

## **Sarayaku- Ecuador**

### **The Original Kichwa People of Sarayaku before the Inter-American Court in defense of nature and the rights of the peoples in the American Continent**

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In the past three decades, Sarayaku (a people of 1,200 members fighting against oppression, and the destruction of Mother Nature and our life spaces), have done the impossible in order to prevent our sacred territories from being transformed into an industrial oil field of death. Consequently, the economic, political, and military powers have been closing in on us - pressuring, threatening, and accusing us of being separatists. There is discrimination against our people. After we built an organizational force in the 70s, for the right to land and territory, which in this period were considered uncultivated, Sarayaku has been persecuted and slandered and the leaders have been considered subversives. Qualified as such, they put us on the Pastaza map as a RED ZONE. Worse still was when in 1989 we expelled the American company Arco Oriente (now called Agip) from our territory. The military intelligence, infiltrated by our own indigenous brothers, continually harassed us.

In 1996, the State granted Block 23 to the Argentinean company CGC without any form of consultation. Later in 2002, the company, protected by armed forces, police, and private security, forcefully and violently entered our territory causing panic, violence, familial and community division. The company planned to forcefully displace us, reducing our territory to 2 km, called the "Sarayaku Center" from the 140,000 hectares that were collective property. They militarized and chained off the passage through the Bobonaza River. They tortured our youth. They presented criminal accusations against leaders and members of the charges of terrorism, kidnapping, vandalism, robbery, and a payment of \$200,000 for each charged person turned over. The oil companies CGC (Argentina) and CGG (France) were able to enter our living areas. These zones are still affected and brutally subdued through explosions. And over all, the Company CGC planted below the earth 1.5 tons of dangerous explosives of pentolite used to locate petroleum.

In this way, the life of the superior beings of the "Kawsak Sacha" zones (living forest) of the wetlands, mountains, moretales, and lakes, home of the creatures and beings of the masters of the forest, was irreversibly affected. These beings (Amazanga, Sacharuna, Yashingu) fled with all of their people. These areas of emotional, psychological, and spiritual power were sterilized, affecting the lives of the Sarayaku. The Yachak (elders) stated that one could hear great screams of pain within the mountains and lakes.

Currently, in the zones of seismic development, the forest is **empty**. Due to the tons of seismic explosions, the resources of species of animals, flocks of wild boar, parrots, deer, and fish from the river have disappeared. With this the subsistence economy of the Sarayaku has become precarious. There is malnutrition. Those most affected are

the children and the elders. Various leaders have died as a consequence of this harsh reality.

The successive governments have accused us of being enemies against development and against the government. They have actually labeled us as fanatics, as sectarians, as a state inside the State, as an obstacle to the development of Ecuador. As the years go by, they continue to violate our rights. Every day, marginalization, exploitation, and crime are our reality. Days become centuries, life seems to modernize, but the violation of human rights of the original people continues in various Latin American countries and around the world. The neocolonialism expresses itself in megaprojects of natural resource exploitation, under the pretext of development.

We are victims of this cruel and dark reality of misunderstandings and lootings. We see how the memory of our history, our life in harmony with nature, the philosophy that has allowed us to maintain our cultural roots are attacked against the will of our organized society. This disarticulation of the codes and systems of organization and authorities has brought disappearance of ancestral knowledge, the cultural base of our continuance, where the Ayllus and entire populations are forced to walk the fine line of poverty and misery along with migration.

The governments have accused us of terrorism, sabotage, and crimes against public wellbeing. Meanwhile, impunity is the face of the present. A justice justified in the name of democracy. Because of this, in 2003, the people of Sarayaku with the support of various organizations presented their case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to defend our sacred territory and life against the petroleum projects that were granted by the Ecuadorian State without consultation.

Today, after eight years within this process, we find ourselves in the last chapter of litigation. Before issuing a ruling, the Court has convened a public hearing in San José, Costa Rica, which will take place on July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of 2011. During the hearing, Sarayaku will have the opportunity of presenting testimonies before the court, as well as the opportunity to display final pleas regarding the case. We are sure of a favorable sentence that would signify above all a historic triumph for the Sarayaku, but equally crucial for all of the indigenous peoples of South America, as the sentence will establish applicable standards in the rest of the States of the region, whose territories are inhabited by various indigenous peoples.

We have always, and will always protect and nurture our Mother Earth, the forest that nourishes us every day. We from the world of the Kichwa culture are always ready to defend the right to life and the rights of nature.

***“When the other peoples have surrendered, the sons and daughters of Sarayaku will not back down.”***

**– prophecies of the Tayak, the last men of the Corn River.**

Costa Rica, July 6th, 2011