

PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY FOUR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE ‘PEOPLE OF THE CENTRE’ (COLOMBIAN AMAZON)

Opening a path of understanding with the Colombian government to jointly safeguard the future of life in the Amazon

- *Between 23 and 27 October 2023, our delegation of four indigenous peoples from the Amazon - **Pøøsiøhø** (Andoke), **Nonova ïini** (Nonuya), **Feeneminaa** (Muinane) and **Nipodimaki** (Nipode-Uitoto-speaking), known as the **‘People of the Centre’**, arrived in Bogotá to demand that the National Government includes us in processes relating to Supreme Court Ruling 4360/2018 on the protection of the Colombian Amazon.*
- *We travelled to the capital because we are **deeply concerned about the expansion of the agricultural frontier in the Colombian Amazon**. Every year, the deforestation ‘monster’ comes closer to our territories of life, despite the many commitments of the Colombian state to stop the forest loss.*
- *We, the ‘People of the Centre’, **are the ancestral owners and administrators of our territories**, but we have not been consulted nor respected in the implementation of the Court Ruling to date.*
- *During our visit to Bogotá, we have met with various national government bodies and attended a hearing that we requested at the High Court of Bogotá. We presented our concerns regarding Ruling 4360/2018 to the court hearing, and filed our petitions seeking our **direct and effective participation in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the Sentence**.*

Bogotá, 27 October 2023: During the week of 23-27 October, our delegation of traditional authorities and delegates representing the indigenous Amazonian Pøøsiøhø (Andoke), Nonova ïini (Nonuya), Feeneminaa (Muinane) and Nipode-speaking Uitoto peoples were in Bogotá to demand that different national government authorities guarantee our direct and effective participation in the forest policy instruments and agreements ordered by the Supreme Court of Justice under *Ruling 4360/2018*. Our peoples are the traditional owners of territories of life in the departments of Amazonas and Caquetá. We are known as the ‘People of the Centre’ and we make up the Association of Traditional Authorities of the Regional Indigenous Council of the Middle Amazon (CRIMA). The primary objective of our visit to Bogota has been to obtain guarantees for our fundamental rights, including the right to exercise self-government, and our rights to prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent, among others.

The Colombian Supreme Court ruling ordered that concrete mechanisms to stop deforestation and mitigate climate change be established, in order to safeguard the future of life in the Colombian Amazon and the rights of future generations. Five years have passed since the ruling, yet, we, the indigenous Amazonian peoples who inhabit the Middle Caquetá River Basin, who identify ourselves as the ‘People of the Centre’, have not been informed in a timely manner about the process and, even less, consulted in our ancestral and traditional territories.

This situation is of immense concern to us. We, the ‘People of the Centre’, are the ancestral owners of our territories, which cover almost 3 million hectares. We are concerned about the expansion of the agricultural frontier, and we are dismayed that the Colombian state has not been able to control it, thus violating the fundamental rights of our future generations.

Given our apprehensions about threats to the Amazon forest and the violations of our fundamental rights, we, the ‘People of the Centre’ requested a hearing with the High Court to express our serious misgivings in relation to STC 4360/2018. This hearing was held on 25 October in the presence of state institutions with which we also met during the week, including the Administrative Department of the Presidency, the Ministries of the Interior, Agriculture and Rural Development, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Ombudsman’s Office and the Amazonian Institute for Scientific Research SINCHI. We consider this hearing to be historic, **as we are the first Amazonian Indigenous Peoples who have given evidence and presented petitions directly to this Tribunal overseeing implementation of Judgment 4360/2018.**

We presented directly to the hearing our concerns regarding climate change and the uncontrolled advance of the deforestation frontier, which have affected our territories of life in various ways, including increasing temperatures, alteration of crops in our traditional fields, loss of soil fertility and disruption in the reproductive cycles of species such as fruit trees in the forest and fish in our rivers. All the above violate our fundamental right to life, and are threatening our health, food security and future survival. Forest destruction and climate change also endanger the health of our Mother Earth. Our Mother is sick, and her sickness affects her human children and all other beings in nature.

In order to assert our rights and sustain the life of future generations in our ancestral and traditional territories, we presented **our concerns and proposals relating to ruling 4360/2018 to the state bodies and to the High Court**, including, among others:

1. **The national government** must guarantee us a process of prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent, with adequate guarantees and resources, before formulating and implementing any plan or action that could affect our territories of life. These rights must be triggered in relation to all plans, programmes, projects, measures, ordinances, contracts, international treaties, conventions and judicial decisions that have been taken and may affect our traditional and ancestral territories. These fundamental rights are protected under the Colombian Constitution and in jurisprudence derived from the decisions of the higher courts of Colombia. They are also recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169 and other international human rights instruments.
2. **The National Government, the Supreme Court of Justice and the High Court of Bogotá** must guarantee our rights of access to information and full, effective and direct participation in all actions, decisions, measures and initiatives relating to this court ruling and subsequent court orders that may potentially impact on our territories and fundamental rights. This must be enabled through the establishment of a new intergenerational space or mechanism which allows us to influence all the relevant processes of the STC 4360/2018, that may affect us and our generations.

3. We must be guaranteed the exercise of our rights to govern, control and administer the territories of the four peoples of the 'People of the Centre' in any national or international plan, programme, measure or initiative associated with the Judgment, which may have a (direct or indirect) impact on our cultural and territorial rights and integrity.
4. To ensure the future of life in our traditional and ancestral territories in the Colombian Amazon and to benefit future generations, Law No.2 of 1959 must be repealed or at least amended, in order to establish solid legal guarantees for our territorial rights. In addition, adequate public resources must be made available to strengthen self-government and support the territorial environmental management practices of the 'People of the Centre'.
5. **The National Government, NGOs along with international climate and environmental funds** must ensure direct funding and technical assistance for our peoples, in order to maintain our ancestral knowledge systems and support our self-determined initiatives to care for our territories of life. Our priority is to construct our own Life Plans according to our Word of Life to guarantee the survival of our present and future generations.

Voices of our traditional authorities and indigenous delegates on STC 4360/2018

Marcelino Fiagama, Traditional Authority of the Nipodimaki People (Nipode-speaking Uitoto):

"The natural cycle of life for us has an order each day and night. Throughout the year there is an ecological calendar that guarantees the life of our territories and the Amazon. The sun shines during the day so that the 'People of the Centre' can engage in livelihood activities. At night, the moon shines more softly so that the trees in the forest can cool down and rest, breathe and drink water. In the early morning, a mist forms that later disperses, and then the blue sky appears, reflecting the colour of the forest canopy."

"Today, we can no longer work in our traditional fields after 8 a.m. We used to be able to work until 10 a.m. Now the midday heat heats up our traditional house. The heat passes through the roof. This was not the case before; our traditional dwelling was cool all day long. In our analysis, the upper atmosphere is being damaged by air pollution."

Jorge Ortiz, Traditional Authority of the Fééneminaa People (Muinane):

"The problem we are experiencing is that Mother Earth is warming up. She is unwell. If she is sick, we, who are her children, are worried. We must look for ways to soothe and calm her."

"We have the knowledge of origins and the Word of Life. We apply it in our territories. We want to exchange knowledge with non-indigenous society, but often they only come to our territories to extract resources and look for money. We do not understand those who cause destruction, poverty, inequality and damage to Mother Earth. Nor do we understand why the State cannot control its 'children' (settlers, cattle ranchers, etc.) who cause disorder and deforestation in the Amazon. We seek dialogue to understand each other and demand that the state control its children."

Levi Suárez, Pueblo Fééneminaa (Muinane):

“We seek a direct and lasting dialogue between the indigenous governments of our four peoples of the ‘People of the Centre’ and the national government. In this way, we seek to guarantee our effective participation in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of any programme, measure or planning instrument, derived from Ruling 4360, that may affect our ancestral and traditional territories.”

Alvaro Rodriguez, Traditional Authority, Nonova ñinii People (People of Achiote):

“The truth is that climate change and global warming are not the fault of the ‘People of the Centre’. These problems are caused by big industries and wealthy people who are extracting oil, minerals, uranium and other materials from the sub-soil. These substances are the strength of our Mother Earth. Their extraction makes our Mother Earth sick, and it breaks the natural cycle of life. All the factories and the burning of petrol pollute the air.”

“Our Creator established a system for generating life-giving air. The bodily hair of the Mother are the trees of the forest. They absorb the pollution and dirt and send it down into the ground, where it is purified by the Mother. The trees and all the plants take it back and breathe out the air of life. This is what sustains vibrant life and the health of humanity. But the tree-felling monster is the same money monster. The forest is being destroyed to make money. And that is why we came so far here to Bogotá, in order to call the attention of the Colombian authorities. I sang in the Court: ‘Where are you, state authorities [in tackling deforestation]? The rubber industry almost exterminated our Nonova ñinii people last century. For us, the few survivors, this genocide makes us very sad. And now deforestation and the money monster are coming to exterminate us. That is why we came here to tell the Colombian authorities: Listen to us! Take decisions with your authorities to prevent the destruction before it reaches our territories of life.”

Hernán Moreno, Pueblo Nonova ñinii (People of Achiote):

“We are concerned about the ‘monster’ of deforestation that is devastating the forest. This monster is advancing together with the agricultural frontier. It is eating the trees and leaving behind cattle pastures. But the state is not attacking this monster that is exterminating life. Every year it continues to advance in the headwaters of the Yará River, along the Caguán River and south of Miraflores, as it advances towards our territories of life of the ‘People of the Centre’. If this monster is not stopped, it will reach our territorial limits in just a few years. We are concerned about what will happen to our children and grandchildren in the future. One message our commission has brought to the Colombian government is that we need to attack the monster of deforestation together in order to heal Mother Earth.”

Franklin Andoque, Pueblo Pøøsiho (People of the Axe):

“As ancestral owners of our territories of life and indigenous rights-holders, our deep concern is that our peoples, the ‘People of the Centre’, have not been informed, let alone consulted about this court ruling, especially in relation to its associated instruments and initiatives that may have a direct impact on our territories. Five years have passed since the ruling was adopted, yet mechanisms or processes to enable effective participation, prior consultation, and respect for the right to free, prior and informed consent of our peoples remain unclear.”

Additional documents (attached in [the press kit](#)):

1. Demands And Proposals of the People of the Centre: Intergenerational Pact for the Life of the Colombian Amazon (PIVAC) (available in Spanish only)
2. A Word from the People of the Centre on the Future of Life in the Amazon as a Territory of Life (available in Spanish only)

Contacts for further information:

Kevin Castro, Facilitator of the 'People of the Centre' delegation to Bogota, +57 322 6902766

Tom Griffiths, Senior Advisor, Forest Peoples Programme, tom@forestpeoples.org

Niya Seklemova, Digital Communications Officer, Forest Peoples Programme, niya@forestpeoples.org / +31 6 23368935