

PROJECT LEGAL AID

*and care network
for Amazonia*

Stephanie Rodriguez Ugolotti

ARONSON FELLOWSHIP

MENTOR MIKE HARRINGTON



Welcome

to the working draft of the Legal and Care Network for the Amazon report.

This document outlines a project currently in development that aims to support Amazonian Indigenous communities through interdisciplinary legal advocacy, care-based practices, and transnational collaboration.

This report is structured around the following key sections, each designed to explain a core component of the initiative:

ABOUT THE
PROJECT

GUIDING
PRINCIPLES

PROBLEMS TO
ADDRESS

OBJECTIVES

HOW TO?

TIME LINE

COMPETITION?

Q&A

About the project

The Project Legal Aid and Care Network for Amazonia is an interdisciplinary initiative and network dedicated to uplifting and empowering indigenous Amazonian communities and graduate students through legal support and care-based advocacy, bridging the north and south.

Guiding Principles



ENVIRONMENTAL CARE

The defense of the Amazon is an act of care: for the forest, water, its people, and future generations. Environmental care means respecting nature as a living being, not a resource, and engaging with it through reciprocal and protective practices inspired by Indigenous cosmologies.



ALTERNATIVE-LED CONSERVATION

Rather than extractive models, to support community-based conservation strategies that are locally rooted and led by those who have historically stewarded these territories. Including integrating traditional ecological knowledge and resisting greenwashing or militarized conservation practices.



DECOLONIAL & COMMUNITY APPROACHES

This involves centering Indigenous leadership, ancestral knowledge, and bottom-up organizing. The methodology deconstructs colonial legal systems and challenges institutional hierarchies by co-creating frameworks that prioritize autonomy, prior consultation, and community-defined justice.



CLIMATE JUSTICE

As the Amazon is central to global climate balance, and its defenders are among the most at risk, its needed to advocate for climate justice that recognizes the disproportionate burdens placed on Indigenous peoples and links environmental health to social, racial, and gender justice.



INDIGENOUS RIGHTS & LAND PROTECTION

At the center and heart of this project is the defense of Indigenous territorial sovereignty. Aiming to work toward securing legal recognition of Indigenous governance, protection for land defenders, and enforcement of international agreements such as the Escazú Agreement.

Problems

This is a summary of the urgent issues facing the Amazon, one of the most vital ecosystems on Earth, and also facing Indigenous communities, including threats to territory, criminalization, violence, and environmental degradation.

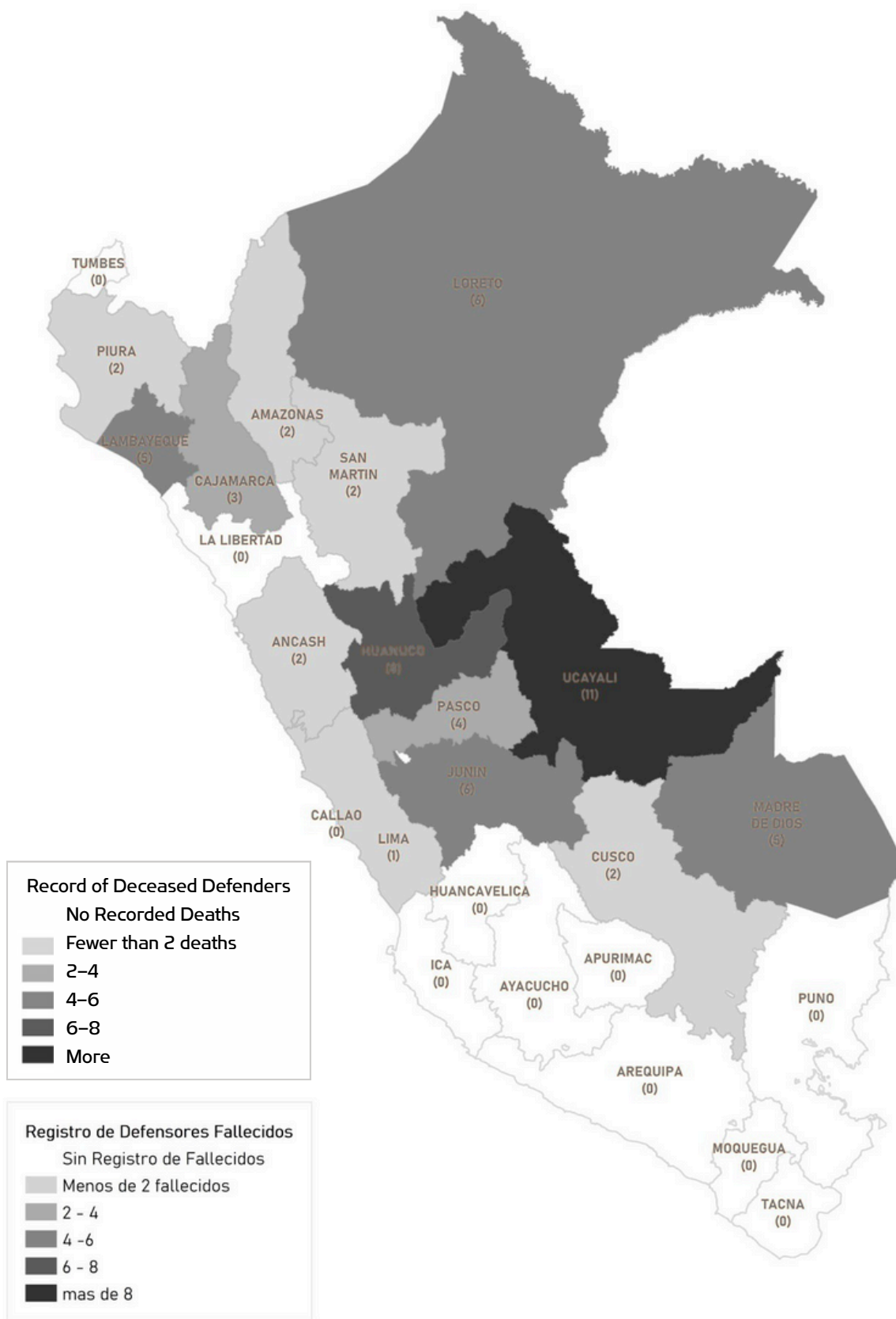


Rather than being recognized as protectors of life and territory, defenders are targeted, surveilled, and falsely accused of crimes, being an urgent need to provide legal and community-based protection strategies that respond and center the voices of those who risk their lives to defend the planet.

a. Criminalization and threats to defenders

Environmental and land defenders face increasing levels of violence, repression, and criminalization. According to Global Witness (2023), **an environmental activist is murdered every two days**, most often in regions rich in natural resources and biodiversity, like the Amazon.

In Peru, Indigenous leaders who defend their territories against illegal logging, mining, drug trafficking, and land grabbing are at risk. These threats are part of a broader pattern of systemic neglect, impunity, and state failure to protect those on the frontlines of environmental justice. An indigenous-led initiative, the Indigenous Guards, employs defense strategies.

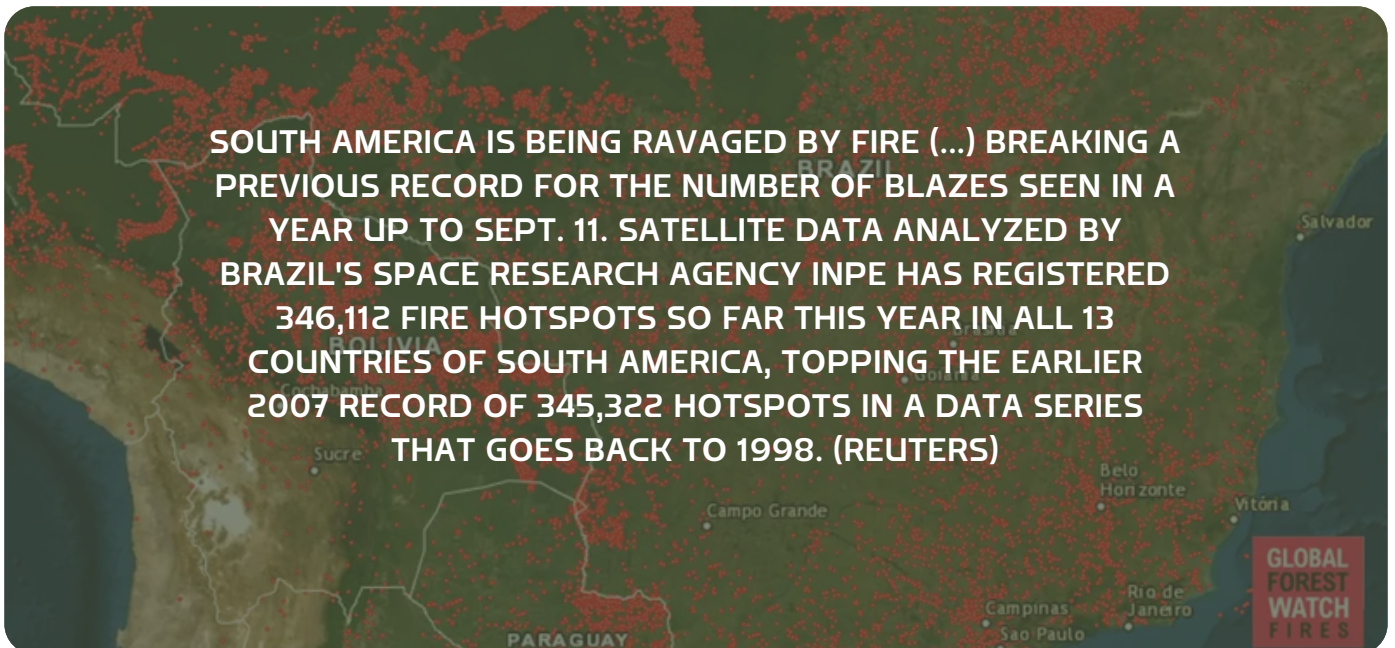


b. Ecosystem destruction

The Amazon is undergoing rapid and alarming destruction. **18% of its forests have been completely lost, with an additional 17% severely degraded—and the trend continues to worsen (WWF, 2022)** with recent years fires. This degradation not only threatens global climate stability and biodiversity but also the survival of Indigenous communities whose lives and cultures are deeply interwoven with the forest. The ongoing loss of the Amazon is a crisis of both environmental collapse and human rights.



SOUTH AMERICA IS BEING RAVAGED BY FIRE (...) BREAKING A PREVIOUS RECORD FOR THE NUMBER OF BLAZES SEEN IN A YEAR UP TO SEPT. 11. SATELLITE DATA ANALYZED BY BRAZIL'S SPACE RESEARCH AGENCY INPE HAS REGISTERED 346,112 FIRE HOTSPOTS SO FAR THIS YEAR IN ALL 13 COUNTRIES OF SOUTH AMERICA, TOPPING THE EARLIER 2007 RECORD OF 345,322 HOTSPOTS IN A DATA SERIES THAT GOES BACK TO 1998. (REUTERS)



c. Lack/insufficient legal and financial support

- Despite being on the frontlines of environmental protection, Indigenous communities in the Amazon often face insufficient legal and financial support to defend their territories and rights.
- Many communities lack access to legal representation, emergency protection mechanisms, and the financial resources necessary to sustain long-term advocacy or resistance efforts.
- This structural gap leaves defenders vulnerable to violence, land dispossession, and criminalization.

d. Ethnic and gender-based challenges



Organizations have documented the differentiated and often intensified violence faced by Indigenous women leaders and defenders. This includes a troubling rise in targeted gender-based and sexual violence, used as a deliberate strategy to displace them from their territories and weaken community resistance.

These acts are systematic efforts to fracture Indigenous governance and facilitate the advance of extractive industries.

Indigenous women, as key caretakers of land, culture, and community, face layered vulnerabilities due to both ethnic and gender-based discrimination, making their protection and empowerment essential to any meaningful environmental and human rights defense.

Objectives

The project's main goals, such as protecting Indigenous defenders, supporting female leadership, and promoting legal recognition of community-based strategies.

Interdisciplinary Legal and
Care-Based Support

Strengthen Indigenous
Leadership, focus on
empowering women & Re-
center academia with student
leadership/commitment

Co-create community-led
legal / interdisciplinary
strategies that integrate
Indigenous knowledge and
care practices.

Bridging Global South -
North with advocacy
and solidarity

How to?

- Direct engagement between TNS community and Amazon communities, highlighting the critical need for accessible legal aid and financial aid.
- Legal-interdisciplinary support that nurtures environmental guardianship and community empowerment.
- Knowledge, care, land and law to empower and defend.

"Estudiar y luchar es deber estudiantil"
(Study and fight is students duty)

Interdisciplinary research that combines legal and financial aid with care

Activities	Current activities	Expanding efforts
Direct support via NGOs & Government	Relationship building with community-based organizations, NGOs & government bodies Proposals for legal & financial aid	Recruit legal/interdisciplinary volunteers Develop regional coordinators Foster direct indigenous leader engagement
Workshops / training	Workshops on human rights, children rights and gender-based violence with emphasis in Amazon	Partner with universities for pro-bono support Needs assessment & design Mentorships program
Legal reports & Press Notes	Data collection with federations, leaders & lawyers. Standardized report/press releases/aid drafting/manuals	Engage with social media for broader outreach Support and collaboration with Marisol García (San Martín) / Linda for co-authorship (Ucayali)
Call for Inputs UN	Draft submissions aligned with UN protocols in consultation with indigenous leaders and lawyers	Increase submissions, with advocacy organization. Involve students in drafts

Re-orienting ideas

a. Patriarchy, territoriality, and margins

Women are constantly denied autonomy over their bodies; girls even face greater vulnerability due to gender, age, ethnicity, and rural living situations. In the Amazon, struggles over territorial control are constant and deeply entangled with systems of oppression.

Rita Segato (2016) offers a powerful analysis of patriarchy as a system that requires the subjugation and exhibition of the female body for its reproduction. Segato highlights the centrality of violence against women as a spectacle that sustains colonial and capitalist power structures:

“Entendemos que algo muy importante debe seguramente depender, apoyarse en esa destrucción constantemente renovada del cuerpo femenino, en el espectáculo de su subyugación, en su subordinación de escaparate. Algo central, esencial, fundacional, para el “sistema” debe ciertamente depender de que la mujer no salga de ese lugar, de ese papel, de esa función.”

(Segato, 2016)

Segato's call to "centralize the margins" offers a critical foundation for the project, as it seeks to reposition historically marginalized voices, particularly those of Indigenous women and defenders, at the center of its legal and care strategies. By grounding the work in their lived experiences and leadership, the project challenges dominant frameworks and builds more just, community-led approaches to environmental defense and legal advocacy.

b. Cuerpo-territorio

The decolonial feminist concept *Cuerpo-Territorio* highlights how Indigenous women resist imposed victimhood through care and embodied resistance. Marisol's and Carmen's teachings reinforce care and self-care as a radical act.

(Zaragocin & Caretta, 2021) situates the struggles of the body and the territory as interconnected. Rooted in Indigenous feminist practice, the concept illustrates how the violence inflicted on bodies, particularly in terms of gender and race, parallels the harm done to territories. This relationship goes beyond mere symbolism; it is fundamentally tangible, touching on critical concerns such as health, food security, and environmental degradation. The approach emphasizes participatory and embodied methods like territorial mapping to challenge and reshape geography and knowledge production through a decolonial lens.

c. Acuerpar

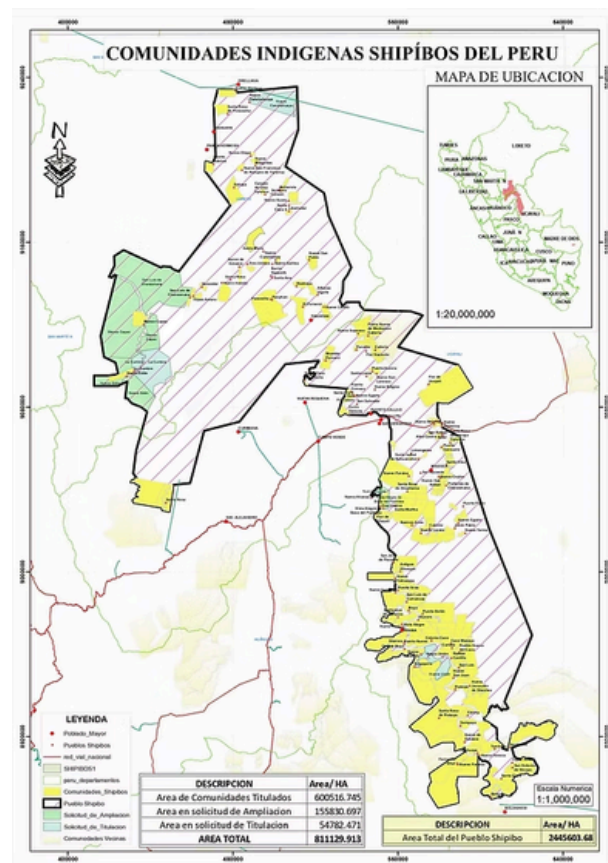
María José Méndez (2023) deepens the concept of *acuerpar*—"to give one's body"—as an act of embodied solidarity that challenges individualistic and neoliberal notions of care. Within the framework of this project, *acuerpamiento* becomes a way to shape how we approach legal advocacy, community protection, and collective healing. Rather than imposing external solutions, its imperial to practice solidarity rooted in reciprocity, mutual aid, and the physical and emotional presence alongside Indigenous defenders. An excellent example of community *acuerpamiento* of the defense of the Amazonía is the work being done by the Indigenous Guards.

Indigenous Guards

To **reclaim governance** over their ancestral territories., the Indigenous Guards of the **Shipibo** and **Kakataibo** peoples are collectively organizing through their representative organizations **COSHIKOX** and **FENACOKA**. Their work centers on protecting rivers, lakes, forests, and wildlife through community-led environmental stewardship.

Together, they represent 33 base communities across three regions of the Peruvian Amazon: Ucayali, Huánuco, and Loreto, encompassing approximately 8.5 million hectares of territory.

- Of the 33 bases, 25 are located between Ucayali and Loreto, within Shipibo territory.
- The Shipibo people have reported the highest number of threats, with 107 documented cases, while the Kakataibo people face the highest per capita risk, including a tragic number of assassinations—between 9 and 19 in recent years.
- Protected natural areas (Áreas Naturales Protegidas) are being used not only for environmental protection but also as a strategy to strengthen territorial defense.



Re-orienting support

As part of the reorienting support strategies, the project had offered tailored and context-sensitive assistance that centers Indigenous leadership and priorities. These technical strategies and ethical commitments had included:

Technical legal advisory

Through regular (weekly and biweekly) meetings to provide consistent legal support rooted in human rights and environmental frameworks

Translation

(English–Spanish) during meetings, events, and for texts and legal reports.

Focused on making legal language accessible and community-friendly, facilitating meaningful participation in transnational advocacy and legal processes.

Logistical coordination

Supporting travel, event organization, and community meetings to ensure Indigenous participation in key spaces

Enhancing Indigenous-led campaigns and initiatives

Such as those led by the Indigenous Guards, through collaborative design processes and grant writing to ensure sustainable, autonomous action.

Events co-organized & supported

**TAKE ACTION TO
DECOLONIZE CONSERVATION**

International Day of Action - Feb 27 in NYC

- FILM SCREENING "NYAMA"
10:00 AM @ The New School Room D1103, 6 East 16th Street.
With comments from Columba González-Duarte (TNS),
Miranda Mlilo (Survival) and Ashley Dawson (CUNY)

- PROTEST & VIGIL:
12:30 PM @ Central Park Zoo with comments from Abou Farman (SCC/TNS)



"We're suffering here. We don't know how we're going to survive, there is nowhere for us to live."
Suzanne, Baka woman

"Nyama" portrays an Indigenous Batwa mother and her young son, who are thrown off their land when it is made into a conservation area.

JOIN US after the film for a vigil at the Central Park Zoo, funded by the Wildlife Conservation Society. WCS supports a colonial model of conservation, including in Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Congo, where abuses have taken place against the Indigenous Batwa people.



Forest Call

New York City, NY

Date: February 28, 2025, 12:00-2:00

Venue: Henry Luce Foundation

Co-organized event, provided technical support in content development and logistics, and contributed to the design of visual materials such as posters and flyers.

Helped with the overall organization of the event, provided technical support in translation to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for diverse audiences.

Save the date

EARTH MONTH CONVERGENCE 2025

April 19th and 26th, 12-7pm | Socrates Sculpture Park



Co-organized event, support in content development and logistics. Additionally, offered translation services between Spanish - English. Contributed to accountability processes and workshop coordination. I also participated sharing insights from the project and advocating for environmental justice and Indigenous rights.



Co-organized event, support in content development and logistics. Served as a moderator and participated as a speaker, sharing insights from the project.

CONSERVATION AS EXPLOITATION

Indigenous leaders and land defenders from Abya-Yala, Africa, and Asia expose how biodiversity conservation is being weaponized for the theft of Indigenous lands. Indigenous and local communities increasingly face conservation initiatives that expel them from their lands, restrict their livelihood practices and open their territories up to carbon trading, logging and other forms of exploitation.



THIS CONVERSATION UNPACKS HOW CONSERVATION IS BEING USED TO LEGITIMIZE EXPLOITATION OF INDIGENOUS TERRITORY AND EXPLORES INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP OF NATURE AS A POWERFUL ALTERNATIVE

- Lizardo Cauper Pezo, Shipibo Konibo Xetebo Council
- Bettina Cruz Velázquez, Assembly of the Tehuantepec Isthmus
- Miranda Mlilo, Survival International
- Edward Thomas Porokwa, Pastoralists Indigenous Forum Tanzania
- Columba González-Duarte, The New School for Social Research
- Abou Farman, Shipibo Conibo Center & The New School

4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
24 APRIL 2025

CHURCH OF THE COVENANT
310 E 42ND ST. NEW YORK



Co-organized event, provided technical support in content development and logistics, and contributed to the design of visual materials.



Co-organized event, support in content development and logistics. Offered Spanish-English translation. Also participated as a speaker, sharing insights from the project and advocating for environmental justice and Indigenous rights.



minga!

['mĩŋgä]
del quechua mink'a

condición de vida en colectividad
práctica de reciprocidad
obra comunitaria retribuida con comida
intercambio de tiempo, experiencia, arte y labor
acción de movilización; fiesta-trabajo

Provided technical support and logistics, helped with the overall organization of the event. Offered translation between Spanish and English to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for diverse audiences.



Pucallpa, 27 de mayo de 2025

Asunto: Invitación a la Mesa Técnica de Trabajo sobre Ordenanzas Municipales para el Reconocimiento Normativo de las Guardias Indígenas Amazónicas



De nuestra mayor consideración:

Los apus Lizardo Cauper Pezo, Abner Ancon Rodriguez y Segundo Pino Bolívar, representantes del Consejo Shipibo Konibo Xetebo, la Organización Regional de Guardia Indígena y la Guardia Indígena del Pueblo Kakataibo del Perú, autoridades indígenas de los pueblos Shipibo Konibo y Kakataibo, tienen el agrado de invitarle a participar en la **Mesa Técnica de Trabajo sobre Ordenanzas Municipales para el Reconocimiento Normativo de las Guardias Indígenas Amazónicas**

Participated in the technical working session on municipal ordinances for the recognition of Amazonian Indigenous Guards in Ucayali, Peru as support of legal team of COSHIKOX.

Documents co-authored & supported

1. Co-drafted a contribution for the Call for Input to the UN report on Indigenous Peoples and International Solidarity, in partnership with Instituto de Defensa Legal.
2. Co-authored the document “Amazonian Indigenous Guards: Our Right to Exercise Justice with Autonomy to Protect Our Lives and Territories,” an initiative led by the Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo Council (COSHIXOX).
3. Supported the methodological design of the “Rights” section in the First Meeting of Kakataibo Women, an initiative of the Indigenous Guard of the Kakataibo People.



Donaciones

Convocatoria de información para el informe sobre los Pueblos Indígenas y la solidaridad internacional

PUBLICADO POR
Experto independiente en derechos humanos y solidaridad internacional

Huánuco, 8 y 9 de mayo de 2025. Durante dos días, la comunidad nativa de Santa Martha fue escenario del Primer Encuentro de Mujeres Kakataibo, una iniciativa histórica convocada por la Guardia Indígena del Pueblo Kakataibo del Perú (GIPKAP). Este encuentro reunió a treinta mujeres pertenecientes al pueblo Kakataibo, y con dos invitadas del pueblo Kichwa de la Red de Mujeres Indígenas de San Martín de la CODEPISAM, y de la Organización Regional de la Guardia Indígena del pueblo Shipibo-Konibo (ORGI), quienes compartieron sus experiencias de organización y defensa de derechos en sus territorios.



Guardias Indígenas Amazónicas: nuestro derecho a ejercer la justicia con autonomía para proteger nuestras vidas y territorios

Consejo Shipibo Konibo Xetebo
Organización Regional de Guardia Indígena
Federación Nativa de Comunidades Kakataibo
Guardia Indígena del Pueblo Kakataibo del Perú
Instituto de Defensa Legal
Forest Peoples Programme
The Shipibo Konibo Center
Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social

Competition? not competition but collaboration

Below is a map illustrating the Legal and Care Network's reach and collaborative opportunities planned for 2025–2026. Highlighting key regional organizations as Ucayali (COSHICOX) and San Martin (FEPIKECHA); community partners, and institutional allies engaged in this transnational effort.



This is a careful team effort

Special thanks are due to:

- **Mike Harrington**, Aronson Fellowship mentor and Director, Sustainability Engagement at Tishman Environment and Design Center.
- **Prof. Abou Farman**, Anthropology Program Advisor and President of the Shipibo Conibo Center.
- **Prof. Neyda Martinez** and **Prof. Jen Van Der Meer**, co-directors and mentors of the Impact Entrepreneurship Initiative.

To all of the above and below, thank you for the -still ongoing- contributions to this care-collaboration journey.

Project inspiration. colleagues and friends



Marisol García: Kichwa leader of the Tupac Amaru community in San Martin and currently president of the FEPIKECHA. Served on the board of directors of the CODEPISAM, the regional organization that is part of AIDSEP. Marisol has been key in the project conceptualization.



Linda Vigo: Lawyer and human rights defender, worked with FECONAU, Instituto de Defensa Legal, Forest Peoples Programmes, Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, and the Human Rights Commission of Pucallpa. Currently, she is the head of the SCC-COSHICOX Legal Program in Ucayali.



Columba Gonzalez-Duarte: Anthropologist PhD University of Toronto, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at The New School. Research on feminist ecology and ethics of care. Studied relationship between monarch butterflies and communities they interact with. Currently, professor mentoring the project.



Rosa Arévalo: Political scientist with a diploma in Human Rights, MPA at Syracuse. Experience conducting research in the Peruvian Amazon (Amazonas and San Martín). Currently, PhD student in Politics at CUNY collaborating with research and partnership opportunities.



Carmen Álvarez: K'iche' woman, anthropologist, socio-environmental psychotherapist, activist committed to healing and life-saving processes, as a network serving the community. Currently, she is supporting the project and care network with spiritual mentorship.



Carol Montealegre: Anthropologist, Visual Arts MA from UNAM. Research intersect cinema, performance art, and human rights advocacy. Worked on the project Howls in the Mountains with a women's union in Colombia on alternative healing practices for post war trauma. Currently part of the Shipibo Conibo Center.



As the project proposer of the **Legal Aid and Care Network for Amazonía**, I am honored and deeply thankful to the Aronson Fellowship to allow me continue building on longstanding relationships with colleagues, friends and communities committed to co-developing strategies that center Indigenous leadership, decolonial practices, and the defense of life.

Moments captured along the journey





*Buen vivir es cuidado a la vida y el
territorio con dignidad*

THANK
you

