

FROM RESISTANCE TO VICTORY: LESSONS FROM GUATEMALAN MOVEMENTS



NISGUA

Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala



“We Are Not Afraid Anymore”—Memory and Resistance

AJR shows how memory, spirit, and organized resistance can confront injustice—and win. Their voices remind us: when we organize, we are powerful.

📸 10th anniversary of the genocide verdict. San Gaspar, Chajul. Photo by NISGUA, May 10, 2023.

A People United—How the Xinka Stopped a Mining Giant

Through ancestral leadership and deep organizing, the Xinka people stopped a powerful mining project—proof that collective action works.

📸 Xinka leaders present consultation results. Photo by [Prensa Comunitaria](#). Guatemala City, May 8, 2025



Territorial Defense Rooted in Faith and Community

CODIDENA empowers Xinka communities through grassroots education and youth leadership—showing how faith-based organizing can be a force for environmental and Indigenous justice.

📸 Young community scientists monitor the Las Flores River in Santa Rosa to raise awareness about water conservation. Photo by [Colectivo Anpük](#), May 2023.



In a time of global uncertainty, we draw inspiration from our Guatemalan partners—grassroots organizations and Indigenous communities who have resisted colonialism, militarism, and extractivism for generations. **Through deep-rooted organizing, collective vision, and courageous action, they’ve achieved victories once thought impossible.** For decades, NISGUA has accompanied these resistances, standing in solidarity through moments of grief, challenge, and triumph. **Their ongoing work shows us that with collective action, meaningful change is not only possible—it’s already happening.**

"WE ARE NOT AFRAID ANYMORE"— MEMORY AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

In times of repression and criminalization in both Guatemala and the United States, learning the diverse stories of those who have faced State violence is itself an act of resistance.



AJR women march with unbreakable dignity to honor the victims of Guatemala's Internal Armed Conflict. Photo by NISGUA, February 25, 2025.

NO MORE FEAR: WOMEN RAISING THEIR VOICES

Doña Romelia, survivor of the genocide in Guatemala and board member of the Association for Justice and Reconciliation, which seeks justice for war crimes, shares with us that **silence is not an option in the face of injustice**. She explains how to **draw strength from spiritual practices**, honoring the lives of those who have preceded us in the struggle.

"As women survivors of the Armed Conflict, we are no longer afraid. We must speak out, say what happened to us, everything we suffered at the hands of the Guatemalan army. We must never stop denouncing the massacres, torture, sexual violence, and forced disappearances. We were persecuted in the mountains, and here we are, still resisting, fighting so that these atrocities are never repeated."

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE

Maya ceremonies also form a core part of the struggle, rooted in ancestral traditions that honor the elements—air, sun, moon, stars, night, and day—and the natural world present in every community. The spirits of those who were taken remain close, offering protection and strength.

Holding ceremonies is a way to stay connected, to ask for health, clarity, and protection in assemblies, protests, court hearings, and commemorations. **It is both a daily practice and a political act, woven into every step of resistance.**



Altar in Nebaj honoring those who died seeking truth and justice, on the 12th anniversary of the genocide verdict. Photo by NISGUA, May 10, 2025.

Today, Doña Romelia sees history repeating itself. Violence is returning with force in Guatemala, and those who seek peace and justice are being criminalized. In this context, she **calls on us to stand in solidarity—accompany those under attack, raise our voices, denounce injustice, issue statements, hold press conferences, and speak out publicly.**

A PEOPLE UNITED— HOW THE XINKA STOPPED A MINING GIANT

LAND, IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

Since 2011, the Indigenous Xinka People have opposed the El Escobal silver mine, which was installed in the territory without the consent of the Xinka people, violating their rights as Indigenous people.

After more than thirteen years, with demonstrations and sit-ins, they managed to get the State to recognize their rights and the Constitutional Court ordered a **consultation with the communities affected by the mine**. They did not consent for the mine to operate.

They are now awaiting the State's response to the PAPXIGUA process. If their will is respected, it would mean that one of Canada's most powerful companies, Pan American Silver, would have to leave the territory.

In addition to the community consultation, they were able to **suspend mine operations until the will of the Xinka people is taken into account**. This process has been achieved because thousands of families have participated in the resistance in Casillas, the peaceful demonstrations, and the consultation processes.

This struggle involves children, youth, wives, husbands, grandmothers and grandfathers.



Hundreds of Xinka marched in the capital urging the Court to rule on their right to consultation, denied by the mining company claiming they're not Indigenous. Photo by CPR.Urbana, April 10, 2018.

The Parliament of the Xinka People (PAPXIGUA), formed in 2004, is made up of a Board of Directors for the Parliament itself, a technical team, commissions (of land, women, youth, and education and spirituality) and community boards of directors in 24 municipalities in the departments of Santa Rosa, Jalapa and Jutiapa.



Press conference and march of the Xinka People marking the presentation of the community consultation results. Photo by NISGUA, May 8, 2025.

LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

The Indigenous Ancestral Authorities that make up the PAPXIGUA are **respected leaders in their communities**, many of them involved with the Catholic Church, others leading processes to recover their territory and culture.

The strength and unity of PAPXIGUA gave them the confidence to lead the 106-day National Strike for Democracy in 2023, together with other ancestral authorities. The strike successfully stopped a coup in Guatemala. **PAPXIGUA was able to maintain a peaceful encampment in their territory and in the capital city because of the community behind this organization.**

The Ancestral Authorities that make up the Parliament lead the work of **affirming their identity and claiming their rights to the ancestral territory of the Xinka people**, actions that have earned them great respect among the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala.

TERRITORIAL DEFENSE ROOTED IN FAITH AND COMMUNITY

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE & ACCOMPANIMENT

CODIDENA has a team of ten specialists in environmental issues and grassroots organizing. They know the territory very well, as they are originally from the region and are part of the local communities—most of whom belong to the Indigenous Xinka People and have a profound connection to the care of Mother Earth and water.

Amalia Lemus, technical staff member at CODIDENA, shared what they do:

In 2010, Monsignor Bernabé and Father Juan Manuel Arija founded the Diocesan Commission for the Defense of Nature—CODIDENA, an organization of the Catholic Church focused on working with Indigenous communities in the department of Santa Rosa to defend Mother Earth.

"We offer training in environmental issues, forest nurseries, water monitoring, human rights, civic engagement, and advocacy. We also support conflict resolution, inter-institutional dialogue, and provide consultancies on institutional responsibilities, waste management, and forest use. Additionally, we help communities secure funding to preserve forest reserves in their territories."



Community members and youth science groups took part in water quality monitoring in November 2022. Photo by Colectivo Anpük, May 2023.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN DEFENSE OF LAND AND WATER

Much of their work centers on **grassroots education, especially with local youth**. This has helped strengthen the community and empower members to defend their Indigenous culture and territory.

CODIDENA formed a group of **young community scientists, the "Tekuanes"**, who are equipped with specialized tools to **measure and monitor water pollution** caused by mining and share data to inform and protect the population.

REVIVING INDIGENOUS XINKA IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURE

They have also focused on **preserving culture and recovering the identity of the Indigenous Xinka People**, once again placing their trust in youth.

Organized as the community communications collective, "Colectivo Anpük", they have created **processes to recover the Xinka language, traditions, stories and legends**. In so doing, they have become a reliable communicator to learn what is happening in the territory.

CODIDENA's journey shows that community education and training in environmental and cultural issues are fundamental tools to confront extractive companies and capitalist interests. Learning from their path can strengthen our own.