

# BETWEEN US, WITCHES ALL

INITIATIVES AND REFLECTIONS AMONG AFRO-DESCENDENT PEOPLE,  
INDIGENOUS, WOMEN, HUMMINGBIRDS



Panama, November, 2021

# PARTICIPANTS

## **María Betania Mota de Jesús**

General Secretary of Mov. of Women  
Indigenous/RR-CIR  
[mariabetaniamota2224@gmail.com](mailto:mariabetaniamota2224@gmail.com)

## **Paola Yañez Inofuentes**

General Coordinator of the Women's Network  
Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and  
Diaspora-RMAAD  
[paolinyaez@gmail.com](mailto:paolinyaez@gmail.com)

## **Mireya Peart Vasquez**

Coordinator of the Central American Region of  
the Network of Afro-Latin American women,  
Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora-RMAAD and  
President of Afro- descendants Women's  
Voices of Panama.  
[peartmireya@hotmail.com](mailto:peartmireya@hotmail.com)

## **Tania Pariona Tarqui**

Quechua ayacuchana, indigenous activist,  
politician, feminist and former congressman of  
the Republic of Peru. Associate member of  
Board of directors of CHIRAPAQ, member of  
the Continental Link of Indigenous Women of  
the Americas.  
[killachallay@gmail.com](mailto:killachallay@gmail.com)

## **Norma Don Juan**

National Coordinator of Indigenous Women  
of Mexico-CONAMI, Continental Link of  
Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA)  
[yloyotl@gmail.com](mailto:yloyotl@gmail.com)

## **Dialys Ehrman**

Advisor to the National Union of Kuna Women,  
Vice Coordinator of the Indigenous Women's  
Alliance of Central America and Mexico.  
[dialysnehrman@hotmail.com](mailto:dialysnehrman@hotmail.com)

## **Darianela Broce**

International Communications and Social  
Networks of the National Union of Kuna  
Women, Nis Bundor.

## **María Clemencia Herrera Nemerayema**

Director of the Women's Ecological Cultural  
House, Knitting and Knowledge (MUTESA).  
She coordinates the Political Training School for  
Leadership and Governance of the National  
Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of the  
Colombian Amazon (OPIAC), and the  
Indigenous Women's Network  
on Biodiversity of Latin America  
and the Caribbean. Bartolomé de las Casas  
Award, 2019.  
[chnemerayema@gmail.com](mailto:chnemerayema@gmail.com)

## **Melissa Martínez**

BLACK FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION  
HONDURAN (OFRANEH). Coordinator of the  
Ancestral House of Natural Medicine, Punta  
Gorda, Roatán, Honduras.  
[fresaf70@gmail.com](mailto:fresaf70@gmail.com)

## **Dalyris Ehrman Morris**

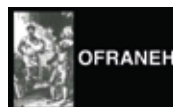
President of the National Union of Kuna  
Women, Nis Bundor.  
Nis Bundor representative in the Kuna  
Congress and member of the Axis  
of women and children. Secretary of the  
SOS ALBINOS Foundation of Panamá.  
[dalyrisehrman08@gmail.com](mailto:dalyrisehrman08@gmail.com)

## **Margarita Antonio**

Social Anthropologist, communicator, cultural  
manager. Member of the Alliance of Indigenous  
Women from Central America and Mexico.  
Ayni Fund Coordinator, FIMI  
[antoniomargarita@gmail.com](mailto:antoniomargarita@gmail.com)

## **Maricela Kauffmann**

Researcher and cultural manager. Activist and  
militant of learning processes in  
indigenous, Afro-descendant and Traditional  
organizations and communities.  
Member of CCARC Consulting Team.  
Associated with Lapta Yula Creative Women  
Organization.  
[maricela.kauffmann@gmail.com](mailto:maricela.kauffmann@gmail.com)



## CONTENT

The encounter	3
Sounding maracas on the boat, on the bus, on the plane, walking	4
Hugs between giants	5
The “word of life” and methodology	5
Our mobilization is social, it is spiritual, it is political	7
Our work and growth	7
Challenges and recommendations	8
Sharing our perspective and proposals with other women	8
Out of the depths. In the midst of the pandemic (2020)	9
Nis Bundor, female leaders and exemplary generational change	11

## The encounter

**The relationship between organizations of Afro-descendant women and organizations of Indigenous Women is visible and has left traces throughout the struggle and defense of our identities and territories.** However, the Afro-indigenous approach has been and is less visible. We thought that ignoring or being unaware of afro-indigenous issues was common in isolated areas, but no way! We reaffirm that the rapprochement between Indigenous and Afro-descendant women demands new looks and anti-racist actions.

We met to delve into our own concepts and the facts made us reframe questions and dig into racist practices and racial discrimination that we face daily in our societies. We fight against discrimination; we have been doing it since the Durban Action Plan. Since then, we have been talking about walking together on a minimum platform, with frameworks that would allow us to sanction, prevent and educate from childhood on the anomaly that racism represents and be able to exercise in our contexts an anti-racist education.

Racism and racial discrimination are the barrier that does not allow the recognition of cultural diversity; there is no complete and real conviction that we indigenous and Afro-descendants people are capable of making decisions about our own destinies.

We, indigenous and Afro-descendants women, address the problem of racism and racial discrimination demanding an end to violence due to the fact that we defend our right to life and our territories. We agree that institutions, in the different Nation states, demonize our forms of organization; they classify us as organized groups that hinder development.

We reiterate that racism is an issue that impacts us all. In fact, there is a growing discussion about environmental racism. Feminism from the perspective of their own actors begins to question that the gender equality is not possible to reach if ethnic racism is present. In a society where relationships are based on racist practices it is not possible to achieve well-being for all and struggle successfully against economic poverty. It is necessary to get closer among us, and consider strategies to face the multidimensionality of racism from a political perspective.

Affirming individual and collective rights, we sat down to work.

---

Man Ray al Aire Libre, a Facebook Live from Peru about racism, stereotypes and social representation to which 15 thousand people connected for 5 hours.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX5cEsgqKvE>).

## Sounding maracas in a boat, by bus, by plane, walking

From Roatán, after spending two days transferring boats and buses, Melissa arrived at Tocumen International Airport, named in honor of the Kuna chief that ruled those lands in pre-Columbian times. Melissa gave the agent of the National Immigration Service and Naturalization of the Ministry of Public Security the letter of invitation that the Caribbean and Central American Research Council (CCARC) sent to her previously, to participate in the "Dialogue between indigenous, Afro-descendant and traditional women to reflect and work out initiatives to illuminate the path and accompany our walk".

The agent read, reread, and finally called another agent. "Excuse me, are you a Witch? Are you coming to a meeting of Witches?", she was asked bluntly as she was led into a room where the agents continued to check her documents and confiscated the dried garlic cloves they found in her backpack. They let her pass, surely "bewitched" by the smile and arguments of Melissa, a Garífuna woman.

A similar situation happened to María Betania, Secretary General of the Movement of Indigenous Women of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR). She made a three-day trip from the Brazilian state of Roraima to reach Panamá. Melissa and María Betania met at the hotel, and the final blow to these two afro-indigenous women travelers, with a previous and confirmed reservation, was given by the front desk receptionist at the hotel who told them: "You will have to wait 3 hours to get into your room...".





## Hugs between giants

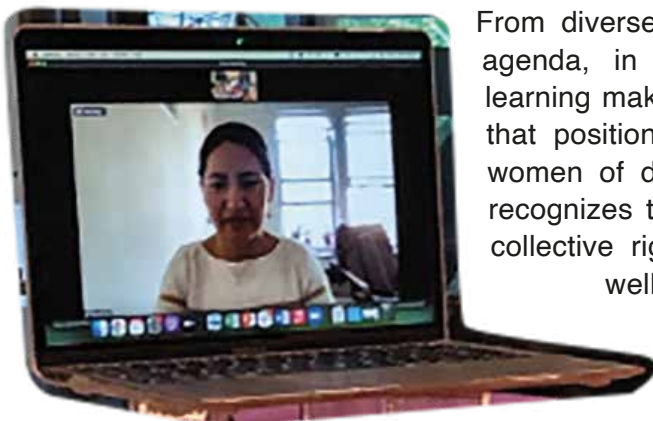
We set out to meet in order to release our word, to learn between us, to listen to our voices and tune the collective voice. After embracing each other, perceiving and feeling each other, we sat down to talk; orality came to life telling and sharing our

stories and mishaps. We laughed plenty and that was nice! We all wanted a solid agenda to continue moving forward with firm steps towards more collaboration and unity. So, without a prior agenda, without mandates, with lots of questions and guiding topics on women's participation in politics; on the resurgence of racism and discrimination; on spirituality and worldview, we began and proceeded to invoke the energies, the protection of our ancestors and of our wise and elder women to join forces, grow in power and respect for mother nature. We invoked and prayed not to forget the traditions, to nurture our collective memory with our narratives, and to recover the history of shared walking. We recognized ourselves as women struggling and walking with “the word of life”,

to bring back to practice, what was thought and what was spoken; in order to open doors for reflection in the search for points of articulation and joint actions.

## The “word of life” and the methodology

Clemencia spoke to us about "the word of life", how to learn to recognize it and give it life to establish solid links, relate among us, build together and enjoy life with music, dance and poetry; it is a challenge in each of our environments and processes.



From diverse cultural identities we want to build a common agenda, in which wisdom, knowledges, experiences and learning make part of the unit of thought. We want an agenda that position our rights as Afro-indigenous and intercultural women of diverse ethnic origins. We need an agenda that recognizes the urgent need to protect our human rights, our collective rights to our territories, our knowledges and our well-being. As a whole, that agenda should enable political influence within the racist state institutions, governments and societies in which we live, and which demonize our activism.

**We organized a workshop to learn about agendas, strategies and actions and held a dialogue providing reflections to build interculturality in the context of wisdom and knowledge of each indigenous peoples and ethnic group. Focused on what we think, how we feel and propose we addressed the following topics in a panel:**

- ☐☐ Power and Empowerment, **Mireya;**
- ☐☐ Spirituality and Discrimination, **Melisa and Dalyris;**
- ☐☐ Alliances and Spirituality, **Norma and Paola;**
- ☐☐ Spirituality and Formation, **Clemencia;**
- ☐☐ Spirituality and Leadership, **María Betania;**
- ☐☐ Governance, **Dialys;**
- ☐☐ Afro- Indigenous peoples, **Margarita.**



With the strength of unity and the wisdom of knowing how to walk and weave, that we receive from our elder women, most of us have two tools with which we demand respect for our identities and rights. We intend to cleanse ourselves of the prejudices and stereotypes; examine ourselves to ensure that our strategies are consistent with our work and that of the generations that accompany us.

We are organizations of Indigenous and Afro descendant women, strengthened organizational and institutionally to challenge discrimination and racism and struggle for equality.



We gave interviews about these topics to the program “Building Opinions” of the journalist Danilo Churches on Radio Mía.  
<https://www.facebook.com/MIARA/DIOMEDIA>

## Our mobilization is social, is spiritual, is political.

We agreed that spirituality, worldviews and ancestral knowledges converge in intercultural practices which themselves are intrinsic to our identities. Such elements facilitate our resilience and allow us to maintain a dialogue with Nature. On this matter, here are some thoughts:

☞ Thinking spirituality from the perspective of the law of origin of our indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, it becomes the thread that connects us with the law of life and continuity. Spirituality is central in the context of violence and long periods of conflict in which we live, and for this reason it must be approached holistically.

☞ Spirituality is a resistance mechanism for peoples and families whose lives have been fractured. Therefore, we must consider spirituality as a disputed territory in the current context and events.

Tania emphasized that spirituality is a resistance mechanism to survive as peoples and cultures. She pointed out that providing care and healing for victims of violence is important because States do not provide care for the victims, that need to heal.

☞ The ECMIA has approached violence from a historical dimension to influence public policies.

☞ The cosmovision is a way of seeing the world; this world of ours in which everything has meaning. In everyday life, in the management, use and control we have over Nature our framework and approach are based on our worldview. The worldview of the world we know, is understood against current. For example, we oppose the irrational exploitation and extraction of natural resources; we oppose mining operations that pollute and depletes the sources of water. We defend the water that is life and the right policies to mitigate and reduce climate change.

Ancestral practices and resilience are the cultural legacy for the survival of generations. COVID-19 taught us to value Nature and to return to traditional medicine. The transnationals have not stopped working and increasing their profits in times of crisis and pandemic. It is us, our peoples, our countries the ones that have suffered. From the intercultural point of view, blacks, indigenous people, migrants have been highly affected by the lack of opportunities, increase in precariousness and the absence of services.

## Our work and growth

In order to mobilize our networks, in the context of high complexity and crisis of our countries, we must address issues linked to diverse social, cultural and survival aspects which are crucial to ensure respect for interculturality, diversity, plurality and equal rights.



## Challenges and recommendations

- Empower economically Indigenous and Afro-descendant women;
- Rescue and systematize the knowledge and wisdom sheltered by spirituality;
- Encourage the formation of networks to safeguard knowledges and ensure recognition of intellectual property;
- Promote cultivation practices for traditional foods, with absolute respect for mother earth, to achieve food sovereignty;
- Strengthen organizations and women leaders in defense of the rights of women;
- Support the bases in the communities for generating spaces to rescue and practice traditional medicine; the pandemic is still latent due to the collapse or absence of national health systems in our territories, we will continue tackling the pandemic, despite the lack of vaccines;
- Educate and train leaders for our territories;
- Reflect on the impact of racism and discrimination in our organizations, working together those issues with our youth;
- Promote the Afro-indigenous alliance in the different territories to strengthen the issues related to diversity.

## Share our perspective and proposals with other women

- We have to discuss the issues of racism in all spaces, including those of feminism, which address similar topics and agendas as ours, but doesn't talk about racism.
- From each organization, promote working together, to strengthen our advocacy and lobbying capacities for the defense of our lives and territories.
- Join efforts to build an anti-racist agenda, with the participation of youth in its construction and decision making.
- Develop the generational change with orientation, sense of belonging and security; with different strategies, knowledge, using our own and traditional pedagogies.
- Allocate resources, develop actions and provide support for children and youth in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and community radios.
- Build proposals to develop an anti-racist education addressing the Afro indigenous dimension because there is ignorance of history, despite sharing common roots and experiences.
- Address the issue of discrimination, based on our knowledge and reflection, on Afro-Indigenous digital platforms.
- Return to our ethos of thinking, speaking and doing practical things.

## Out of the depths. In the midst of the pandemic (2020)

Mireya Peart Vázquez has been a constant weaver in the loom of the gender agenda, and for the inclusion of policies by governments in favor of the eradication of racism and sexism. An economist and poet, she is synonymous with power.

Poetry of the deep  
In the middle of the pandemic  
Author: Mireya Peart  
May 04, 2020

They asked me to stay home  
with my family, for life.  
They ordered me not to go out  
because evil was outside  
and we had to wage war on it.

They asked me to stay home  
and there I took shelter worried, fearful  
looking at walls and battered ceiling  
from my little makeshift home  
where the sun barely reaches.

They asked me to stay home  
the company also fired me  
the food ran out, the water did not arrive  
and my offspring with sad faces, deep eyes  
I look outside, the promise does not appear.

They asked me to stay home  
to take care of the virus, I understood.  
days go by, I have no water, soap or bread  
hope is exhausted, dying.  
My family survives in endless resistance.

They asked me to stay home  
the promised aid has not yet arrived  
there is no force, the resistance ends.  
My sad family with hunger cries  
feeding anger from my pain.

Don't blame me if I go out because of them  
against the wind and the pandemic.  
I also built from scraps,  
masks of hope  
to exchange them for support of my house.

They asked me to stay home.  
Necessary and true.  
I happen to have a dilemma:  
If I go out I might die  
if not, it is certain that my children will be lost.



## Nis Bundor, female leaders and exemplary generational change

In 2021, Nis Bundor celebrated 30 years of efforts training women leaders and watching over the rights of indigenous women. For Kuna youth, the organization has been a means for the change. Bold, outspoken and assertive, Dalyris Ehrman is the president of the National Union of Kuna Women (Nis Bundor) and Darianela Broce is in charge of International Relations and Communication. These two young women have their feet in the present, for building the future. They make hope shine; they are media actors with their own narrative. Darianela told us "I began to participate in the organization and to tour the Kuna districts at the age of 14. That is how I was learning. I accompanied my mother to congresses, to marches, to events of indigenous villages and meetings of indigenous women, that's how my training began."

These "Daughters of the Stars" are the daughter, granddaughters and great-granddaughters of Mu Elida and Estanislao López, Chieftain and leader of the seven indigenous peoples. The Mu (grandmother) Elida participated in the Kuna revolution of 1925. During the resistance against the government invasion, she was beaten and they ripped out the Olasu, the ring they wear on their noses.

The pioneering leader is Dyalis Ehrman, a lawyer and the first indigenous woman to hold a national public office in Panama. She participated in the first meeting of indigenous women held in Beijing and is part of the Association of Indigenous Women of Central America and Mexico (AMICAM). AMICAM is a regional platform that supports national organizations of indigenous women whose guide for action is framed on indigenous worldviews. It supports a programmatic agenda to visualize, coordinate and carry out management activities to create a critical mass of indigenous women with advocacy and lobbying capacities to gain political participation, empowerment and recognition of the rights of women and indigenous peoples. (<http://alianzami.org>)



Our Kuna sisters invited us to visit their territory, and we left. We crossed the mountain range, a narrow and winding road, and we went down until we reached Puerto Dibin. There we embarked to Anmardub, an ecotourism venture created by the Kuna Congress and managed by the local community. Then we went to Miryadub, another of the islands, for lunch. It was a spectacular tour to enjoy the Panamanian Caribbean, the white sand beaches, and the crystal clear waters. Kuna Yala sinks into the sea. The rise in sea levels, they explained to us, is making the archipelago disappear.



CCARC  
CARIBBEAN CENTRAL AMERICAN RESEARCH COUNCIL



FORD  
FOUNDATION

[WWW.ENTREPOVOS.ORG](http://WWW.ENTREPOVOS.ORG)