

To the International Community and the Diplomatic Corps in Guatemala

The undersigned Indigenous leaders and organizations express our concern regarding the granting of extractive industry and hydroelectric dam concessions in indigenous territory in Guatemala without the due free, prior and informed consultation and consent process.

Indigenous Peoples have demonstrated sustainable stewardship of the land for thousands of years. The spirits of our ancestors inhabit the sacred hills, rivers and mountains. We are Ra'al Ch'och', sons and daughters of the Earth who, as a loving mother, gives us nourishment and protects us. She is who we ask for permission before sowing our seeds, fishing, or hunting an animal to feed ourselves. She is who we thank for our harvests, for wood, and for all that we need to live. In this critical global moment in which climate change presents an imminent threat, we need ancestral wisdom to know how to live with nature in a way that does not deplete future generations' resources. As Indigenous Peoples, we have the right to freely choose the economic and political model for our communities, we have the right to freely decide what kind of development projects to implement in our ancestral territories.

Throughout the world, the implementation of an exclusionary economic development model that exploits natural resources at the expense of local communities has resulted in social conflict, greater inequality, and the forced displacement (migration) due to poverty. We have seen again and again that, in a national context of weak environmental regulations and corrupt state institutions, corporate actions result in violence and environmental degradation.

Community consultations are an ancestral practice carried out according to the customs and traditions of each people. Indigenous Peoples have consulted for centuries through a fundamentally democratic process that seeks consensus and community participation for holistic community well-being and the common good of future generations. These ancestral practices do not need state intervention, but rather should be respected by governments and other institutions.

Likewise, ILO Convention 169, and other international legal tools that protect Indigenous rights, indicate the obligation of States to carry out good faith consultations and obtain free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before a license to exploit natural resources is granted or any other administrative measure that affects the life and territory of First Peoples. The government of Guatemala has repeatedly failed to meet this international commitment. The Congress of the Republic of Guatemala is currently considering legislative proposals to regulate the consultation of Indigenous Peoples as a means of facilitating access and providing guarantees to corporations. We reject the attempts to restrict Indigenous Peoples' rights to free-determination, consultation and consent.

Due to the aforementioned, the undersigned indigenous organizations:

Demand respect for Indigenous Peoples' right to make decisions about our territories and the future of our communities.

Demand that the Guatemalan government recognize the way of life and the forms of decision making of different Peoples and in different Indigenous territories. It is not possible to regulate community consultations without hindering and radically changing the forms and practices that we have undertaken for thousands of years.

Call on the United States government to respect the international conventions, declarations and guidelines that protect the environment and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as adopted international human rights commitments.

Ask the rest of the diplomatic corps in Guatemala, that you continue to ensure the respect for Indigenous Peoples' rights, particularly the rights to free, prior, and informed consultation and consent according to the international parameters on this subject.

We call on the Peoples of the world to stand in solidarity with the struggles fought by our Indigenous brothers and sisters around the world for the protection and defense of their territories. We must come together to protect biodiversity and life from the greed of extractive corporations that put all living things at risk.

Guatemala, November 2018