



Quito, 14 de marzo de 2025

Declaratory Letter from the General Coordinator of COICA on the Anniversary of its Creation

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To the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, the governments of the Amazonian countries and the international community:

On this 41st anniversary of the creation of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), I address you with a message of vindication, hope and unity. More than four decades ago, our Leaders founded COICA as a response to centuries of marginalisation, raising the collective voice of the Amazonian peoples.

Today, honouring that legacy, we reaffirm our determination to continue the struggle through word, action and constructive and visionary proposals to continue to raise the fact that we are the millenary and original owners of our rivers, forests and Amazonian territories.

Today we reaffirm an inalienable principle: indigenous peoples, being pre-existent to the States, we must be recognised as our own systems of government, with the capacity for political, technical and diplomatic dialogue on equal terms with the governments of the countries where we live.

Our original nations existed long before the republican borders; as societies with their own knowledge systems to manage our Amazon, and we still conserve our own languages, cultures and structures of government and authority that have endured for millennia.

It is time for the world to recognise this living reality. We do not ask permission to be - we are - free and sovereign peoples over our lands, and we demand to be treated with the dignity and respect befitting ancestral governments, we will not tolerate outside interference from those who want to see our great institution COICA destroyed, only to be the spokespersons for what they do not know.

Calle Sevilla N24-358 y Guipúzcoa - La Floresta / Quito - Ecuador
Casilla postal 17-21-753
(593) 23226-744
coica@coicamazonia.org
www.coicamazonia.org



COICA is leading a historic proposal that will redefine the representation of indigenous peoples, and this whole process constitutes a full exercise of self-determination, it is the duty to be of the 511 indigenous peoples that inhabit it.

As part of this initiative, COICA is transforming itself into an entity with international legal status, transcending state borders to represent our Amazonian nations in the global arena.

This internationalisation will strengthen our own voice in decision-making spaces. We seek to have legal recognition as an international actor, and institutional presence in each country of the Amazon basin. In this way, we will be able to interact as equals - from government to government - taking the message and proposals of more than 511 Amazonian indigenous peoples to the world.

We know that, in order to be coherent with what we demand outwardly, we must also strengthen our own house first. For this reason, we categorically reject clientelistic practices and any hint of corruption that have damaged confidence in our organisations. We will not allow outside interests or personalism to divide our people; we cannot fall into the corrupt, politicking practices that we have always criticised.

Central to this task has been the courage of indigenous women, who have led the struggle to eradicate these evils. Our women leaders and wise women, with their deep connection to community life, have raised their voices against paternalism and manipulation.

As they have cried out: 'let us rule, for we can achieve unity'. Inspired by that call, we pledge to eliminate clientelism and any practice that undermines COICA's internal democracy forever.

Along these lines, we promote the reform of our internal electoral mechanisms to guarantee an equitable, transparent and rotating representation of all member countries, and thus strengthen the unity of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

We are revising and updating our navigation chart so that the leadership of COICA is exercised in a rotating and inclusive manner: all national organisations that make up our Coordinating Committee must have the opportunity to take the reins of COICA on equal terms.

In this way, we will banish for good the caudillismos and favouritisms, ensuring that COICA truly reflects the diversity of Amazonian voices. We also reaffirm our autonomy and dignity: COICA is not and will not be an instrument of political parties, governments or foreign agendas. We firmly reject any external interference that seeks to impose divisions or conditions on us. We owe only to our peoples, and it is to them that we are accountable.

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The autonomy we seek must also be reflected in the economic sphere. That is why we are proposing innovative financial mechanisms that guarantee indigenous self-determination in practice and promote the indigenous economy. Our priority is that the resources destined for our peoples reach the communities directly, without going through intermediaries who dilute, condition or appropriate part of these funds.

On this path we have established initiatives such as the Indigenous Fund 'Amazon for Life', designed to channel climate and conservation investments directly to communities and grassroots organisations. This fund, the result of collaboration between COICA and the Inter-American Development Bank, seeks to reduce intermediation and ensure that every dollar goes where it should go: to the families who defend the forests, to the territory that protects life. With mechanisms like this, with a clear and well-worked vision of governance and scale, we affirm our right to decide on our own development priorities, according to our vision and our needs, strengthening autonomous territorial management and transparency.

This effort for the life and dignity of our peoples is vindicated by important advances in the recognition of our rights. Yesterday, 13 March 2025, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a landmark ruling in the case of the Tagaeri and Taromenane indigenous peoples (peoples in voluntary isolation) against the Ecuadorian State. In this unprecedented judgment, the highest human rights court in the Americas recognised the violation of numerous fundamental rights of these peoples: the right to collective ownership of their ancestral territory, the right to self-determination, the right to a dignified life, to health, to adequate food, to their cultural identity and to a healthy environment, among others. For the first time, the IACHR Court explicitly ruled on the situation of indigenous peoples in isolation, reaffirming that the principle of no contact and respect for their decision to live in voluntary isolation must be fundamental premises guiding the actions of States.

This historic verdict fills us with hope: it confirms that our demand for absolute respect for the life and self-determination of indigenous peoples - even those who choose not to have contact - is fully supported by international law. We welcome this decision with deep emotion and demand its full implementation. Let this outcome serve as a reminder to states that the protection of the most vulnerable peoples of the Amazon is not optional, but a duty that cannot be postponed.

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COORDINADORA DE LAS
ORGANIZACIONES INDÍGENAS
DE LA CUENCA AMAZÓNICA



On this day of commemoration and struggle, we renew our unwavering commitment to the defence of our rights, our territories and Mother Earth. We call for the union of all Amazonian peoples, from elders to youth, and we extend our hand to civil society, to the international community and to the governments that really want to listen: let us walk together in a dialogue of mutual respect. Our struggle is not against anyone, it is for life, for justice and for a shared future. We are not seeking privileges, but the fulfilment of a long-delayed historical justice. We are indigenous nations that deserve a seat at the table where decisions that concern us are made. The time has come to build state-indigenous peoples relations based on equality, good faith and full recognition of our self-determination.

With the living memory of our ancestors who resisted to bequeath us this Amazon, and with the strength of our new generations who dream of a dignified future, we will continue to move forward. This path we have embarked on is challenging, but it is guided by the deep conviction that a living Amazon is a guarantee of a secure humanity. On the anniversary of our COICA, we reiterate to the world that we will not take a step backwards in the defence of life, dignity and self-determination of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

A fraternal embrace,
Sincerely



FANY KUIRU CASTRO
COORDINADORA GENERAL DE COICA

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