central ideas contained in the document "The pandemic, a global crisis, and strengthening the voices of women and youth" will be shared. In addition, women leaders from mixed organizations and movements will share their thoughts. A plenary session and discussion will conclude the meeting, followed by a final invocation.



SISTER ISABEL CIPRIANO, (FIMI)



FIMI is a global mechanism that brings together the collective leadership of indigenous women, activists, and human rights leaders from around the world (Asia, Africa, America, the Arctic, and the Pacific), with a common agenda for developing the leadership skills of indigenous women. It has four programs: Research, the Ayni Fund, the Global Leadership School, and political participation and advocacy.

In developing its activities, FIMI promotes free determination, the principles of seven generations, prior, free and informed consent, solidarity and building partnerships, full and significant participation, respect for diversity, empowerment, complementarity, and reciprocity. These are FIMI's fundamental principles in its work.

Political advocacy is carried out collectively in the region and has strengthened the legal framework for indigenous women. FIMI continues to actively exert influence in the international context, and build skills through virtual encounters. The internet allows us to communicate with each other.

The Global Leadership School is in its 8th session, with 33 participants. It was taught online, and participants received financial support to cover the cost of the internet connection. It has participated in meetings of the CEDAW, CSW, and the Generational Equality Forum, and has organized meetings with other women's organizations. It is currently working on the Second World Conference of Indigenous Women.

With great patience, indigenous women in the communities have documented the impact of the pandemic and have shared this information in publications such as the Global Report on Indigenous Women, which includes information about the impact of the pandemic and ongoing resilience. They have also researched Environmental Justice, and continue generating information for the Observatory of Indigenous Women against Violence.

During the pandemic, FIMI's Ayni Fund has responded to some emergencies, helping organizations to reorganize themselves to provide technical resources to indigenous women. Some 106 projects have received support in the form of small, medium and large grants. There was also a call for seed projects, and for Leading from the South II.

Building institutional capacities has been a challenge. When the pandemic hit, we immediately had to restructure processes and implementation periods. We now have better tools for ensuring our vision, and for communicating with partner organizations. We have adapted the Ayni Fund's processes to the emergency. A first step was finding out what was going on with different organizations, in order to help ensure support to indigenous women through providing technical and financial resources. Many women used the resources for producing fast-growing foods, health kits, and for prevention campaigns in their own languages. The Research Program documented what was happening with women and how we were living through the emergency. An informative report was shared with our organizations, and also with organizations that are not part of FIMI.

An effort has been made to prioritize self-care, healing and spirituality, and caring for ourselves, our families and the community. This reproductive and caretaking role is something we provide to all, accompanying processes from our own being, recognizing ourselves in these increased responsibilities, in multiple violences. In general, we address the violence experienced in private spaces, but social and collective violences require the deployment of skills, adapting ourselves, being resilient, and walking beside our sisters.

The FIMI's Ayni Fund provides resources for projects, but our sister partners offer their skills, their strengths, their homes, their spaces, their knowledge. This is why we have embraced mutual support, positioning spirituality and individual and collective care at the center.



SISTER MIREYA PEART VÁSQUEZ, coordinator for the Central American Region of Voices of Afro-descendant Women of Panama



The network of Afro women is a space where Afro-descendant women can confront racism, sexism, and ethnic, class-based and other types of discrimination. These are the objectives defined by the Network. Since 1992, we have been building recognition in the region. We have supported the construction of democratic, equitable and just societies, multicultural societies free of racism and racial discrimination.

Another objective of the Network is promoting the construction and consolidation of a broad-based movement of women, in all structures and geographical settings of Latin American life, including the diaspora. In addition, we work to raise awareness about the reality of Afro-descendant women in their regions. Afro women face terrible discrimination in their territories and nations, and the Network is addressing this situation. How do we do it? Through training and advocacy. We reject all forms of discrimination, above all because it destroys the lives of the people in these territories.

The Network insists that agreements against discrimination signed with governments be fulfilled. The guiding document for us is the Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Other Forms of Intolerance (Durban, 2001) and the Montevideo Consensus (2013). We have been working in this direction for many years.

What are we currently doing? To move forward in developing policies and demands, we have carried out various diagnostic studies about the real situation in which Afro-descendant populations are living.

The Network of Afro-Latin American Women has documented the precarious situation of the Afro population in Central and South America. The data on violence, for example, is alarming. In many places, violence against Afro-descendant women has worsened, while the conditions of hunger and misery have also been aggravated. The Network demands that States assume and fulfill commitments and guarantee the necessary budgets, going beyond simply making declarations about eradicating racism and sexism.

We confront the State through organizing and commitment. We have developed seminars and workshops to train ourselves—human rights defenders—in the provision of care. We have to defend ourselves in order to continue the fight, to struggle without fear, while also caring for ourselves. They must not eliminate us. If they cover our mouths, our voices must not be silenced.

The situations in Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador are also terrible. Processes of dispossession are underway, just like in Colombia. Research has been conducted in South America to design agendas linked to individual countries, enabling more effective incidence. In 2015, the Network organized a summit where the Network platform was approved, along with different areas of work: the rights of Afro women, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive rights. In the area of education, we propose the incorporation of history and Afro contributions into curricula. We promote the participation of organizations that generate statistics, and we are part of the census commission with the goal of incorporating Afro-descendant variables. It is well known that the censuses keep us invisible, but we use data to demand the policies that can change such conditions.

We are formulating projects that can help end the crisis, promote resilience, and can generate possibilities for life. At the same time, entrepreneurial projects have been developed. Our youth are commercializing their products via social media, using these networks to make home deliveries and generate some income for their families. We greatly value the work of young people in the Network, which is why we have provided learning and knowledge, and voiced our concerns. The compañeras who are responsible for managing the networks are a great help. They generate a lot of joint creativity. Strong partnerships with young people have been created. It has been an experience replete with resilience.

We need to strengthen the care we provide. There have been many rapes in Colombia, and there were 14 rapes of minors every day in Panama in 2019. These situations must be confronted and given greater visibility. The Network believes strongly in partnerships with indigenous populations, because we have an ancestral tradition and history. The slaves who ran away from colonial exploitation on plantations took refuge in the mountainous regions, and there they found themselves with indigenous peoples and made common cause. They shared knowledge, above all in relation to food and health. Black women who were slaves also ran away, and they were the creators of this Congo culture. They were spiritual leaders in these runaway settlements. They were guides, warriors, couriers, and did what they had to do to defend themselves against slavery.

Comments from:

Galio Gurdían (Entre Povos/CCARC), Sonia Chía (CHIRAPAC), Paola Yañez (RMAAD)



THOUGHTS AND SUMMARY GISELLE DOS SANTOS (CEERT)



Greetings from Brazil. I am so grateful to be part of this discussion. It was very interesting. Compañera Juliet made very important points about the impact of this crisis on our communities and our territories in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Juliet emphasized that for many of us, the crisis of democracy already existed, and the economic crisis as well. They have caused a dramatic impact on the lives of women. I would like to mention the Brazilian reality, and the importance of black women's struggle in confronting the fascist process underway here. The march of black women is an important expression of the ancestral struggle of black women.

In addition, we saw the presentations of compañeras from women's organizations that gave us the opportunity to understand the actions being developed in this context of reinventing the types of actions we undertake, our political interventions, and the great creativity of women's organizations and giving new meaning to this struggle. A phrase was mentioned about the creative power of women, some of them mothers, but all of us creators. Today, this power was demonstrated. The discussion and dialogue were so incisive. Thank you very much.

SYNTHESIS OF STARTING POINTS FOR MOVING FORWARD: SISTER PAOLA YAÑEZ (RMAAD)



The pandemic has led us to rethink our priorities, to see what was urgent and where we should focus our attention. Today, we have spoken about the growth of inequity, rethinking all of our processes, economic topics, and the urgency of generating data that evidence our existence. We will continue to consider:

- Discriminatory governments.
- Narco-controlled governments.
- Neo-colonizing societies.
- Genocide, especially of indigenous and Afro-descendant women leaders who defend their rights and territories.
- The pandemic and the global crisis.
- The need to build organizational and institutional capacities, with equitable participation.
- The capacities of indigenous and Afro-descendant women with respect to the resilience of organizations, and achieving good living ("buen vivir").
- The alternatives for facilitating training about inclusive leadership, and inter-generational sharing of information and leadership among women, each with their own histories and identities.

**WALKING TOGETHER IN A PROCESS
OF SHARED LEARNING**

Forgiveness	Unity	Solidarity	Strength and hope	Respect
Resistance	Roots	Long live life	Constructive partnerships for moving forward	
We do not achieve democracy if we give in to fear				




The video was directed by Eli Laban, human rights activist and ally with indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. He has done the audiovisual work for this project. Many of us appear, speaking about our experiences of what was like during the pandemic, and there are also images of our First Convening, in November 2019, and our virtual meeting in November 2020.



#5MParoNacional #SOSPueblosIndígenas



- EXIGIR la desmilitarización de las ciudades como requisito indeclinable para que se abra un verdadero diálogo social, que debe convocar a todas las organizaciones y sectores que han participado en este Paro y que conlleve a lograr que este gobierno escuche a quienes hoy levantamos reivindicaciones justas contra la reforma tributaria, la reforma a la salud, la implementación de los acuerdos de paz y el desmonte de los derechos fundamentales como la consulta previa, libre e informada y las consultas populares con las cuales muchos territorios están defendiendo el agua y la biodiversidad del país, entre otras.
- DENUNCIAR la brutalidad policial y el conjunto de las violaciones de derechos humanos que se están presentado durante el Paro Nacional, exigiendo al Congreso de la República, a la Fiscalía y Procuraduría General de la Nación y a la Defensoría del Pueblo que actúen en el marco de sus deberes constitucionales y legales, e investiguen todos los hechos que enlutan la vida de los colombianos y colombianas y que corroboran la urgencia de una profunda reforma que desmonte la Doctrina de Seguridad Militar según la cual el pueblo es un enemigo interno.
- RECHAZAR la anunciada declaratoria por decreto de un “Estado de Conmoción Interior” que sólo refleja la incapacidad del gobierno para construir un verdadero proceso de paz y favorecer la verdad, la justicia y las garantías de no repetición, es la guerra y la crisis social, ambiental, económica, humanitaria y política lo que está en la base del profundo descontento social que mantiene al pueblo movilizado a pesar de la incertidumbre que pesa sobre nuestros derechos democráticos y civiles

ORGANIZACIÓN NACIONAL INDIGENA DE COLOMBIA- ONIC

¡CUENTEN CON NOSOTROS PARA LA PAZ NUNCA PARA LA GUERRA!



SISTER MARGARITA ANTONIO (ENTRE POVOS).



After having met together in Mexico City and taking off in our own directions, the pandemic hit and we had to stop everything. The whole dynamic changed. The problems we already had were accentuated, and we had to rethink how to do things, how to learn, and how to share.

Maricela Kauffmann and I proposed this study, asking ourselves how women were experiencing and resisting the pandemic. We thought about and defined this study and this process as a conversation between women, between leaders. The phrase that became the title is a good summary of the situation. We are grateful for the collaboration of Tangni Hodgson and Nidia Bustillos for their help in updating some of the information we obtained.

During the conversations, we met with women together with young people. The new generation, confronting the pandemic and working together with community leaders and their organizations, united, caring for themselves, gaining strength from the worldview and spirituality of their elders. The pandemic did not end. COVID-19 upended our lives and our societies.

Juliet noted how the pandemic gave greater visibility to the fact that our societies, all of them, are filled with racist stereotypes and imagery that generate great social and economic hardship and inequalities that affect our communities, and which have worsened. We all know this. We have learned and shared in dialogues, webinars, research and studies such as those carried out by FIMI, ECMIA and others.

In a succinct manner, we make note of some of these initial shared impacts in our territories, where we have lacked so much but still survive:

- 🌀 Violences, discrimination, racism.
- 🌀 The vulnerability of rights defenders.
- 🌀 Uncontacted peoples, above all in the Amazon.
- 🌀 The loss of spaces for spirituality, transmitting culture and knowledge, and inter-generational dialogue.
- 🌀 Increased work for women.
- 🌀 Increased extractivism: wood, mining, cattle ranching.
- 🌀 The collapse of health care services.
- 🌀 A lack of access to virtual education.
- 🌀 Little or unequal access to technology.

WHAT DID WOMEN DO?






We didn't just stand idly by. We resisted the impact using our spiritualities, knowledge and skills, strengths and identities. We adopted strategies, and the study helped recover some good practices and profound learning that communities and organizations derived from the pandemic:

- 🌀 We organized, positioning youth with their cell phones and social media at the center of this process.
- 🌀 Preventing violences by caring for grandmothers and girls, boys and adolescents.
- 🌀 Defending the territories and demanding respect for our rights.
- 🌀 Taking action to ensure food and developing entrepreneurial activities.
- 🌀 Learning from our ancestral knowledge.
- 🌀 Strengthening ourselves to be able to accompany families.
- 🌀 Improving communication and awareness in communities, in organizations, in countries and also globally.



We learned to be strategists, to imagine what to do and how to do it, to arrive where we wanted to arrive. Technology allowed us to reach new spaces with the holistic view that health also means knowledge, wellbeing, harmony.

Thinking about which roads to follow and which recommendations to make on this journey, hand in hand with a great diversity of women—indigenous, black, with disabilities, creators, from rural areas—to strengthen dialogue and continuity, we saw the need to:

-  Improve communication.
-  Collaborate more.
-  Show greater solidarity.
-  Recognize ourselves as people, as human beings.
-  Demand compliance with all of the regulations we have won, but that have not yet been implemented.

These efforts by women’s organizations and mixed organizations have reinforced more horizontal relationships, sharing, working, complementing knowledge, and allowing us to engage in dialogue with cooperation agencies, donors, philanthropists, demonstrating why resources must come with respect, with recognition from us and from others. These knowledges, skills and spaces are part of our often unrecognized, undervalued and non-remunerated contributions. We must once again learn from our elders, acknowledge ourselves, promoting a new respect that harmonizes and exercises the power of women, with women and with men, with youth, with diversities, with the poor and marginalized, which is what defines our indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. We say that we have been impoverished and excluded. We want to recover the dignity that has been snatched from us.

Comments:

Paola Yañez (RMAAD, Elodia Castillo (COMUNDICH),
Isabel Cipriano (FIMI), Galio Gurdián (Entre Povos/CCARC).



**SISTER
SARA OMI,**
Organization of Women Leaders of Mesoamerican Territories



“In 10 years, I imagine women from the community helping us... managing our resources and policies, activating a gender agenda with our indigenous peoples and in our territories... We struggle for women’s participation in political processes, to reduce the impact of climate change in our forests... Our greatest obstacle is an unbalanced world, led by men. We have been struggling for 10 years, we are forests of people...”



Good morning. I am grateful for this important space. In the organization, we are in a process of struggle and advocacy. Above all, we continue raising women’s voices throughout Mesoamerica, in these difficult times of pandemic.

Just as the women in the video expressed, we are people of the forest, and promoting traditional knowledge is extremely important to us. Added to the process of resistance, it has strengthened our participation in the communities, allowing us to position our voices, our strength and our alliances within our territory.

We are putting an environmental agenda onto the table, that includes climate change, our forest, the territorial struggle, and traditional knowledge. We focus on the abilities of women to address these issues in our territories, and we are building our capacities to enable us to achieve sustainability.



SISTER ISABEL PASOS, AMPB.



From the Technical Secretariat of the Women’s Coordination, I wanted to comment that this group of women is comprised of leaders who have been democratically elected in their communities. They have a gender agenda linked to the climate agenda. They try to give visibility to the need to connect Goals 5 and 13 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (gender equity and climate action).

We cannot speak of climate justice if we do not involve women in decision making, and also in discussions about building public policies that affect indigenous peoples, the forests, and the women who inhabit these territories.

The Women’s Coordination is a space, a platform, for demonstrating a region filled with cultures, led by women who struggle to give visibility to the challenges of living in these territories replete with multiple inequality gaps.

They invite our sisters to join with this movement, to demand that governments fulfill their commitments and responsibilities to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and territories. This is a struggle for power.



SISTER TANIA PARIONA



Good morning everyone. Thank you very much Paola, and those who have promoted this wonderful and timely meeting between indigenous and Afro-descendant women, in difficult, tense contexts that have great impact on our communities and our peoples.

In general, the pandemic’s impact has been limited to discussions about health and economics, but for original peoples, it involves much more than health and economics. It has to do with territorial rights, the lives of indigenous environmental defenders who often have no protection or legal mechanisms for safeguarding their lives.

In some countries, a State of Emergency or prolonged quarantines have been used to silence and repress demands—social, territorial and health demands—while permitting the advance of extractive activities. The demonstrated deterioration of the environment, of our territories, greatly increases the possibility of negative impacts from different pandemics. This is what we are experiencing from one of them, COVID-19, but future pandemics could have even greater impact given existing living and health conditions, and the increasingly precarious access to water or basic foods.



ECMIA and CHIRAPAQ have publicly declared that the impact of COVID-19 on women has a relationship to violences. Cases of femicide and sexual assaults against girls and adolescents do not decrease. Rather, they have been rising. In different countries where ECMIA operates, there are no clear policies for addressing the violences faced by indigenous women. I am certain that the same is true for Afro-descendant women. For various years, we have been working jointly on this issue, in partnership, in close coordination with Afro-descendant sisters in international arenas and also at the national level.

In the case of Peru, for example, a common platform for struggling against racism and discrimination has been created by Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples. Since 2005, this has allowed these daily, historical and systematic problems to be situated within public discourse and debate. However, public policies, decisions, and budgetary allocations that should be a priority for the agendas of governments are not concretized. There is a homogenizing, colonial, monolingual view that sees only the urban, non-indigenous context.

Employment is another aspect that we are not defining as a priority, although the ILO indicates that 85% of Latin American women have jobs in the informal sector. Who are they? They are women, indigenous women, who do not enjoy labor rights, who do not have access to dignified jobs. They work under exploitive conditions without any type of social security protections, much less the labor rights that are enjoyed by other social sectors.

Another aspect that needs to be emphasized as part of this logic of working in partnership is related to the creation of desegregated data. When information or statistical evidence does not exist, we do not exist as a priority for public policies. There is no official data that breaks down violences, femicides, education, access to water, the effects of climate change, or the vulnerability of territories where extractive industries are exploiting natural resources. I think that this is one of the topics that should motivate us to work in networks, in partnership. Little by little, this issue is being addressed as an important topic, but things are moving very slowly. Perhaps we need to strengthen ourselves as both indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, so that both will be defined as priorities by governments.

And the question is, how do we join together to take these steps toward change, to gain greater visibility, to be able to play a greater role in decision-making? Our voices are becoming stronger, and this is emanating from our own communities and our places of origin. The problem is that no one listens to us, we are not considered. This is the strategy that eludes us. Based on the opportunity provided by this meeting, we need to define a clearer and more decided route, with greater strength, and hopefully other allies will join us, which will provide the necessary support. We need to collect information, studies, videos, so that this evidence, which is not always considered, is an element that reaffirms that the situation of indigenous peoples, and indigenous women in particular, requires urgent attention. It requires a specific focus, and of course public policies with their specific budgets. We are not a priority for others. This must motivate us today to think about joint actions that respond to multiple forms of violence, including racism and discrimination. This is something that has been underway for many years, but that we really need to push forward in a more decisive manner.

One week ago, ECMIA and CHIRAPAQ presented a very important report about intercultural models for confronting violences. We have many exemplary and valuable experiences that could be models for public policies. I believe in our joint work because it has generated positive initiatives aimed at interventions that could be converted into local or national public policies. Now that this has been written, has been demonstrated, the next steps must be taken.

The Afro-descendant compañeras also have a long history of struggle that allows us to say that we are at a critical juncture. We have the advantage of this prior experience, because it has not been easy for us, indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, to achieve what we have achieved today. We have been made invisible, with no power or voice. All that we have today is thanks to our organizational work. This was not a favor from the government. It has resulted from pure pressure. If there is something to acknowledge, it is the work of our older sisters who have walked, who have transcended, before us. We owe it to them. This should be seen as our capital, and we need to capitalize on this experience and this history, to say that this is not a struggle of only this moment. It is not a ten-year struggle. In 1995 we began to gain visibility. This does not mean that we did not exist before and that we did not have a prior history.

International visibility has allowed us to know and learn about this insistent and steady struggle, by women, for equality and respect for differences. Equality that considers differences, and not a single vision. This struggle does not respond to the archetypical woman. There are diverse women and a plurality of realities and histories. There are also exclusions that have left their mark on us. As a new generation, we believe there are windows of opportunity, and that we can continue growing, taking one step back to recognize this history, and one step forward to project a better future.





**SISTER
PAULINA PAR,**
Baquiax Faction in Totonicapán;
member of the Utz Che´ Network



I am a defender of the forest. The problems that we all face, the reality of our countries, is the same throughout the world, and the result is the same for all indigenous peoples, campesinos, and Afro-descendants: we have no voice, we have no echo, we have no support from governments or big business. The donors are strict. In emergencies they tell us that nothing can be changed, that the funds must go where they were allocated. So, they help us in a certain sense, but they tie our hands in another.

During the pandemic, the municipal mayor told all of the community mayors that they could not leave. He declared a quarantine without a need to do so. He took advantage to lock us up and try to tie our feet and hands. We have not let him. We could not meet. It was urgent, because each year we run out of water, this vital liquid. The president of the Water Committee agreed to allow us to tap into the River Project. But they didn't allow us to gather people together to do so. We discussed it and did it clandestinely, while socially distancing. It was necessary for us. We know that from the time they wake up, women are using this sacred liquid. We know that water is life, it has no substitute. We did the work and are enjoying this life-giving liquid. With or without a governor, with or without the mayor, we did the work. There was not one single infection.

In Totonicapán, we have our medicinal plants. This has helped us during the pandemic. We cannot go to pharmacies, there are no vaccines. The governments says that the upper parts of our forests are good for mining, but we are not going to let them enter. This is the heritage left to us by our ancestors, by mother nature. We had become used to single-crop farming. We didn't want to plant. The pandemic has forced us to return to mixed agriculture systems, to survive. There is no aid, there is no money, there is no work, there is nothing.

We are experiencing a difficult time in the world. Governments gain power and those who govern are only concerned with making themselves richer. Sometimes I have spoken, and sometimes it makes me sad and a little afraid, since they criminalize our activities here, as everywhere. I feel very sad for our brothers from Colombia. We feel solidarity with them.





PLENARY PRESENTATION

COMUNDICH

- ◉ The youth from our territories are migrating. This is concerning. The youth migrate and communities get poorer.
- ◉ We involve the youth in development projects. They were enthusiastic about a rainwater collection project.
- ◉ We help our youth become stronger through introducing them to our struggles, our demands for territorial rights, human rights, and women's rights, and the criminalization that victimizes us. They learn of the spirituality that has been important to the resistance.
Indigenous women:
- ◉ We govern territorially and manage our livelihoods and production.
- ◉ We lead judicial processes, holding governments accountable when our rights are violated, especially women's rights.
- ◉ We transmit spirituality to the new generation.

OFRANEH

- ◉ We involve youth in the struggle to recover our lands, defend the territory, and continue surviving in this country.
- ◉ Youth and Garifuna leaders have recovered land, and we are continuing to resist.
- ◉ We try to recover our identity and culture, but it is not easy because we are sad.
- ◉ We suffer from systematic displacement and racism perpetrated by the Honduran government. There are no laws for us.
- ◉ Our hearts cry in pain. We live in resistance, defending our rivers, seas and land. We stand in struggle, seeking justice for our fallen and disappeared brothers. We are saddened by the lack of response from the Honduran government.
- ◉ We accompany our brothers from other organizations and other ethnicities.
- ◉ We have an alliance with COPINH.

MIEQB

- ◉ Building leadership is a daily task. In addition to our willingness to participate, we make agreements to discuss quotas with organizations. We have a statute that guarantees the participation of youth. No one can be elected who isn't registered. Women join, but there were few who advanced in the organization.
- ◉ To achieve changes and make progress in public policies, and to strengthen ourselves as women, we take part in large events for women, such as the March of the Daisies.
- ◉ We have had many conferences to discuss our policies and budgets. Women's participation in the Municipal Councils is very important.
- ◉ Women are training young people to produce typical clothing. We encourage them to learn about our ethnic identities, so the youth do not leave the communities. We also involve them in building water reserves for the communities that do not have access to water.
- ◉ This is a space for constructing agendas. Each organization has specific agendas in the struggle for rights. Yesterday there was a meeting to prepare people who were going to participate in a hearing.
- ◉ We understand that when women have their territories, they have autonomy.
- ◉ Spaces such as these are very useful for creating partnerships and networks.

AMPB

- ◉ In Mesoamerica, we have seen the youth become unmotivated. Sometimes this is the result of social media, which presents lifestyles that are not compatible with community life.
- ◉ There is a high incidence of suicide among youth in the communities.
- ◉ One form of positively strengthening leadership is to make young people feel proud to take part in political processes that defend the territory.
- ◉ In the Mesoamerican Leadership School, youth re-encounter their identity.



	Empower identity beginning in childhood		Alliances		
Promote ethical, inter-generational leadership, and solid activism		Brazil suggested an alliance of Afro and indigenous women to engage in dialogue and build leaders with additional support from the outside		Solidarity	
	Conduct communications campaigns about the needs in different countries			Dare to take steps forward and recognize yourself	
Honduras requested definition of an agenda for continuing the struggle. They need to link with others		Alliance of women Afro and indigenous to dialogue and strengthen the leaders		Respect	
	Unity		Building leadership is positive process if it is done in an inter-generational manner		Make agenda to follow in the fight and articulate
We lost our fear as we picked up the microphone		It is important to work on issues related to health and violence in the territory		Apologies	
	Open the doors to more women, and overcome the mistrust of young people		Live life		



CONCLUSIONS

WEAVING POINTS OF HOPE

Thank you for sharing such thought-provoking ideas during these two days of meetings. We addressed topics that left a bitter taste, because they are deeply painful:

- 🌀 Victimization.
- 🌀 Violences against human rights defenders.
- 🌀 The disproportionate use of force.
- 🌀 Murders and genocide.
- 🌀 The criminalization of poverty.
- 🌀 Increased inequality gaps.
- 🌀 Water as a human right.
- 🌀 Policies of death.
- 🌀 Ongoing racism and discrimination.

Other topics filled us with hope and enthusiasm, such as food security, climate justice, political participation, consultations prior to implementing policies, and programs and projects in our territories. These have been enriching work sessions in which ancestral knowledge and spirituality have accompanied us, moving forward with proposals.

Agreements moving forward:

- 🌀 We will meet again on June 16 and 17, 2021.
- 🌀 We will consider multiple forms of violences, as a way of creating linkages.
- 🌀 We will generate more data as evidence, to strengthen our influence on public policies.
- 🌀 We will identify meeting points, based on the thoughts of indigenous and Afro-descendant women at this meeting, to link steps forward that strengthen our struggles.
- 🌀 Define points of coordination for the Afro-Indigenous Women's Alliance.
- 🌀 Build a support and solidarity network to respond to current situations (Colombia, Brazil, Honduras).
- 🌀 Continue training to reduce the vulnerability of our youth.
- 🌀 Inter-ethnic meetings, like this one, to augment community-based training.
- 🌀 Struggle for the territories with the ethical leadership of women.
- 🌀 Rescue ancestral knowledge.
- 🌀 Respect and solidarity for the pain of sisters and brothers.

Partnerships are the result of efforts that began long ago. We carry them in our blood, and they fill us with happiness. Indigenous women made use of the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing, in the midst of a sort of Tower of Babel, to build upon the first one. With the First Declaration of Indigenous Women in Beijing (1995) and the Fourth World Conference Against Racism in Durban (2001), we looked for ways to influence a change in the traditional white feminist paradigm. Alliances have also been nurtured by 500 years of mobilization.

The pandemic has only made it clearer that together, coordinating agendas, we are stronger. Without losing identity in the face of renewed institutionalized racism, we join efforts to connect local spaces with global spaces. With more skills, being more strategic, we can join, link, combine and find each other, over and over again. It is not only about learning amongst ourselves. It is about having routes of communication that make us stronger in relation to others.



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