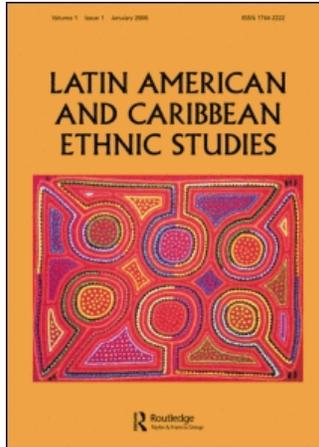


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Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala: From Resistance to Power

Marc Becker

Thousands of indigenous activists from 24 countries gathered in Guatemala in the last week of March 2007 for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala. The gathering strengthened both local and transnational indigenous organizing efforts. The summit was entitled 'From Resistance to Power,' reflecting key concerns of how to move beyond resistance to oppressive regimes in order to claim positions of power in government. Evo Morales' recent election as Bolivia's president inspired many activists to explore similar paths to challenge state power in their own countries. The meeting represented a merging of issues that had previously divided indigenous organizations, including disagreements over whether to follow an ethnic 'Indianist' or a leftist 'Popular' line. At the same time, a new focus on electoral paths to power raised threats of opportunism from candidates who pursue their own self-interests while compromising on key issues such as opposition to neoliberal economic policies. Nevertheless, the Guatemala summit reflected advances toward new levels of unity and points to a promising future for continental indigenous organizing initiatives.

Keywords: Indigenous summit; indigenous movements; Abya Yala; Guatemala; Iximché; nation-states

Indigenous movements, as social movements in general, have long been held in tension between the opposing poles of unity and diversity. Briefly, and perhaps somewhat simplistically, movements need to be rooted in local and concrete issues, while at the same time finding strength in building a broad-based movement that requires the ability to bridge quite diverse concerns. Carol Smith (1990, p. 279), for example, notes a tension between indigenous leaders' desire to create a pan-Maya identity while community groups seek to maintain a sense of local identity.

Smith observes that perhaps it is the fragmented local identities that have ensured the preservation and survival of native cultural traditions. ‘Throughout history,’ Smith observes, ‘Indian communities have maintained themselves through diversity, which has prevented them from forming a united Indian nation that could proclaim its own national sovereignty. . . this “weakness” has also been the source of Indian cultural “strength,” since no centralized power in Guatemala has ever found a single cultural source or symbol to destroy through which Indian culture *in general* would be eradicated’ (Smith, 1990, pp. 282–283).

Over the course of more than 30 years of indigenous organizing, not only within Maya movements in Guatemala but also on a continental level, these two positions (strength in unity versus strength in diversity) continue to hold each other in a seemingly inherent and inevitable tension. Even while recognizing the importance of rooting struggles in local issues and acknowledging that macro-level organizational structures open up more possibilities for opportunism, co-optation, and repression, activists continue to find purpose and meaning in a search for continental indigenous unity. In 1992, the quincentennial of Christopher Columbus’ voyage triggered a great deal of organizing activity throughout the continent. Activists talked about the meeting of the ‘southern condor’ with the ‘northern eagle.’ After the quincentennial, many of them returned to work on local issues in their home communities. At the beginning of the 21st century, a global indigenous movement once again appears to be re-emerging.

Thousands of indigenous delegates from 24 countries gathered in Guatemala in late March 2007 for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala. Abya Yala means ‘Continent of Life’ in the Kuna language,

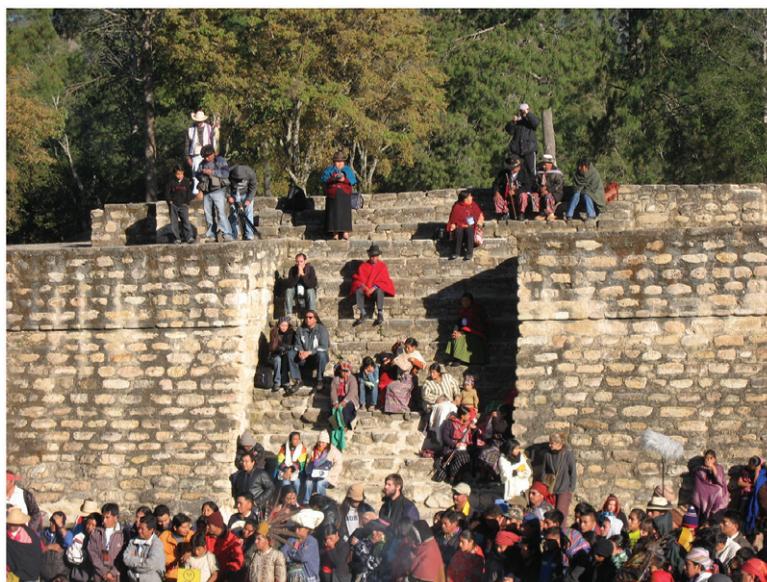


Figure 1 Delegates gather at the Iximché ceremonial site at the start of the Indigenous Summit.

and is the word they use to refer to the Americas. The week-long summit was held in Iximché, a Kaqchikel Maya ceremonial site located in the Guatemalan highlands two hours from the capital city. Two weeks before the summit, US President George Bush visited Iximché during a visit to Guatemala. Maya priests subsequently cleansed the site of his 'bad spirits' in preparation for the summit, and to replace his politics of war with a politics of life, dignity, and equality.

The summit was entitled 'From Resistance to Power,' reflecting key concerns of how to move beyond resistance to oppressive regimes in order to claim positions of power in government. Similar to ongoing discussions in broader popular movements, indigenous activists debated how best to engage state power (Van Cott, 2005). Should militants use electoral means to join existing governments, work to overthrow them, or create autonomous and parallel governing structures? The recent election of Evo Morales to the presidency in Bolivia marked a new phase in the relationship between indigenous groups and national governments, pushing activists towards electoral participation as a way to make their voices heard. Delegates applauded and embraced Morales as their 'indigenous president of the Americas.' The presence of his foreign minister David Choquehuanca in an official capacity at the summit, and a planned presence of Morales himself, indicated a new level of indigenous engagement with existing state structures. More broadly, debates at the summit focused on how to transform government institutions from oppressive, racist, exclusionary structures to something that would reflect the indigenous values of participatory governance, equality, dignity, and a sustainable co-existence with the earth.

While this meeting was labeled the 'third continental summit,' it built on a much longer history of continental indigenous organizing across the Americas. Previously, the Indian movements had been split over whether to follow a class-based or ethnic-based strategy. As anthropologist Xavier Albó (1991, p. 308) notes, different visions of how best to lead the struggle had led to long, contentious, and seemingly irreconcilable debates. Some organizers favored alliances with the political left in a unified class-based struggle that emphasized their economic exploitation as peasants or small farmers. Others wanted to accentuate the unique indigenous cultural attributes and focus their struggle against the racial discrimination they faced. While the Iximché meeting did little to bridge this gap, an increasing number of activists and academics now see this as a simplistic and perhaps inherently false divide (Postero & Zamosc, 2004, p. 12). Iximché represented the building of higher levels of unity even as new divisions began to emerge, particularly in regards to the potential, challenges, and pitfalls of choosing the electoral path to engage state structures. The Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala provides an opportunity to reflect on these issues and on the prospects and possibilities of a more unified movement.

A Bit of History: the Globalization of the Continental Indian Movement

Over the past 30 years, activists have attempted to establish pan-indigenous movements on local, regional, and international levels (Brysk, 2000). Most of their

efforts, however, have met with limited or mixed success. The 1960s saw an intense process of indigenous conscientization. The primary issues were indigenous identity, self-determination, sovereignty, and territorial rights (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA], 1988, p. 13). One of the most significant organizations to emerge at the time was the IWGIA, which grew out of a 1968 meeting of anthropologists at the 38th International Congress of Americanists in Stuttgart, Germany. Anthropology was becoming a more politicized discipline, and anthropologists expressed 'a growing recognition of responsibility for the people whom we study' (IWGIA, 1988, p. 28). The scholars condemned the abuses that they had witnessed during their field research in South America. The IWGIA emphasized that it did not speak on behalf of the native groups, but rather sought 'to enable indigenous peoples themselves to put forward their case' (IWGIA, 1988, p. 36). Other support groups sprung up around that time, including Cultural Survival at Harvard University, and Survival International in England. Survival International led educational campaigns (largely through letter-writing campaigns, protests, and published reports) in support of the rights of tribal peoples. Whereas Survival International attempted to defend and protect tribal groups from the encroachment of western society, Cultural Survival helped native peoples and ethnic minorities with their encounters with industrial society.

Eleven anthropologists gathered in Barbados in 1971 at the Symposium on Inter-Ethnic Conflict in South America to analyze the current situation of indigenous peoples. In the Declaration of Barbados, the group called for the 'liberation' of Indians from their colonial domination, and 'the creation of a truly multi-ethnic state in which each ethnic group possesses the right to self-determination and the free selection of available social and cultural alternatives.' The Declaration stated that it was 'essential' that the Indian peoples should 'organize and lead their own liberation movement.' They observed a growing ethnic consciousness and looked forward to 'the beginnings of a pan-Latin-American movement' (IWGIA, 1971, pp. 3–4). At the same time, the IWGIA also began to work more closely with indigenous organizations and supported the efforts of native groups to form their own organizations. These initiatives were very influential in supporting indigenous struggles for autonomy and self-determination.

In response, the activists began to create their own international organizations in order to press forward with their agendas. One of the first regional indigenous-led meetings was the Parlamento Indio Americano del Cono Sur (American Indian Parliament of the Southern Cone), held in Paraguay in 1974. Thirty-two representatives drafted a document that declared their rights to land, work, education, language, health, and organization. 'As an Indian people,' the document stated, 'we have a personal identity with an ethnic awareness of our own' (Materne, 1980, p. 65). The same year, eight delegates from around the world met in Georgetown, Guyana for a Preparatory Meeting of the International Conference of Indigenous Peoples. The goal was to foster the exchange of information between groups and to reduce physical and cultural genocide; combat racism; ensure political, economic, and social justice; and to defend indigenous cultural rights (IWGIA, 1974, p. 2). Delegates from 19 countries subsequently met in October 1975 in Port Alberni,

British Columbia, Canada, at the International Conference of Indigenous Peoples to form the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). The WCIP was a worldwide federation designed to strengthen indigenous organizations, support their struggles, and work on development projects. They believed that through the creation of an international communications network, indigenous groups could more effectively struggle against the oppressive neocolonial nation-states in which they lived. 'Solidarity between indigenous peoples,' the WCIP said, 'was necessary for the survival of each indigenous nation' (Consejo Indio de Sud América [CISA], 1983, p. 7).

Leadership issues and relations with governments helped define the nature of the WCIP. In his summary of the formation of the WCIP, Douglas Sanders notes that its leadership was not radical. Rather, they relied heavily on governmental and church support in addition to that of the IWGIA, universities, and other non-governmental organizations (Sanders, 1977, p. 20). Even though the goal was to create an indigenous-run organization, the Guyana Government helped make local arrangements for the preparatory meeting and church groups including the World Council of Churches provided funding for the founding meeting (Sanders, 1977, p. 12). Sanders notes that a 'pattern of government sponsored, politically autonomous indigenous organizations is fairly common today in the western industrialized countries,' but that this experience was 'incomprehensible to the delegates from most of Latin America' who often faced extreme governmental repression (Sanders, 1977, pp. 22, 23). This wide difference in experience led to different attitudes toward state power and toward international organizations.

The WCIP was structured around five regions: North America, Central America, South America, South Pacific (later changed to the Pacific Region to include all Pacific peoples rather than just Australia and New Zealand), and Northern Europe. It established an International Secretariat in at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, but moved it in 1984 to Ottawa in order to be closer to the International Community (IWGIA, 1976, p. 3; 1984, p. 98). Sanders (1977, p. 24) observes that, while the native peoples in Latin America had long struggled for political goals and the nature of their struggles had often defined indigenous movements, they did not have the resources to internationalize their struggle and thus the initiative for the formation of an international body fell to people from North America and Europe. Each region was to form its own organization. Indigenous representatives from Central America, Mexico, and Panama finally met in 1977 to establish the Consejo Regional de Pueblos Indígenas (Regional Council of Indigenous Peoples). In 1980, activists from South America gathered in Peru for the First Conference of Indian Nations and Organizations of South America where they formed the CISA (South American Indian Council).

The formation of the CISA, the *IWGIA Newsletter* notes, 'marks a most important step forward in the long struggle for the liberation of the Indian peoples' (IWGIA, 1980, p. 3). The CISA declared that it was 'an organization representative of the Indian nations of South America, whose mission is to set forth the claims of its member organizations' and which 'must strive for the unification of Indian organizations, peoples, and nations with the object of solidifying our liberation

struggle' (South American Indian Information Center, 1984, pp. 37, 38). Nevertheless, already in the formation of the CISA, issues emerged that would later plague and divide international indigenous movements. Specifically, the CISA faced charges of racism from non-indigenous groups who were trying to organize the Indian population in order to achieve their own political goals. The IWGIA noted that this was an ironic situation, because these Indian leaders were simply implementing ideas stated in the Declaration of Barbados that called for an end to non-Indians representing indigenous causes and instead for Indian peoples to organize by themselves (IWGIA, 1980, p. 3).

The CISA soon became much more radical in its demands than its parent organization, the WCIP. The CISA took an aggressive stance in terms of attacking colonial centers of power and vindicating their own ethnic identity. 'There should be no compromise with governments, religious practitioners or any movements which are not in the interests of the Indian,' the Council declared. 'It is up to the Indian to create his own government and show the world his own reality' (IWGIA, 1984, p. 95). The CISA aggressively denounced acts of genocide and ethnocide, and declared that 'the "independent nation states" which broke the ties with the European empires did not signify any achievement of liberty for us; on the contrary, it meant treachery and a great subjugation, plunder and slavery on the part of the creole classes, step-children of the west, who formed their "nations" by treading on us' (IWGIA, 1981, p. 7). The CISA declared that Indian peoples were 'the only real hope for a true Socialism.' In countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico where Indians were the majority, 'any real revolution must be initiated by us, by our race, our essence, and with our strength to assure victory' (IWGIA, 1981, p. 7).

In the midst of these discussions, a split between an 'Indianist' and 'Popular' or leftist wings emerged within international indigenous movements. To a certain extent, this was a pragmatic split between areas in which there was no mass indigenous movement and alliances with leftist forces were important for survival, and places (particularly the Southern Andes) where indigenous leaders wished to gain a role in state government through the strength of their own political movements (IWGIA, 1984, p. 100). Asunción Ontiveros, the coordinator of the CISA, criticized movements that called themselves indigenous but did not have an Indian philosophy or ideology, but rather simply allied themselves with the left. 'The Indian movement,' Ontiveros noted, 'is not a movement that only struggles for economic issues.' Rather, it also struggles for territory, culture, traditional medicine, and other issues that effect indigenous groups. Ontiveros, however, had an open attitude toward leftist leaders. Sometimes, he notes, 'the education that they received speaks little about Indians. Given this reality, as an organization we have to go out, speak with them and educate them' about indigenous interests and identity (Agencia Latinoamericana de Información, 1987, p. 4).

At the Second Conference of Indian Nations and Organizations of South America in Tiwanaku, Bolivia in 1983, 200 indigenous delegates along with 2,000 observers discussed territorial rights, cultural and scientific rights, indigenous philosophy and ideology, economic and educational issues, organizational policies, human rights,

and solidarity. The CISA declared that organizational unity was their main defense against the European invaders' attempts to control, repress, and kill them. Indigenous peoples should 'take power where we are the majority, and [demand] cultural and territorial autonomy in the countries in which we are a minority' (South American Indian Information Center, 1984, p. 5). Once in power, they would cleanse themselves of Western thinking and eliminate borders that divide indigenous groups. The document is a clarion call for self-determination and a reclamation of indigenous identity and traditional forms of organization.

In 1984, indigenous organizations from the Amazonian regions of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru formed the *Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* (COICA) (Coordinating Body for the Indigenous Peoples' Organizations of the Amazon). Delegates agreed 'to form an alliance among "Amazonian indigenous peoples" in order to act internationally with a concerted voice defending their collective rights as peoples' (Smith, 1994, p. 25). Rather than creating another organization, it was decided to form a coordinating body that would rotate among members. COICA's objectives were to defend the rights of the Amazonian peoples, represent its member organizations at international forums, promote traditional cultural values, and strengthen the organizational unity of all indigenous peoples (Chirif Tirado, García Hierro, & Chase Smith, 1991, p. 210).

The COICA became best known for its efforts to develop alliances with environmental groups. They criticized 'debt-for-nature' swap schemes that often excluded indigenous participation, and instead proposed 'debt-for-Indian stewardship' swaps that would place preservation in Indian hands. 'Outsiders have either ignored us or have spoken on our behalf,' COICA president Evaristo Nugkuag stated. 'Now we have a formidable international organization and a common voice. We will argue our own case' (Gennino, 1990, p. 27). COICA first established contact with European environmentalists in 1986, and then met with a similar group in the United States in 1990. This led to a May 1990 meeting in Iquitos with 16 environmental and 15 non-governmental organizations from North America, Europe, and Peru to sign a document known as 'The Iquitos Declaration' that stated their intent to continue working together in an 'Indigenous and Environmentalist Alliance for an Amazon for Humanity' (IWGIA, 1990, p. 73). The statement was a dramatic step forward for both pan-indigenous organizing as well as building links with outside allies.

In 1992, organizations from nine Amazonian countries (expanded from the previous group of five) gathered in Manaus for COICA's fourth congress (Smith, 1994, p. 39). It was a truly international encounter, with over 70 different indigenous groups from five different colonial traditions (Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and English) present at the meeting. Valerio Grefa from the Ecuadorian Amazon was elected general coordinator of COICA, and the organization's permanent headquarters were established in Quito. In addition, the 1992 COICA meeting introduced reforms intended to stop abuses that a centralized leadership could introduce. This included abolishing the position of president and instituting a more horizontal structure, which included a board of directors, a coordinating committee, and an executive committee (*Abya Yala News*, 1993a, p. 15; Rosha & Burch, 1992, p. 20; Smith, 1994, p. 36). In his position of leadership of COICA, Grefa issued 'a call to

solidarity, to the unity of indigenous peoples within the diversity of cultures that we have, so that in the immediate future we have a unified voice, a monolithic voice, and that we can be heard by the governments in the international arena' (*Abya Yala News*, 1993b, p. 14). COICA positioned itself as drawing strength from a large unified movement.

The approach of the quincentennial of Columbus' 1492 voyage across the Atlantic Ocean provided an opening for heightened international organizing efforts. Indigenous activists rejected the celebrations planned by governments, and instead called for an alternative campaign to mark the '500 years of indigenous resistance.' The largest, most powerful organizational expression of opposition to quincentennial celebrations was a July 1990 gathering of 400 representatives from 120 indigenous nations and organizations at the First Continental Conference on Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance in Quito, Ecuador. The concluding Declaration of Quito enunciated an '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 toward our liberation' (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador [CONAIE], 1990, p. 5). Subsequently, the symbolic date of 12 October became a rallying point for indigenous liberation.

In addition to the goal of fomenting international cooperation to organize against the 1992 quincentennial celebration, participants at the Quito conference sought to overcome language, class, and culture barriers; to renew their dedication to resist oppression, discrimination, and exploitation; and to struggle for complete autonomy, self-government, self-determination, and structural change for indigenous groups. The Quito Declaration appealed for 'complete structural change; change which recognizes the inherent right to self-determination through the Indian Peoples' own governments and the control of [their] territories' (CONAIE, 1990, pp. 4–5). Self-determination was fundamental to these demands, for it was only through autonomy that total liberation would be realized. Autonomy and self-determination included the right to control land, natural resources, economic development, government, social and cultural matters, and maintain the equilibrium of the eco-system. These goals would 'be achieved only after the rejection of the capitalist system' and through participation in a struggle 'geared toward the construction of a new society, pluralistic, democratic and based on popular power' (CONAIE, 1990, p. 10). Implementing this agenda would require engaging state structures.

Out of the Quito meeting emerged a new international organization to coordinate indigenous struggles. The Coordinadora de Organizaciones y Naciones Indígenas del Continente (CONIC) (Coordinating Body of Indigenous Nations and Organizations of the Continent) was a coalition of 26 indigenous groups that sought to influence international policy-making and governing bodies. The CONIC was organized around five regions: the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central America, the Andean Region, and Brazil and the Southern Cone. In a 'Declaration of Principles and Objectives,' the CONIC stated that it had 'arisen due to the need to consolidate the bonds of union and communication between organizations and nations native to this continent.' The CONIC was 'to be a communication instrument for the indigenous Peoples of the continent and not a representative organization'

(CONIC, 1992, p. 1). This network represented 'a new stage in the struggle of Native Americans to develop both strong local organizations and powerful international networks' (Alegría & Cayuqueo, 1994, p. 26). Unlike the WCIP, much of the organizational efforts behind this new group came from South America. The CONIC was aware of the irony and significance of this fact. 'Given the historical pattern of domination of the South by governments of the North,' they noted, 'it seems very fitting that this effort to create Continental Indigenous Unity is being initiated by the indigenous people of South and Meso America' (*Abya Yala News*, 1993c, p. 8). Coming out of the South also shaped the ideology of the new organization.

In 1993, the CONIC sponsored the Second Encounter of Indigenous Nations and Organizations. Perhaps as significant as this gathering was a series of five organizing meetings that led up to this conference. The first took place in Panama in December 1991. At this meeting, delegates formalized CONIC's structure in order 'to carry out a coordinated plan of action for 500 Years of Indian Resistance and Struggle against colonialism.' The CONIC planned 'to organize workshops and continental gatherings in order to make known the Indian position regarding the 500 years, with the goal of attaining a definitive unity at the continental level.' CONIC noted the 'urgent need to unify the indigenous peoples (original nations) of the continent.' Through the re-establishment of 'historical links that were disrupted by the invading colonizers,' the CONIC hoped to bring about 'the reconstruction of our communities' (South and Meso American Indian Information Center, 1992a, p. 12). Subsequent meetings in New York, Panama, and Mexico all reiterated the need to promote indigenous unity on a continental level, create systems of communication between organizations, and work for self-determination and indigenous rights (CONIC, 1994).

More than 300 delegates met at the Otomí Ceremonial Center of the Ñathó Ñahñu people in Temoaya, Mexico from 8 to 13 October 1993 for the Second Encounter of Indigenous Nations and Organizations. The tone and content of this meeting was different from the organizing sessions leading up to it as well as the First Encounter in Quito in 1990. The Declaration of Temoaya has more of an emphasis on spirituality, tradition, harmonious development, community, education, and culture, even as it includes the persistent theme of self-determination and indigenous rights. In particular, resolutions at this encounter addressed issues such as indigenous opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was to go into effect several months later, and the Human Genome Diversity Project that proposed to collect tissue samples from 722 indigenous groups before they became extinct. In addition, the group criticized the United Nations for its failure to live up to promises it made in declaring 1992 the International Year of Indigenous People (CONIC, 1993; Alegría & Cayuqueo, 1994; *Abya Yala News*, 1993d). Delegates decided to meet again in Guatemala in October 1994 for a constitutive congress to discuss and adopt CONIC's organizational principles and guidelines. This meeting was postponed several times, and eventually never took place.

Meanwhile, divisions between the ethnic and leftist wings of the international indigenous movement became increasingly apparent. In 1991, future Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú and other indigenous leaders who favored a closer working relationship with sympathetic sectors of the left met in Guatemala

in a Continental Encounter of Five Hundred Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance. This campaign began in Bogotá, Colombia in October 1989 at the First Continental Encounter of the 500 Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance Campaign. After pressure from Black leaders, the name of the meetings were expanded to explicitly include them. After Guatemala, a subsequent encounter was held in Nicaragua in October 1992 (Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Políticos, 1993).

The CONIC was critical of this campaign, and condemned the Encounter as an attempt to obtain political goals distant from indigenous concerns and to usurp indigenous issues. The Guatemala Encounter 'clearly shows the marginalization of the participation of indigenous delegates.' According to the CONIC, '90% of the delegates represented the popular sector, and only 10% represented indigenous issues.' They declared that this campaign did 'not respond to the demands of Native Peoples,' nor did it 'guarantee that indigenous proposals will be respected in the future' or allow for 'each people to decide their own destiny' (CONIC, 1992). The Guatemala meeting represented the beginning of the end of attempts to build a unified indigenous and popular movement (Hale, 1994). At the first CONIC meeting in Panama in December 1991, delegates noted 'the failure of building alliances with some of the grass-roots organizations, especially with the groups that are directing the Continental Campaign 500 Years of Resistance of the Indigenous, Black, and Popular Movement' (South and Meso American Indian Information Center, 1992b, p. 22). This break became formal in March 1992 at the second CONIC meeting in Panama. Guillermo Delgado (1994, p. 82) notes the difficulties of building alliances between indigenous organizations and popular movements. 'From an indigenous point of reference,' he argues, 'indigenous peoples' histories remain colonial when reduced to class.' Many of the more popular oriented groups subsequently began to work instead with the international peasant movement Via Campesina. The two wings of the movement occasionally collaborated when their paths crossed, but increasingly they operated in quite different environments.

This organizational rupture led to a break of seven years during which many indigenous activists worked instead on local issues in their own countries. This was not wasted time, but a period of great organizational advancement in several countries. In October 2000, the CONIC once again came together to organize the First Indigenous Continental Summit at Teotihuacan, Mexico. Delegates representing 36 indigenous organizations from around the continent signed the meeting's Declaration of Teotihuacan that condemned colonial governments in the Americas for their failure to recognize fundamental indigenous rights and liberties. In particular, most countries had failed to ratify Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, which recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples, and they blocked similar projects to recognize indigenous rights at the United Nations and the Organization of American States (Fliert, 1994; Roy, 1997). The declaration also condemned the neoliberal economic policies of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank, which

increased the levels of dependence, oppression and poverty for indigenous peoples. In response, indigenous delegates reaffirmed their guidance 'by the ancestral spiritual values of our cultures, by our languages and history,' and their rights to territory and self determination. The Treaty of Teotihuacan declared a mutual commitment to coordinate organizing efforts across the continent based on four elements: a spiritual alliance, political solidarity, complementary cultural understandings, and economic and commercial agreements of exchange (CONIC, 2000). The statement sought to bridge indigenous cultural and political concerns.

At the end of the Teotihuacan summit, delegates agreed to meet again the following year in Ecuador. It was not until 2004 and on the eve of the First Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, however, that the Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala took place. Several hundred delegates representing 64 indigenous peoples and nationalities participated in the summit. Delegates debated 10 themes including land rights, autonomy and self-determination, diversity and plurinationality, intellectual property rights, relations with multilateral organizations, the World Social Forum, gender and the role of women, political participation, militarization, and communication.

The closing Declaration of Kito (the Kichwa spelling of the host city of Quito) once again embraced the rights of indigenous peoples and denounced the neoliberal economic policies that nation-states and international lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank imposed on their communities. These entities, the statement notes, 'are disregarding our collective rights to our land, changing legislation to allow privatization, corporative alliances, and individual appropriation.' Delegates resolved to continue to work together to share experiences, and to develop a common agenda of actions and mobilizations against the exclusionary neoliberal globalization model. They declared an unalienable right to their territory, and the legitimization of their own models to govern those autonomous spaces. The declaration closed with an expression of solidarity with the Venezuelan and Cuban people in their continued anti-imperialist struggles (II Cumbre, 2004).

Organizers traced the Quito summit as part of an organic evolution of organizational meetings, beginning with the Meeting of the Eagle and the Condor at the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador in 1990 and the Second Continental Encounter of Indigenous Nations, Peoples and Organizations in Mexico at Temoaya in 1993. These two continental encounters are seen as the foundation for the continental summits in Teotihuacan, Mexico in 2000, Quito, Ecuador in 2004, and, finally, in Iximché, Guatemala in 2007.

Meanwhile, indigenous activists took advantage of an increasing number of other opportunities to gather and discuss their common concerns. At the end of the 2004 summit in Ecuador, participants crossed town to join the Americas Social Forum. One of five themes at the Forum focused on indigenous peoples and African descendants, and the persistent issues of racism, poverty, and exclusion that they faced. Given that neoliberal policies often have a most intense impact on these populations, a complete rejection of free-trade agreements was ever-present in their

discussions. At the end of the Forum, indigenous organizations led a march for life and against free-trade agreements. Just before the march, a heavy rain shower soaked the city, cooling the air and cleaning out the pollution that hung heavy over the city. Under these ideal conditions, the march snaked past the US Embassy and through the streets of the city. Distant from debates a decade earlier, indigenous activists seemed to be leading the popular movement.

Half a year later, indigenous activists once again turned out in force for the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, for a 'Puxirum of Indigenous Arts and Knowledge.' In the Brazilian Tupi-Guarani indigenous language, Puxirum means 'a joining of efforts for a common goal.' Their meeting ended with a declaration that 'another world is possible, and we are part of that world' (Ecuadorunari, 2005). These broader meetings of civil society facilitated the re-emergence of a strong continental indigenous movement.

In November 2005, over 250 delegates from across the continent joined in a Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations in Mar de Plata, Argentina. The indigenous summit was held in opposition to the meeting of the Summit of the Presidents of the Organization of American States, and to protest the neoliberal policies that the official meeting favored. Initially, organizations that wanted to extract benefits for themselves had convoked an Indigenous summit to support neoliberal policies and the proposal for a Free Trade Area of the Americas. Deep fractures once again threatened to split the movement, with charges of '*contra-cumbre*' (counter-summit) and '*compra-cumbre*' (purchased-summit) being fired across the divide. The activists gathered in Mar de Plata held firm in their opposition to neoliberalism and co-optation. They rejected 'the pillaging of our territories and natural resources,' and acts of 'aggression against our rights of autonomy.' They demanded recognition of indigenous rights of self-determination, and the pluricultural, multiethnic, and multilingual character of society. Finally, again the delegates appealed for the creation of a 'Network of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Abya Yala for Indigenous Rights that will allow us to have permanent, systematic and effective interaction and relationship on a continental level' (Cumbre Continental de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas, 2005). A new continental indigenous movement seemed to be emerging.

In the aftermath of Evo Morales' election as president in Bolivia, a 'Continental Encounter of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala' was held in La Paz in October 2006. The invitation to the meeting noted that it was being held under a new international context, one in which indigenous people had already taken power. The meeting had the objective of strengthening links of international indigenous solidarity within this new historical context, with the goal of constructing multicultural states. The meeting's 'Declaration of La Paz' presented an optimistic perspective on the direction of international indigenous organizing. After surviving 514 years of oppression and domination, a new era was dawning. Reflecting the meeting's slogan 'From resistance to power,' delegates called to re-found state structures from an indigenous perspective in order to do away with exclusion and marginality (Encuentro Continental de Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas del Abya Yala, 2006).

Iximché

In a context of increased optimism and energy, thousands of indigenous activists – many times more than had attended any of the previous international gatherings – from 24 countries gathered in Guatemala in the last week of March 2007 for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala. Under the slogan ‘From Resistance to Power,’ delegates descended on the Iximché ceremonial site to discuss a broad range of issues and concerns. Even with an underlying spiritual or cultural identity, the key concerns reflected how to move from resistance to positions of power. The meeting represented a merging of issues that had previously divided indigenous organizing efforts, including disagreements over whether to follow an ethnic ‘Indianist’ or leftist ‘Popular’ line. At the same time, a new focus on electoral paths to power raised threats of opportunism from candidates who pursue their own self-interests while compromising on key issues such as opposition to neoliberal economic policies. Nevertheless, the Guatemala summit represented the building of new levels of unity.

Spiritual Ceremonies

At the 1991 Continental Encounter of Five Hundred Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance in Guatemala, spirituality created a divide between indigenous and leftist delegates. While leftists commonly embraced a more materialist analysis of the anti-quincentennial struggle, spirituality remained much more entrenched in the lives of the indigenous delegates. More than language or dress, spirituality became an ethnic marker that distinguished them from the other leftists. It was deeply ingrained in indigenous cosmologies. Hale (1994, p. 20) describes how indigenous delegates seamlessly moved from discussions of spirituality to political topics, including ones of self-determination. Rather than occupying separate spheres, for indigenous activists, spirituality and political engagement often became one and the same.

Spirituality similarly became an inherently central element at Iximché. The first day of the 2007 Guatemala summit dawned bright and sunny. In Tecpán’s main plaza, a nearby town where many of the delegates were housed with local families, organizers shot off fireworks to celebrate the beginning of the meetings. In the early morning light, delegates crowded on buses to travel the four kilometers up to the Iximché ceremonial site (as part of the ideological framing of the event, organizers insisted on referring to Iximché as a *ceremonial* rather than *archaeological* site, claiming its continuing relevance to their lives rather than simply as a distant tourist curiosity). Nestled in a plaza surrounded by pyramids, Maya leaders led the group in a spiritual ceremony as the sun peeked over the horizon. On subsequent days, delegates from North, South, and Central America all took their turns with the opening ceremonies and caring for the sacred fire. The Compact of Iximché reaffirmed the statements in the Treaty of Teotihuacan from the First Continental Indigenous Summit in Mexico in 2000. The Compact pledged to fulfill the obligations of that Treaty ‘through the Power of Collective Memory, rooted in the millennial history of our coexistence on our continent



Figure 2 Ritual cleansing of the speaker's table before beginning plenary sessions at the summit.

Abya Yala' with the goal to build 'a continental liberation movement of Abya Yala to decolonize our Pueblos, Nations, territories and cultures' (Cumbre Continental de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas, 2007). This language captured the spirit of the summit.

After the ceremonies, delegates descended to the entrance of the ceremonial site for breakfast (well organized in a communitarian and solidarity style) and the inauguration of the summit under a huge tent set up for this purpose. A Maya elder cleansed the speaker's table with incense before the presentations began. Despite this cosmological framing, the summit's discussions focused primarily on economic and political rather than cultural issues. The summit's slogan 'from resistance to power,' borrowed from the previous meeting in La Paz, captured the spirit of the event. It is not enough to resist oppression, but indigenous peoples need to present concrete and positive alternatives to make a better and more inclusive world.

The summit's ideological orientation was apparent from the inaugural panel onward. After Tecpán's mayor welcomed delegates to Iximché, Ecuadorian activist and Continental Council member Blanca Chancoso called for indigenous peoples to be treated as citizens and members of a democracy. She rejected war-making, militarization, and free-trade pacts. 'Our world is not for sale,' she declared. 'Bush is not welcome here. We want, instead, people who support life. Yes to life. Imperialism and capitalism has left us with a historic debt, and they owe us for this debt.' She emphasized the importance of people creating alternatives to the current system.

Indigenous Peoples and Nation-states

Delegates to the summit continued to press for their political rights as sovereign indigenous nations. In a first for these summits, Western Shoshone National Council member Joe Kennedy traveled to Guatemala on his Western Shoshone passport. Kennedy and other Western Shoshone members Sandy Dann and Larson Bill presented to the summit the implications of a 10 March 2006 decision by the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to urge the US Government to stop threatening actions against the Western Shoshone Nation. 'The history of racial discrimination in terms of the relationship between our indigenous peoples and the government states has roots in the Doctrine of Discovery and the Papal Bull *Inter Caetera* of 1493,' Kennedy stated. 'It is time that the present governments step up to these historical injustices, and take action to stomp out all forms of racial discrimination.' Delegates articulated and pressed for their political demands in very concrete terms.

Three plenary panels extended formal discussions of the relationships between indigenous peoples and nation-states, particularly as speakers framed the discussions of the summit's theme of moving from resistance to power. The panels examined relations between Indian peoples and national states, territory and natural resources, and indigenous governments. Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj from Guatemala pointed to a gap between indigenous political understandings and the technical skills necessary to achieve those visions. In particular, indigenous leaders need better training in economics and international law. But this does not mean borrowing solutions from the outside world. 'There are no recipes for success,' Velásquez emphasized. 'We need to make up our own alternatives.' There would need to be indigenous solutions to these problems.

Bolivia's foreign relations minister David Choquehuanca argued that we should not rebuild current states, but dream and create new ones. 'Our minds are colonized,' he stated, 'but not our hearts. It is time to listen to our hearts, because this is what builds resistance.' Development plans look for a better life, but this results in inequality. Indigenous peoples, instead, look to how to live well (*vivir bien*). Choquehuanca emphasized the need to look for a culture of life.

Rodolfo Pocop from the Guatemalan host organization Waqib' Kej argued for the need for a new word to replace the term 'resources' because it reflects a mercantilist concept foreign to indigenous cosmology. He suggested using instead 'mother earth' because if we do not live in harmony with the earth we will not have life. Isaac Avalos, secretary general of the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, picked up on this concept, suggesting that we should not talk about territory rather than land because it is a much broader term that includes everything – land, air, water, petroleum, gas, and so forth. Following along with this symbolism, Avalos advocated taking care of the earth as our mother so that it could continue to provide a future for its children. The discussions led the gathered delegates to advocate for very practical and concrete actions, such as drinking local water and boycotting Coca-Cola.

Following the panels, delegates broke into 15 working groups to draft proposals for coordinated actions on specific themes. Topics for discussion included land and territory, self-determination, intellectual property rights, identity and cosmology, globalization, and indigenous justice systems. While the plenaries were often filled with discourses long on rhetoric, the workshops provided a venue for substantive and concrete proposals.

Women

Inclusion and equality are expressed values that have long run through many indigenous communities and organizations. Nevertheless, aspects of the dominant culture's inequalities surfaced throughout the summit, and were most visibly apparent in gender dynamics. Women participated actively and massively throughout the summit. But while organizers made honorable attempts at equality on the plenary panels, men still outnumbered women by about three to one at the speakers' tables. The imbalance became even more notable during discussion periods when about 10 men spoke for every woman who approached the microphone. Finally, a woman from Peru rose to note that men always dominate these conversations. 'We need parity,' she demanded, 'both individually and collectively.'

The summit also included a working group on women's issues, and another on youth and children. It reflected a conscious effort to engage these issues on a serious level. Delegates discussed plans to hold a summit for indigenous women and children, possibly together with the fourth summit or in 2008 at the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala.

Militarization of Social Spaces

Indigenous groups, like broader popular movements, face the problem of the criminalization of protest and the militarization of social spaces. Not only in Guatemala but across the Americas, governments apply 'anti-terrorist' legislation against indigenous and popular struggles. Paramilitary squads target dissidents. These forms of intimidation closed spaces for civil society.

Accompanying the criminalization of protest is the militarization of social spaces, with governments using the excuse of criminal violence to place police at meetings of civil society. The police presence began at the airport, where delegates received a police escort to Iximché. A row of brand-new black police Toyota Hilux pickup trucks sat parked outside the entrance of the summit. Inside, the sacred site was crawling with well-dressed, well-armed police officers. Although intimidating, organizers justified their presence with Guatemala's quickly escalating crime rates. Nevertheless, given the government's history of genocidal violence against the Maya, many participants opposed the police. During one of the workshops, the police were seen recording the sessions, confirming in many delegates' minds the nefarious purpose for their attendance. Whether such meetings can police themselves becomes an issue that not only indigenous summits but also social forums and other civil society meetings face.

Declaration of Iximché

The summit concluded with a rally in Guatemala City's main plaza and the reading of the 'Declaration of Iximché,' a document that called for a continued struggle for social justice and against neoliberalism and all forms of oppression. The Declaration made a strong statement against Bush's militaristic and imperialistic policies, and called for respect for human rights, territory, and self-determination. It ratified an ancestral right to territory and common resources of the mother earth, rejected free-trade pacts, condemned the construction of a wall between Mexico and the United States designed to stop immigration, and demanded the legalization of coca leaves (III Cumbre, 2007).

The declaration was perhaps notable for its lack of explicit ethnic discourse and overt cultural references. Instead, it spoke of struggles against neoliberalism and for food sovereignty. On one hand, this positioning pointed to the re-merging of Indianist and popular trends in international indigenous organizing efforts that had led to a split in the movement 15 years earlier. On the other, it demonstrated a maturation of indigenous ideologies. Political and economic rights were focused through a lens of indigenous identity, with an emphasis on concrete and pragmatic actions. For example, in justifying the declaration's condemnation of the construction of a wall on the United States/Mexico border, Tonatierra's Tupac Enrique Acosta declared that 'we indigenous peoples can never be immigrants in our own continent of Abya Yala.' He continued, 'we will be travelers, refugees, displaced, or simply brothers who have met other brothers but never immigrants in our own continent' because colonial borders were imposed from the outside.



Figure 3 Tonatierra's Tupac Enrique Acosta at the closing rally of the summit.

The declaration also endorsed the candidacy of Bolivia's indigenous president Evo Morales for the Nobel Peace Prize. Morales was widely cheered at the summit. Initial plans called for him to attend the summit's closing rally, but ongoing political tensions in Bolivia prevented him from traveling to Guatemala. Instead, he sent a letter that read 'after more than 500 years of oppression and domination, they have not been able to eliminate us. Here we are alive and united with nature. Today we resist to recover together our sovereignty.' Morales seemed to represent the best hopes of the movement.

Compra-cumbres

Morales' reception was in notable contrast to Guatemala's own 1992 Noble Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, who was currently making a bid for the presidency of that country as part of the indigenous party Winaq. She did not appear at the summit, nor did she send a message. Many of those present loudly rejected a (non-Guatemalan) delegate's proposal to include support for her presidential aspirations in the closing declaration. Some justified this exclusion as a reluctance to become involved in the internal politics of the host country. What it perhaps more accurately reflected, however, was the messy contradictions of aspiring to precisely what the summit's theme advocated: political power. Menchú continues to enjoy more support outside Guatemala than within, and even those who saw Morales as a role-model questioned whether the Bolivian experience could be replicated in Guatemala, and whether Menchú was a leader who could do so.

The refusal to support Menchú's candidacy for the Guatemalan presidency was the most visible fractionalization at the summit. Although Menchú was once again at the center of a division within indigenous movements, the break was not along the same lines as the 'Indianist' and 'Popular' divide 15 years earlier. Menchú increasingly allied with corporate elites to fund her political campaign. These political alliances made her unpopular, with opponents denouncing her as playing into a strategy of the right-wing and ruling classes trying to demonstrate that Guatemala no longer oppresses indigenous communities. Middle-class Maya intellectuals who did not reject neoliberal policies held leadership roles in her party Winaq. For activists who criticized electoral alliances with conservative forces, the desire to conquer positions of power did not override the need for fundamental political changes. Simply putting forward indigenous (or female) candidates was not enough. They argued for a deep-rooted transformation of society in order to destroy exclusionary state structures. Whether this could be done through electoral politics, with the accompanying risk of the opportunism and empty symbolic positioning to which Menchú seemed to have fallen, or whether it required other processes remained an open question. In the subsequent elections, Menchú only polled in the low single digits. Instead, most of the rural vote went to winner Alvaro Colom who pledged 'to pay back the historic debt to the indigenous peoples' and to create a government 'with a Mayan face' (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2007, p. 1). It remained to be seen whether Colom could fulfill these expectations.

Largely missing at the summit were the Zapatistas from Chiapas, or their ideas from the 'Other Campaign.' The Zapatistas had refused to participate in Mexico's 2006 presidential elections, arguing that they were part of an old system that did not provide creative alternatives to solve the country's problems. Even with the skepticism toward Menchú's candidacy and the underlying support for the Zapatista's autonomous and horizontal organizing methods, many delegates seemed to be willing to follow the rest of the left in pursuit of a constitutional and electoral path to power that Hugo Chávez's and Evo Morales' victories in Venezuela and Bolivia had opened up. Although joining a largely discredited political class threatens to hurt broader social movements, as happened with Pachakutik in Ecuador, the potential promises of finally gaining power provided a very tempting alternative for many of the activists.

In contrast to Menchú's increasingly moderate discourse, the lead organizers for the Guatemala summit, including the Coordinación y Convergencia Nacional Maya Waqib' Kej, assumed a much more radical stance against corporate neoliberal economic policies and in favor of agrarian and other deep-reaching reforms. What 15 years ago would have been considered the 'ethnic' wing of the indigenous movement increasingly assumed what most would see as leftist political positions. Yet, it is difficult to categorize current indigenous disagreements as a left/right split, or as one between a class-based analysis on one hand and an embracement of ethnic identities as an organizing strategy on the other, as had previously divided the movement. Rather, some divisions increasingly seem to trace back to conflicts between leaders, with charges of opportunism and complaints that certain leaders (such as Menchú in Guatemala) monopolize public spaces to their own personal benefit.

Menchú's candidacy pointed to deeper and ultimately more significant but also sensitive issues within indigenous movements. What purposes and whose interests do organizing both locally and internationally serve? Already, many organizations have felt an increasing division between their grassroots base and elite leaders who move from summit to summit and can be more easily found at the airport than in their home communities. Some activists complained about '*compra-cumbres*,' government officials or agents of neoliberal interests who seek to buy leaders and manipulate these meetings. It continued to be a struggle to build an organic movement that remained dedicated to the interests of local indigenous communities.

Integration of Indigenous Movements

At the opening ceremonies of the Guatemalan summit, Joel Suárez from the Americas Social Forum announced that the Third Americas Social Forum would be held in Guatemala in 2008. For it to be successful, Suárez emphasized, the forum must have an indigenous and female face. He called on delegates to support the forum. Similar to the relations between the second indigenous summit in Ecuador in 2004 and the first Americas Social Forum held the following week, indigenous movements work within the context and in collaboration with broader popular movements.

At the same time, however, indigenous activists are constructing separate spaces for international indigenous organizing efforts. In order to build toward the integration of a continental indigenous movement, organizers called for regional coordinating committees in Central and North America similar to the COICA in the Amazon and the Andean Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations that was formed in 2006. Tonatierra agreed to continue to serve as a communications link for the northern region of the Americas. Delegates also agreed to establish a Continental Coordinating body for Nationalities and Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. The purpose of the body was to allow the exchange of ideas about quality of life issues and to build a movement against neoliberal trade policies.

The final item of business at the closing session was the location for the fourth indigenous summit. Organizers requested that proposals be done by region rather than country, and proposed that the next logical location would be either southern South America or the North. No proposal was forthcoming from the North, but Argentina proposed holding the next summit on the Chilean side of the triple Peru/Bolivia/Chile border in 2009. Justification for the location included supporting socialist president Michelle Bachelet to lead Chile out of the shadow of the Pinochet dictatorship, and to address the lingering issue of Bolivia's outlet to the sea. Given the historic animosities between these countries dating back to the 19th-century



Figure 4 The flags of Tawantinsuyu and Cuba together at the closing rally of the summit.

War of the Pacific, indigenous efforts to organize across borders provides a promising avenue toward hemispheric integration.

Delegates decided to base a continental coordinating committee in Chile to help organize the next summit. The idea of a continental indigenous organization did not seem to inspire a good deal of enthusiasm among the assembled delegates, although when it came to a vote only three delegates indicated their opposition. Perhaps delegates recognized the value of international meetings but believed that the most important work would continue to happen locally in their own communities. Regional indigenous organizations in Latin America have a history of being subject to external co-optation and internal divisions, which naturally makes some activists hesitant to create another supranational organization. Or perhaps, with resources stretched so thin, delegates hesitated to focus resources away from more immediate and pressing local issues. Nevertheless, no one publicly questioned the wisdom of forming more regional coordinating bodies.

Despite these persistent concerns and other divisions that occasionally surfaced, the level of energy and optimism at the summit was high. Discussions reflected a deepening and broadening of concerns and strategies. The gathering successfully strengthened both local and transnational indigenous organizing efforts. The week closed with three feeder marches that converged in a rally in Guatemala City's main plaza, symbolically representing the unification of indigenous struggles from North, Central, and South America. In the dimming light, organizers launched three hot-air balloons, two with the rainbow colors of the indigenous flag. As delegates slowly dispersed, a lingering but determined group of activists danced in a circle waving the flags of Tawantinsuyu and Cuba as the Bolivian tune 'Somos Más' (*we are more*) blasted on the sound system. A full moon rose over the national palace. The week-long summit ended on a high note. The energy at the closing rally reflected the summit's success in building on previous organizing efforts to converge a strong continental indigenous movement. The future looks promising.

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