

Chapter 26



International Indigenous Alliances for Global Justice

Marc Becker, Truman State University



In 1990, Indigenous peoples¹ from across the Americas met in Quito, Ecuador, to protest planned celebrations of the quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic

Ocean. This meeting provided an opportunity to build consensus among diverse groups and to unify around common concerns. The ability of people who had long been excluded and marginalized to gain a voice on a global stage was the result of moving from a focus on narrow, locally defined issues to much broader concerns of engaging state power. An incredibly diverse range of peoples across the Americas representing many different cultures and political

¹The use of a capital "I" in reference to Indigenous peoples is intentional and based on (and in respect for) the stated preference of the board of directors of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC) as a strong affirmation of their ethnic identities.

interests are included under the broad umbrella of "Indigenous," and naturally not all of them joined these organizing efforts. Nevertheless, the growing internationalization of Indigenous movements led to a much larger 2007 meeting in Guatemala that illustrated Indigenous success at linking struggles across the Americas. This chapter includes documents from both the 1990 and 2007 gatherings in order to show both the continuities in Indigenous struggles and their evolution over time.

Although Indigenous peoples long had struggled for their rights on a local level, by the 1960s they began to organize on an international level. Attitudes toward land, long one of the primary demands for many Indigenous activists, reflect this evolution. The issue of the usurpation of Indigenous lands dates back to the colonial period and gained increased importance during the nineteenth century as wealthy estate owners encroached on Indigenous communities. By the end of the twentieth century, Indigenous activists commonly framed their demands in terms of territory and *autonomy*, indicating that they viewed land as an ancestral right rather than a commodity. Their concerns extended beyond social and economic demands to the level of cosmologies, of how they perceived the world around them. The rights of self-determination and control over their own affairs gained importance in the face of government attempts to assimilate them into the dominant culture.

In the 1980s, Indigenous activists also emerged at the forefront of protests against *neoliberal* economic policies that privatized government functions and emphasized resource extraction. These austerity measures emphasized so-called free-market policies in place of government protectionism. As some of the poorest members of society, Indigenous peoples were hit the hardest by cutbacks in government subsidies. The extraction of gold, petroleum, and other precious resources from Indigenous lands left them with the negative environmental and social consequences of mining but with none of its economic benefits. Increasingly, Indigenous peoples raised their voices against these enterprises.

In addition to pressing economic demands, many Indigenous activists emphasized the importance of their unique identities with broad-reaching

political implications. They rejected previous designations as tribes, peoples, or ethnic groups as contributing to their historical marginalization from society. Instead, they demanded recognition as Indigenous nationalities. Most notably in Ecuador and Bolivia, leaders pressed for the inclusion of references to *plurinationalism* in their federal constitutions, declaring that their countries were made up of many different Indigenous nationalities. The goal was to remake the country's political structures to recognize this diversity, and to respond to the needs and concerns of common people rather than domestic elites or foreign corporations.

Anthropologists, the Catholic Church, the United Nations, and *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs) facilitated early Indigenous networking efforts. In 1968, anthropologists founded the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in Copenhagen to support Indigenous struggles through publications and educational campaigns. They were followed by Survival International in England and Cultural Survival at Harvard University. In 1971, eleven anthropologists gathered in Barbados to analyze the current situation of Indigenous peoples. Their "Declaration of Barbados" called for the liberation of Indians from their colonial domination.² Three years later, Bishop Samuel Ruiz organized an Indian Congress in Chiapas, Mexico, with the participation of hundreds of Mayas to discuss common problems of land, exploitation, and racism. At the same time, representatives of eleven South American Indigenous nationalities gathered in Paraguay to discuss similar problems and to call for a unified struggle for their rights.³ In 1975, the IWGIA helped establish the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and subsequently pressured the United Nations (UN) to address Indigenous issues. At first the UN refused, claiming that such issues were domestic rather than

²International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), *Declaration of Barbados*, IWGIA Document No. 1 (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1971), <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/barbados1.php>.

³Yves Materne, ed., *The Indian Awakening in Latin America* (New York: Friendship Press, 1980), 49–76, <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/materne/>.



Women from the local Indigenous organization Pueblo Kayambi (Ecuador) participated in a 2002 protest in Ecuador's capital city of Quito against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (or *Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas*—ALCA in Spanish). Kayambi's Indigenous peoples have a long history of local, regional, and national political activism, dating back to the 1920s. What does this image show us about the "face" of political activism in Latin America? How does this photo capture a moment of protest that was at once local *and* hemispheric in nature?

Source: Photo by Marc Becker.

international concerns but the UN finally conceded to form a Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

Increasingly, Indigenous activists took the lead in organizing international meetings rather than relying on sympathetic outsiders for support. In the 1980s, the South American Indian Council (CISA) organized three regional conferences of Indigenous nationalities and organizations in Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. In 1983, the CISA founded the South American Indian Information Center (SAIIC) in California to support Indigenous self-determination and the unification of Indigenous rights movements on a

continental level. As Indigenous organizations bridged broad geographic divides, they also reached out to environmentalists and Afro-Latin Americans.

In July 1990, the SAIIC joined the *Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador* (CONAIE) and the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) to organize a Continental Conference on Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance in Quito, Ecuador. Hundreds of delegates from twenty countries challenged governmental plans to celebrate the upcoming anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas on October 12, 1492, and

instead they called for an alternative campaign of “500 years of Indigenous resistance” against European genocide. They pledged to turn October 12 into a symbol of Indigenous resistance and liberation.⁴ Their “Declaration of Quito” (reprinted here) was followed by detailed resolutions on the rights of women, self-determination, education, culture, religion, communication, and territorial rights.

After the 1990 Quito conference, many Indigenous leaders returned to a focus on local struggles. A decade later, activists once again gathered at the First Indigenous Continental Summit at Teotihuacan, Mexico. Delegates from thirty-six organizations signed the Declaration of Teotihuacan, which condemned the economic policies of international lending agencies that benefited wealthy elites while increasing levels of dependence, oppression, and poverty for Indigenous peoples.⁵ The Teotihuacan summit launched a decade of increased transnational organizing efforts, including a series of continent-wide summits. In 2004, the Declaration of *Kito* (so named for the Kichwa spelling of the host city of Quito) at the Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of *Abya Yala* once again denounced economic policies that privatized public resources and disregarded collective rights to land.⁶

Thousands of Indigenous peoples from twenty-four countries gathered in Guatemala in 2007 for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of *Abya Yala*. The summit was entitled “From Resistance to Power,” reflecting interest in moving beyond resistance to oppressive regimes in order to claim positions of power in government. Evo Morales’s recent election to the presidency in Bolivia inspired many Indigenous activists to explore similar paths to challenge state power in their own countries. The

summit concluded with a rally in Guatemala City’s main plaza and the reading of the “Declaration of Iximche” (the second document in this chapter) that called for a continued struggle for social justice and against *neoliberalism* and all forms of oppression.⁷ Activists subsequently gathered in a continental summit in Peru in 2009, as well as at other venues including the World Social Forum, that brought together social movement activists around the slogan of “Another World Is Possible.”⁸ Not only did that world need to include Indigenous peoples, but previously marginalized and excluded peoples increasingly took the lead in defining a new world without exploitation and social injustices.

The rise of international Indigenous organizing efforts challenged and pushed governments in new directions. Rather than responding to the initiatives of outsiders, Indigenous peoples increasingly set their own agendas. They used new technologies, including the Internet, to advance their concerns. Leaders blended economic, political, and cultural demands into a unified whole that presented a new and more inclusive way of viewing the world.

Questions to Consider:

1. Reading through the documents that follow, how did Indigenous demands evolve over time? What new issues emerged, which ones disappeared, and what remained the same?
2. How did the use of rhetoric change between these two documents, particularly in the use of Indigenous words and dating? What does this language say about the politicization of Indigenous struggles and how history was used as a tool to present a particular version of Indigenous history and identity?

⁴Elizabeth Bobsy Draper, “Minga in Ecuador,” *Z Magazine* (December 1990): 33–38.

⁵Declaration of Teotihuacan, <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/ctic1.php>.

⁶Kito Declaration, http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/kit0_en.php. “Abya Yala” means “Continent of Life” in the language of the Kuna peoples of Panama and Colombia. Indigenous activists commonly use this term to refer to the Americas.

⁷Marc Becket, “Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala: From Resistance to Power,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2008): 85–107.

⁸The Mama Quta Titikaka Declaration, <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/titikaka.php>; Declaration of Indigenous Peoples at the World Social Forum, http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/caoiwsf09_en.php.



Indigenous peoples from across the Americas joined a march at the conclusion of the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala in Guatemala City in 2007 that is presented in the second document in this chapter. What do "Indigenous" peoples look like in this photograph, and how do they dress? What do their appearances suggest about both the unity and variety of peoples involved in international Indigenous organizations? Can you see parallels between the images in this photograph and the declaration that resulted from the meeting?

Source: Photo by Marc Becker.

3. Did these documents make primarily economic or cultural demands? What was the significance placed on different types of concerns in each document?
4. What is the value of creating international Indigenous organizations? What evidence can you find in these documents of concrete advancements on Indigenous concerns as a result of these organizing efforts?
5. How were local, regional, and global concerns reflected in these documents? What does the balance between these different levels of social protest tell us about the nature of these organizing efforts?

Indigenous Alliance of the Americas on 500 Years of Resistance: Declaration of Quito, Ecuador, July 1990⁹

The Continental Gathering "500 Years of Indian Resistance," with representatives from 120 Indian Nations, International and Fraternal organizations, meeting in Quito, July 17–20, 1990, declare before the world the following:

The Indians of America have never abandoned our constant struggle against the conditions of oppression, discrimination and exploitation which were imposed upon us as a result of the European invasion of our ancestral territories.

Our struggle is not a mere conjunctural reflection of the memory of 500 years of oppression which the invaders, in complicity with the "democratic" governments of our countries, want to turn into events of jubilation and celebration. Our Indian People, Nations and Nationalities are basing our struggle on our identity, which shall lead us to true liberation. We are responding aggressively, and commit ourselves to reject this "celebration."

The struggle of our People has acquired a new quality in recent times. This struggle is less isolated and more organized. We are now completely conscious that our total liberation can only be expressed through the complete exercise of our self-determination. Our unity is based on this fundamental right. Our self-determination is not just a simple declaration.

We must guarantee the necessary conditions that permit complete exercise of our self-determination; and this, in turn must be expressed as complete *autonomy* for our Peoples. Without Indian self-government and without control of our territories, there can be no *autonomy*.

The achievement of this objective is a principal task for Indian Peoples. Through our struggles, however, we have learned that our problems are not different, in many respects, from those of other popular sectors. We are convinced that we must march alongside the peasants, the workers, the marginalized sectors, together with intellectuals committed to our

cause, in order to destroy the dominant system of oppression and construct a new society, pluralistic, democratic and humane, in which peace is guaranteed.

The existing nation states of the Americas, their constitutions and fundamental laws are judicial/political expressions that negate our socio-economic, cultural and political rights.

From this point in our general strategy of struggle, we consider it to be a priority that we demand complete structural change, change which recognizes the inherent right to self-determination through Indians' own governments and through the control of our territories.

Our problems will not be resolved through the self-serving politics of governmental entities which seek integration and ethno-development.¹⁰ It is necessary to have an integral transformation at the level of the state and national society, that is to say, the creation of a new nation.

In this Gathering it has been clear that territorial rights are a fundamental demand of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas.

Based on these aforementioned reflections, the organizations united in the First Continental Gathering of Indigenous Peoples reaffirm:

1. Our emphatic rejection of the Quincentennial celebration, and the firm promise that we will turn that date into an occasion to strengthen our process of continental unity and struggle towards our liberation.¹¹
2. Ratify our resolute political project of self-determination and conquest of our *autonomy*, in the framework of nation states, under a new popular order, respecting the appellation which each People determines for their struggle and project.

¹⁰The Spanish and United States governments were planning large celebrations for the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's October 12, 1492, arrival in the Americas.

¹¹Government policies often accepted Indigenous peoples only if they integrated into the dominant population or remained an exotic curiosity that could be marketed for tourist purposes.

⁹Source: Declaration of Quito, <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/quincentennial/quito.php>.

3. Affirm our decision to defend our culture, education, and religion as fundamental to our identity as Peoples, reclaiming and maintaining our own forms of spiritual life and communal coexistence, in an intimate relationship with our Mother Earth.
4. We reject the manipulation of organizations which are linked to the dominant sectors of society and have no Indigenous representation, who usurp our name for (their own) imperialist interests.¹² At the same time, we affirm our choice to strengthen our own organizations, without excluding or isolating ourselves from other popular struggles.
5. We recognize the important role that Indigenous women play in the struggles of our Peoples. We understand the necessity to expand women's participation in our organizations and we reaffirm that it is one struggle, men and women together, in our liberation process, and a key question in our political practices.
6. We Indian Peoples consider it vital to defend and conserve our natural resources, which right now are being attacked by transnational corporations. We are convinced that this defense will be realized if it is Indian People who administer and control the territories where we live, according to our own principles of organization and communal life.
7. We oppose national judicial structures which are the result of the process of colonization and neo-colonization. We seek a New Social Order that embraces our traditional exercise of Common Law, an expression of our culture and forms of organization. We demand that we be recognized as Peoples under International Law, and that this recognition be incorporated into the respective Nation States.
8. We denounce the victimization of Indian People through violence and persecution, which constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. We demand respect for our right to life, to land, to free organization and expression of our culture. At the same time we demand the release of our leaders who are held as political prisoners, an end to repression, and restitution for the harms caused us.

¹²*Indigenistas* were urban, educated, white outsiders who created policies toward Indigenous peoples, but often with little contact or history with Indigenous communities. Now, Indigenous organizations argued that they should represent their own interests to the government.

Declaration of Iximche': III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Peoples of Abya Yala "From Resistance to Power" March 26–30, 2007 Iximche', Guatemala¹³

We the children of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of the continent, self convened and gathered at the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Peoples of Abya Yala realized in Iximche', Guatemala the days of Oxlajuj Aq'abal, thirteen powers of the Spirit of the Dawn (26th of March) to Kajf Kej, four powers of the Spirit of the Deer (30th of March, 2007):¹⁴

We hereby affirm the Declaration of Teotihuacan (Mexico, 2000), the Declaration of Kito (Ecuador, 2004) and ratify our millennial principles of complementarity, reciprocity, and duality,¹⁵ as well as the struggle for our territories in order to preserve our Mother Nature and the *autonomy* and self-determination of our Indigenous Peoples. We

¹³Source: Declaration of Iximche', <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/iximche.php>.

¹⁴Iximche' is a Kaqchikel Maya ceremonial site located in the highlands two hours from the capital city. Giving the date in the Maya calendar reflects an affirmation of their long cultural history.

¹⁵Complementarity, reciprocity, and duality are common Indigenous values that represent the division of society along different lines, including gender, but that need to work together to function properly.

announce the continental resurgence of the Pachacutic (the return) along with the closure of *Oxlañuj Baq'tun* (long count of 5,200 years) and as we approach the door of the new Baq'tun, we journey together to make of Abya Yala a "land full of life."¹⁶

We have survived centuries of colonization and now face the imposition of the policies of *neoliberalism* that perpetuate the dispossession and sacking of our territories, the domination of all of social space and ways of life of the Indigenous Peoples, causing the degradation of our Mother Nature as well as poverty and migration by way of the systematic intervention in the sovereignty of our Nations by transnational companies in complicity with the government states.

In Preparation to Face and Confront the Challenges of the New Times Upon Us, We Now Determine

To commit to the process of alliance among our Indigenous nations, and among our Indigenous nations and the movements for social justice of the continent that would allow us to collectively confront the policies of *neoliberalism* and all forms of oppression.

To make accountable the government states for the ongoing dispossession of our territories and the extinction of the Indigenous peoples of the continent, due to impunity for the transnational corporations and their genocidal practices, as well as the lack of political will on the part of the United Nations in not advancing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and failure to guarantee the full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To ratify the ancestral and historical rights to our territories and the common resources of Mother Nature, reaffirming the inalienable character of these rights as being non-negotiable, unquantifiable, without impediment, and unrenounceable even to the cost of our lives.

To consolidate the processes now in effect to strengthen the re-foundation of the government

states and the construction of pluri-national states and pluricultural societies via Constituent Assemblies with direct representation of the Indigenous Peoples and Nations.

To advance in the exercise of our right of *autonomy* and self determination as Indigenous Peoples, in spite of the lack of legal recognition by the government states.

To ratify our rejection of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) that make vulnerable the sovereignty of our Peoples and to remain vigilant against similar intentions to implement new commercial agreements.

To reaffirm our decision to defend the nutritional sovereignty and struggle against the trans-genetic invasion, convoking all peoples of the world to join this struggle in order to guarantee our future.¹⁷

To ratify the struggle for the democratization of communication and the implementation of public policies that contemplate specific applications for Indigenous peoples and the promotion of interculturality.

To alert the Indigenous peoples regarding the policies of the Inter American Development Bank, the World Bank and organizations of the like that penetrate our communities with actions of assistance and cooptation whose aim is the fragmentation of autonomous and legitimate Indigenous organizations.

For the Well Being of the Indigenous Peoples, We Now Decide

To demand of the international financial institutions and the government states the cancellation of policies that promote concessions for the extractive industries (mining, oil, forestry, natural gas and water) from our Indigenous territories.

To condemn the policies of exclusion of President Bush and the government of the United States demonstrated in the act of construction of the wall

¹⁶The statement combines cosmologies from across the Americas, bridging Andean (Pachacutic) and Mesoamerican (Baq'tun) notions of the closing of a cycle in order to return to a better future.

¹⁷Nutritional or food sovereignty is the right of people to feed themselves, something that is often challenged by genetically modified seeds that undermine traditional agricultural practices in order to ensure the profits of agrobusiness corporate giants such as Cargill, Monsanto, and Archer Daniels Midland (ADM).

along the border with Mexico while at the same time attempting to expropriate the common resources of our Mother Nature of all the peoples of Abya Yala by implementing expansionist plans and acts of war.

To condemn the intolerant attitude of the government states that do not recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples, in particular those which have not ratified nor guaranteed the application of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.¹⁸

To condemn the imposter and terrorist democracies implemented by the *neoliberal* governments, which results in the militarization of our Indigenous territories and the criminalization of our legitimate Indigenous struggle and the movements for social justice throughout Abya Yala.

In Order to Enact these Words and Realize Our Dreams, From Resistance to Power

We constitute ourselves as the **Continental Coordinator of Indigenous Peoples and Nations of Abya Yala**, creating a permanent vehicle of linkage and interchange, in order to converge our experiences and proposals, so that together we can confront the *neoliberal* policies of globalization and to struggle for the definitive liberation of our Indigenous Peoples and Nations, of the mother earth, of our territories, of the waters, and entirety of our natural patrimony in order that we may all live well.

In This Process We Delineated the Following Actions

To fortify the organizational processes and struggle of the Indigenous Peoples with the full participation of our women, children and young people.

To convene a Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala and a Continental Summit of the Children, Adolescents and Youth of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of Abya Yala.

To convoke a continental mobilization of Indigenous Peoples to save Mother Nature from the disasters caused by capitalism, manifested by global warming, to be realized on the 12th of October of 2007.

To engage actively the diplomatic mission of the Indigenous Peoples to defend and to guarantee the rights of our Indigenous Peoples and Nations.

To endorse the candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize of our brother Evo Morales Ayma, President of Bolivia.

To demand the decriminalization of the coca leaf.

"We have dreamt our past and we remember our future."

Iximche', Guatemala, March 30, 2007.

Suggested Sources:

Recent Indigenous movements have received a large amount of scholarly attention. A good overview by a leading scholar in the field is Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). Donna Lee Van Cott discusses Indigenous engagement with electoral politics in *Radical Democracy in the Andes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc present an excellent collection of essays in *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2004). Also see Kay B. Warren and Jean E. Jackson, ed., *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); and Erick D. Langer and Elena Muñoz, ed., *Contemporary Indigenous Movements in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003).

Columbus Didn't Discover Us: Native People's Perspectives on the Columbus Quincentennial (1992) is a report on the 1990 Quito conference, and it explains Indigenous opposition to the quincentennial. Several recent films portray Indigenous struggles, particularly against mining and resource extraction

¹⁸The ILO is a United Nations agency that promotes of social justice and internationally recognized human and labor rights.

that often has the strongest negative impact on marginalized peoples. In particular, see *Choropampa: The Price of Gold* (Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films, 2000), *Tambogrande: Mangos, Murder, and Mining* (Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films, 2007), *Ecuador: Divided Over Oil* (Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2004), and *Sipakapa Is Not for Sale* (Guatemala: Caracol Producciones, 2006).

NativeWeb (<http://www.nativeweb.org/>) is the premier Web site on Indigenous peoples around the world. It includes a resource database with links to the best Web sites on Indigenous movements, including Web sites created by Indigenous organizations. One of main Web sites on continental

Indigenous organizing in the Americas is that of the Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations (<http://www.cumbrecontinentalindigena.org/>). NativeWeb also has a database of statements, declarations, and manifestos from Indigenous organizing efforts (http://www.nativeweb.org/resources/materials_hosted_on_nativeweb/). The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (<http://www.iwgia.org/>), Cultural Survival (<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/>), and Survival International (<http://www.survival-international.org/>) all have organizational Web pages. The United Nations has many of its documents online, including those from its Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>).