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**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Indigenous Documents Related to the Quincentenary

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8r27f843>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 17(1)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

1993

**DOI**

10.17953

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# Documents Related to the Quincentenary

COMPILED BY CHARLES R. HALE

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## CONTINENTAL INDIGENOUS ALLIANCE "500 YEARS OF RESISTANCE"

### DECLARATION OF QUITO 21 JULY 1990\*

The Continental Meeting "500 Years of Indian Resistance" with representatives of 120 Indian Nations, International Organizations, and Fraternal Organizations, meeting in Quito July 17-21, 1990, declare before the world the following:

We, the Indians of America, have never abandoned our constant struggle against the conditions of oppression, discrimination, and exploitation that have been imposed upon us since the European invasion of our ancestral lands.

Our struggle is not merely a reaction to the commemoration of 500 years of oppression, which our invaders, in collaboration with the "democratic" governments of our countries, want to convert

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\* This is an unofficial translation of the Spanish language document, published by NAMUR Press (Quito, Ecuador), under the supervision of José Almedia (CONAIE), Mecho Calderón (ECUARUANRI), and Víctor Hugo Jijón (CDDH).

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into acts of celebration and jubilation. Indian peoples, nationalities, and nations are providing a combative and committed response to reject this "celebration," based on our identity, which should lead us to a definitive liberation.

The struggle of our people has acquired a new quality of late. This struggle is every day less isolated and more organized. Now we are fully aware that our final liberation can only be expressed as a full exercise of our self-determination. Our unity is based on this fundamental right. Our self-determination is not simply a statement.

We should guarantee the necessary conditions to permit its full realization; and this should be expressed, in its turn, as clear autonomy for our people. Without Indian self-government and without control of our territories, autonomy cannot exist.

To achieve this objective is principally the task of the Indian peoples. Nevertheless, by means of our struggles, we have learned that our problems are not distinct in many respects to those of other popular sectors. For this reason, we are convinced that we need to progress together with the peasants, the workers, the marginal sectors, and intellectuals committed to our cause, in order to destroy the dominant and oppressive system and construct a new society that is pluralist, democratic, and humane, in which peace is guaranteed.

In the present nation-states of our continent, the constitutions and fundamental laws are legal-political expressions that deny our socioeconomic, cultural, and political rights.

Therefore, in our general strategy for struggle, we consider it a priority to demand basic modifications that permit the full exercise of self-determination by means of governments of the Indian peoples themselves and control of our territories.

Integrationist policies, ethnodevelopment, and other practices applied by government entities are not acceptable. Through this route, our problems will not be resolved. An integral and fundamental transformation of the state and national society is necessary; that is to say, the creation of a new nation.

In this meeting it has remained clear that the right to territory is a fundamental demand of the indigenous peoples of the continent. Nevertheless, this right cannot come about if the rights to territory are not guaranteed.

Based on the above reflections, the reunited organizations of the First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples reaffirm:

1. Our complete rejection of the celebration of the Quincentenary, and the firm commitment to convert this date into an occasion to strengthen our process of unity and the continental struggle towards our liberation.
2. The ratification of our unwavering political project for self-determination and achievement of our autonomy, in the frame of the nation-states, under a new popular order, respecting the denomination with which each people determines its fight and project.
3. The affirmation of our decision to defend our culture, education, and religion as fundamental bases of our identity as peoples, recovering and maintaining our own forms of spiritual life and communal living, in intimate relation with our mother nature.
4. The rejection of the manipulation of organizations without indigenous representatives that usurp our name in favor of interests that are imperialist and linked to the dominant sectors of our societies; at the same time, we affirm our will to fortify our own organizations, without exclusions or isolation from other popular struggles.
5. Our recognition of the important role played by the indigenous woman in the struggles of our peoples. We understand the necessity of increasing the participation of the woman in our organizations, and we reaffirm the joint struggle of men and women in our process of liberation, a key issue in our political practice.
6. We, the Indian peoples, consider the defense and conservation of our natural resources, presently under attack by transnational companies, to be vital. We are convinced that the defense will only be real if Indian peoples themselves administer and control the territories that they inhabit, by their own principles, forms of organization, and communal life.

7. We contest the legal standards of the nations that are the fruit of colonial and neocolonial processes. We are seeking a New Social Order that would protect our traditional exercise of Customary Rights, which is an expression of our culture and forms of organization. We demand recognition as peoples according to the standards of International Rights, an issue that we request be included in the policies of respective nation-states.

8. We denounce those who make Indian peoples the victims of violence and persecution, all of which constitutes a flagrant violation of our human rights. We therefore demand respect for our right to life, to land, and to the free organization and expression of our culture. At the same time, we demand the release of all of our political leaders, the end of the repression, and indemnity for all the harm caused.

The Indian Organizations participating in this First Continental Meeting of Indian Peoples want to demonstrate our recognition and gratitude to the Ecuadoran sister organizations for their efforts toward the success of this important event. We want to express our solidarity with the struggle of the Ecuadoran indigenous peoples for liberty and democracy.

Our actions, for this reason, should be oriented towards strengthening our grassroots organizations and achieving better levels of coordination and communication with all the popular sectors.

The continental campaign, 500 Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance, should be empowered with the participation of all of our organizations so that we will succeed in constituting ourselves as an alternative force. The answer to 1492 should be unity and mobilization.

Our campaign should articulate itself firmly with the principle of solidarity with all the struggles for liberation of the peoples and should work for multilateral relations at the international level.

TEXT OF THE FINAL DECLARATION OF XELAJU\*  
11 OCTOBER 1991

At a time when the most complex political changes are affecting the world as a whole; when accelerated changes are underway in Eastern Europe; when the horrified world watches on television attempts at a new world war with chemical and nuclear arms and a coup d'état within one of the world's most powerful countries; when the United States, enthroned as the world's superpower, implements an "Initiative of the Americas," adding another link in the long chain of oppressive policies affecting Latin America; when cholera, a disease from the middle ages, presently kills thousands of Latin Americans in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Central America because the right to health is superseded by the interest demands of an unpayable foreign debt; when the relationship of imperialist forces is redefined and expressed in the creation of new power blocs, and new confrontations result from the redistribution of the world; when Europe, by way of its spokesperson, Spain, comes to our America to speak to us in Guadalajara of an Ibero-American integration bearing neocolonial trappings; when the East-West conflict has disappeared and the Empire shifts the conflict toward the South, we are faced by oppression and death in all their magnitude.

We, indigenous, black and grassroots groups of America, gathered together in the Second Continental Encounter of Indigenous, Black and Peoples' Resistance, held between October 7 and 12, 1991, in Xelaju, Guatemala, the melting pot of Mayan resistance and culture, with the fraternity and respect inherited from our ancestors; and with the firm commitment we acquired with the launching of this campaign two years ago in Bogota, Colombia, have advanced in our reflections regarding:

1. The European and Euro-North American invasion of our continent during these 499 years of colonialism, neocolonialism and evangelization.

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\* "Xelaju" is the indigenous name for Quetzaltenango, the Guatemalan city in which the second Encounter was held.

Excerpts from the compilation of documents titled *Continental Campaign, 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance*. Written and published by the Operative Secretary of the Continental Campaign (Guatemala, November 1991). Excerpts selected by Charles R. Hale.

2. The meaning, use, and value that the life-giving Earth holds for us, as indigenous, black and grassroots groups, and the defense of the ecology and our natural resources.
3. The role of women as generators of life and tireless seekers of liberty.
4. The need for a protagonist role for our youth, rooted in the rescue of culture and the construction of their own identity.
5. We have moved forward in the reflection and the reaffirmation of our struggle for a real democracy throughout the continent, based on the multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural diversity to lead us to the creation of States that bear this same character within the new America yet to be constructed.
6. The reflection regarding the defense of human rights and the rights of indigenous and black peoples in particular.
7. We also moved forward in our collective condemnation of colonialism and neocolonialism, 21 rejecting all celebrations or commemorations that aim to recognize or justify them; at the same time, we revindicate the struggle for our emancipation and self-determination.
8. We have deepened our reflection regarding the unity of indigenous, black and grassroots organizations, defining a general approach toward our political activities in the short-, medium- and long-term, particularly for the year 1992.

Based on the above-mentioned reflections:

WE AGREE TO:

1. Reaffirm and ratify the accords of Bogota, where our campaign began.
2. Reaffirm the broad-based and democratic character of the campaign and its future encounters, as opportunities for reflection and participation, that seek to generate and strengthen efforts at unifying the indigenous, black and grassroots groups throughout the continent. In this sense we believe that it is valid for the diverse

social groups to have their own dynamic within the continental campaign. In keeping with this line of thinking, we validate and ratify the Encounter of Indigenous Peoples which took place July 17–21, 1990, in Quito, Ecuador, as a dynamic we should continue supporting, and we encourage and support this type of initiative from any of the other social sectors participating in the campaign.

3. We declare the year 1992 as the International Year of Indigenous, Black, and Peoples' Resistance.

WE PROPOSE:

1. To strongly oppose the 500th Columbus Day Anniversary, presenting as part of our activities alternative protests in accordance with the interests of our peoples.
2. To strengthen the solidarity of the grassroots organizations with the indigenous peoples.
3. To develop in 1992 the following national-level activities with continent-wide coordination:
  - March 8, International Women's Day.
  - May 1, International Workers' Day.
  - October 7–12, the Third Continental Encounter of the Campaign for 500 Years of Indigenous, Black, and Grassroots Resistance, in Nicaragua. Coinciding with the Encounter will be a continent-wide general strike.
4. To take on the struggle of political prisoners throughout the continent, particularly supporting Leonard Peltier, who is facing two life sentences in the United States.
5. To nominate Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchu for the Nobel Peace Prize, for her ardent struggle in favor of Indian Rights and Human Rights, both in her country and throughout the continent.
6. To call the campaign from this year forward, "500 Years of Indigenous, Black, and People's Resistance."



AFTER THE 500 YEARS:  
INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLES'  
UNITY PROPOSALS FOR POLITICAL ACTION

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The Continental Campaign "500 YEARS OF INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLES' RESISTANCE" seeks to articulate a process that generates an ample, pluralistic, multiethnic and democratic movement of the people (popular sectors) of the continent, so that through a common effort we engage in struggles aimed at reclaiming the rights that have belonged to our people both historically and morally. These are struggles that through unity will have as their goal the liberation of our people.

Our struggle is not a racial one, rather one of indigenous and popular sectors working against systems of domination, and national and international imperialist exploitation.

We maintain a broad and pluralistic character that struggles for real Agrarian Reform in the countries of the continent, for Human Rights, for a new international economic order without social inequality, for the preservation of ecological balance in our countries and against the payment of Foreign Debt.

We work towards unifying the efforts and struggles of indigenous peoples, peasants (campesinos), workers, intellectuals, popular and progressive sectors, to reclaim the legitimate rights of our people. Until we obtain a true and legitimate democracy, in the framework of true representation in which all come together in full spirit of integration, the popular sectors should be the ones to make decisions and resolve the problems affecting them, but also must go beyond the characteristics or concerns specific to our communities.

The Continental Campaign "500 YEARS OF INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLES' RESISTANCE" exists on behalf of the indigenous who were almost completely exterminated and the millions of black Africans who were hunted down, pulled from their lands, and brought by force to America. It exists on behalf of the displaced, the tortured, and the disappeared, of the heroes and martyrs, of the peasants without land, of those cruelly kept in

misery, of the children without schools or access to health care, of the women who are victims of inhumane exploitation, of the indigenous, blacks and mestizos who lack the right to social participation.

We demand a more just order, where the entire population has the right to all social benefits. These benefits are: land and community, education, health care, fair salaries for work, participation in the decisions of their country and social equality. Without these basic rights, we cannot speak of Human Rights.

The economic and social situation of our American countries imposes upon us the undeniable need to unite in order to seek our own solutions to our problems. For that reason, the struggle against all manifestations of colonialism and neocolonialism will be present in our actions, in this Continental Campaign of Indigenous and Peoples' Resistance. Blatant cases of colonialism, such as in Puerto Rico, Panamá, and Belize must be a primary focus of our struggle until independence is obtained. Basic to this first phase of the campaign, up until October of 1992, should be the struggle to establish a new international social and economic order that is more just; the struggle to put an end to the unequal exchange, and for the disappearance of political, economic, military and cultural domination of United States imperialism and other economic powers.

#### GENERAL OBJECTIVES:

1. To promote, with concrete actions, governments to act on our political demand for the promulgation, enforcement and supervision of laws with the participation of native peoples (pueblos originarios) and other grassroots groups, to recover legitimate rights regarding our lands and other cultural and material values.
2. To eradicate, through concrete actions, all vestiges of colonialism. To eradicate neocolonialism, launching a battle for true and definitive independence. To recognize national plurality and consolidate within this reality, sovereignty and democracy for our people, to have real self-determination. This is necessary due to the economic, political and cultural dependence in which our people have lived for centuries, due to the unequal exchanges to which we have been subjected and due to the enormous Foreign

Debt that the Governments have contracted, to the detriment our people. We reaffirm that the foreign debt is one of the principal obstacles to the growth and stability of our economies, and a fundamental factor that impedes economic development, with obvious political implications.

3. To stimulate and promote the egalitarian participation of women in all spheres of political, economic and social life. To recognize their specific rights as participants in the transformation of our societies.
4. To deepen the struggle against all forms of discrimination, be it based on sex or race. To seek solidarity and unity among the people of the continent, recognizing the multicultural and ethnic diversity among us.
5. To promote through concrete actions, the just rights of women and youth. This objective should be central to our work, because a real transformation of the current situation cannot be achieved without the active participation of youth and of women.
6. To continue the struggle to strengthen a coordinated movement at the national, regional and continental levels, among native peoples, mestizos, African-Americans, workers, peasants, settlers in marginalized communities, women, professionals, and students, regardless of religion, belief system or race. The goal is to rise up against exploitation, discrimination, debt and poverty that exists among our people of the Americas.
7. To formulate alternative development projects that are safe and healthy, sustainable, and that emerge from our own needs, realities and resources, utilizing but not destroying the natural resources of the region. To promote solutions for the preservation and recovery of the forests and existing resources, based on a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.
8. To support and promote the democratic management of traditional local governments, through statutes of autonomy, laws in favor of the popular sectors, and the outright use of power by our original traditional governments that still exist in the continent, and that diversity be respected, thus contributing to the strengthening of one large homeland.

9. To struggle against the causes that provoke situations of displacement and refugees; to demand solutions and conditions which allow for voluntary return and the strengthening of legal and social rights of refugees and displaced persons, that allow for their total integration in the region in which they are located.

10. To demand recognition, respect, incorporation and development of all our rights of our communities and native peoples in society; material, economic, social and cultural rights. To support the establishment of national and international legal mechanisms in defense and promotion of the rights of native peoples.

11. To continue strengthening the process of struggle and development of activities which revitalize solidarity, coordination and unity among the peoples, of the continent and of the world.

12. To support the native peoples of the Andean region, who for reasons of economic, social, climatic and land-use, only grow coca leaf, proposing the creation of an institute to industrialize coca, for medicines and vitamins, etc., and also for the regulation of its use.

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#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The Campaign rejects all attempts, activities or programs that have as an objective the celebration of the inappropriately named Discovery of America. For us this celebration brings unfortunate consequences; such as the massive evictions taking place in the Dominican Republic as a result of the construction of monuments to celebrate the Fifth Centennial carried out by the government and supported by various countries.

We cannot celebrate ethnocide and genocide, which during the "conquest" and the "colonialization" alone cost us 90 million victims, and now continues under the regimes of terror and death characterized by the neoliberal model of government in the continent. It would be like celebrating the massacre of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the Jewish holocaust at the hands of the Nazis, which are now considered to be crimes against humanity.

We would not be opposed to a critical analysis of the V Centennial, as a historic encounter between two cultures, in a sense of mutual respect and equality, but we are opposed to the imposition of one culture over another, the defense of economic and military power.

It would be idealistic to think that after this 500 year period, peace will reign and that our actions in the Indigenous and Peoples' Campaign should come to an end, above all because the Campaign is in itself a means and not an end, a means to unity. This objective, undoubtedly, goes beyond 1992. Therefore, our political program, and the plans of action beyond the 500 years should be: to maintain and perfect our programs of struggle, our unity of action, and all the work that launching this Campaign has created. For that reason, the slogan that we propose to embrace after the 500 years is:

"To continue with greater force than ever the demands that we propose for the emancipation of our People."