



**ENTIDAD TERRITORIAL INDÍGENA ATUN WASI IUAI
DEL PUEBLO INGA DE COLOMBIA - AWAI**
MANDATO DE LA ASAMBLEA GENERAL (noviembre 30 de 2017)
Constitución Política de Colombia de 1991 Artículo 7, 246 y 56 transitorio
Convenio 169 de la OIT Artículo 8,1
Decreto Ley No. 1953 de 2014 y Decreto 252 de 2020
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INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND THE PRESERVATION AND PRODUCTION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE: THE EXAMPLE OF THE INGA PEOPLE OF COLOMBIA

COVER NOTE:

As set out in the Annexed report, the Inga people of Colombia consider intercultural education and the production of knowledge as an important means of preserving their ancestral wisdom and culture. Whereas the Inga people have managed over recent decades to entrench their own system of education at the primary and secondary levels, they now seek to establish a similar form of Inga-led education at the tertiary level. This is particularly important to generate and protect scientific knowledge, which can play an important role in a pluri-epistemic system of knowledge production both within Colombia and throughout the world in general. The Inga people have a close connection with nature and the protection of the environment, and seek to elevate scientific inquiry dedicated to these purposes, along with the preservation of cultural knowledge and practices.

The attached report details the history behind the efforts of the Inga people to secure their own educational pathways. It notes that establishing their own intercultural higher education institution will help to preserve Indigenous knowledge and facilitate its transfer between generations. It will also contribute to strengthening peacebuilding efforts in a territory that has struggled with armed conflict for several decades.

As higher education structures have increasingly recognised the importance of diversifying sources of learning and welcoming alternative modes of knowledge creation, the Inga people's higher education project stands as an important ongoing development. It has the potential to introduce transformational change by providing a model of education which places Indigenous knowledge at the centre of learning and the governance of higher education institutions and systems. The present cover note and Annexed report are designed to contribute to these broader purposes.



Annex

THE INGA PEOPLE OF COLOMBIA, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- There is no intercultural higher education space that follows up on the ethno-educational project that the Inga people have managed to establish for their primary and secondary education. Having their own intercultural higher education institution will be a means to preserve and ensure the transfer of Indigenous knowledge between generations and strengthen peacebuilding efforts in their ancestral territory.
- AWAI has the right to establish its own educational system in accordance with Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DDPI) and with national legislation, including the Constitution of Colombia.
- The Inga people of Colombia, from their ancient wisdom and their principles of life, based on their *plan de salvaguarda*, and from their different and comprehensive vision of (so-called) development, consider the generation of new paradigms of training and higher education from their University will be valuable for all humanity.
- The Inga people seek your support to defend the right of Indigenous peoples to enjoy their own intercultural higher education as a path to guarantee peace and transitional justice and request your advice on how to achieve this goal.

Requests:

Based on the information set forth in this report, we respectfully request that you and your team take note of the information and concerns of the Inga people regarding the protection, preservation, and transfer of their cultural knowledge to future generations and the establishment of institutions and educational programs led by Indigenous peoples (particularly at the tertiary level) and:

- disseminate this information through your channels;
- incorporate this information into your initiatives and analysis, as an example of the challenges faced by an Indigenous people in a post-conflict situation;
- connect representatives of the Inga people with other people and groups who can help address these challenges;
- provide any other support that you consider useful for the Inga people in these aspects.

The report is divided into an introduction and nine prioritized topics :

1. Brief historical context of the Inga people of Colombia
2. The organizational process of the Inga people of Colombia



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3. Mandates of the First National Congress of the Inga People of Colombia
4. Human rights, the peace agreement, and the Inga people of Colombia
5. The law and education processes of the Inga people of Colombia
6. The University project of the Inga people of Colombia as a strategy for the recovery, protection, and projection of their ancient knowledge, science, and technology
7. Risks and challenges for the conservation and strengthening of the cultural practices and ancient knowledge of the Inga people of Colombia
8. Call to guarantee the fundamental and collective rights of the Inga people of Colombia, solidarity with their organizational process, and the strengthening of their own education, including the project to create the University as a path to strengthen peace and transitional justice
9. General conclusions

INTRODUCTION

The Inga People of Colombia have a worldview on life and development based on the wisdom of nature, of the *Alpa Mama* (Mother Earth). With a spirituality that is nourished by the sacred plant of *Ambiwaska* (also known as Ayahuasca or Yagé), it is an Indigenous People that is characterized by its ancestral knowledge and the practice of traditional medicine. The Inga are also known for the management of their own politics, and commerce under the Andean principles: *Ama llulla*, *Ama Quella*, and *Ama Sua* (do not lie, do not be lazy, do not steal or take anything from anyone). Likewise, the Inga people manage their own systems of education, health, justice, economy, and self-government, among others.

Since colonial times, the Inga people, like other Indigenous peoples of present-day Colombia, have faced all kinds of violations of their individual and collective rights. This situation has put them at high risk of physical and cultural extinction¹. However, in recent decades the Ingas have advanced organizational processes and have articulated efforts in the defense of individual and collective rights, always within the framework of community mandates. The Inga people have strengthened their political bases, and have their own governance structure under the leadership of Inga men and women who continuously struggle to defend their communities and their territory.

This document presents, in summary, the current reality of the Inga people of Colombia, their organizational process, and particularly the importance of supporting the protection of their culture and territory through the creation of their university as a space with a differential ethnic approach and a focus on human rights.

¹Auto 004 of 2009



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1. Brief historical context of the Inga people of Colombia

The Inga people of Colombia are descendants of the Mitimak group of the Incas of the Tawantinsuyo, known as the Inca Empire to the Spanish. Their Mitimak ancestors were responsible for territorial control and expansion, and the presence of the Inga people in the territory of what is now Colombia dates back many centuries. According to colonial chronicles, upon the arrival of the Spanish Hernán Pérez de Quesada in 1532 to the Sibundoy Valley, the current department of Putumayo, the Ingas had an entire community organizational system that harmoniously linked different aspects, including governance, justice, education, health, economy and food sovereignty in their *chagras* (agroecological farms). The social researcher Charles Mann states in his book “1491: A history of the Americas before Columbus” (2006) that the Incas had managed to establish true States, much larger and more organized than some of those one finds today.

Since the Mitimak were the Incas in charge of expanding the borders of the Tawantinsuyo, some reached what is now known as the middle and lower Putumayo from the southeast through the Amazon region and others from the southwest through the Andes, permanently locating themselves in the highlands of Putumayo. Taita Carlos Tamabioy lived in this region and was considered the key figure who marked the beginning of a history of resistance and struggle for the defense of the cultural and territorial rights of the Inga people in 1700. From then on, the Inga people have expanded to different regions for various historical reasons, and today, more than 25,000 Ingas are located not only in the department of Putumayo but also in the departments of Caquetá, Nariño, and Cauca, in 22 of the 32 capital cities of Colombia and in other countries such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador. Recently, several Inga families have also migrated to North America due to the internal armed conflict. Approximately 35% of the Inga people are located outside their ancestral territory, a reality that leads to a complex situation of “cultural resistance.”

The Inga people of Colombia, historically and according to the Tawantinsuyo tradition, were organized into *ayllus* or family clans. During the colony, the Spanish crown imposed the figure of the *cabildo* (community council) and the *resguardo* (reservation). These forms of government were controlled by the missionaries to avoid disorder in the community or disobedience to civil or religious authority. Today, these forms of community organization have been appropriated by many Indigenous peoples as a structure of self-government and have the legal status of public institutions of a special nature. Its traditional authorities (governors) are public authorities with political-administrative and justice administration powers and functions.

Over the centuries, the Ingas have been characterized by their knowledge and ancestral management of traditional medicine, organizational politics, production, and economy based on respect for the Natural Law of Origin and the resources of the *Alpa Mama*. The Inga people reflect the cosmos in their forms of social, economic, political, and cultural organization. “Our environment is not only limited to the elements of nature and other human beings, but every beat of our hearts drives us to live it in a beautiful way, to weave harmonious relationships with all beings based on the practice of respect, and the observance of the values and principles that make it work, as well as the strength of all the elements that become life. In this way, we learned to take from nature only what we need, asking



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permission and thanking the Earth for its goodness, and its teachings on values and principles that have to do with community and collective life as opposed to individualism.”²

2. The organizational process of the Inga people of Colombia

In November 2017, the Inga people of Colombia convened a General Assembly to review and approve the content of their *plan de salvaguarda Nukanchipa Kaugsaita Iuiata Mana Wañungapa Sakisunchi* “so that our life and thought survive,” and to make the relevant decisions for its implementation. The assembly had the participation of more than 800 Ingas from all over the country, including authorities and delegates from 98 communities. After five days of diligent work, the main thematic lines of the *plan de salvaguarda* were approved, and the *Atun Wasi Iuiai Indigenous Territorial Entity - AWAI* of the Inga people of Colombia was created as an organic instrument for the promotion and defense of fundamental and collective rights of all Inga communities and families nationwide. The assembly approved the statutes of the organization that contain the organic, administrative, and executive norms and bases. In addition, the assembly, in accordance with the approved statutes, elected the members of the Directive Council, and the zonal councilors and thematic delegates for a four-year term. This team of leaders was given the mandate to launch the strategic implementation of the different themes of the *plan de salvaguarda*.

What was achieved in the General Assembly is the result of more than eight years of discussion and consensus in which children, young people, women, men, elders, spiritual guides (Yachas - Sinchis), and leaders of the Inga people participated. During this time, the different problems, strengths, and challenges were observed and analyzed, leading to the formulation of action strategies in the short, medium, and long term, with a comprehensive and intercultural vision and approach, taking into account the ancient historical memory of the Inga people and their current relationship to the state and the world.

Since 2017, the Inga people have made progress in the implementation of the *plan de salvaguarda*, mainly in the areas of governance, education, and culture. Within the framework of Indigenous peoples at the national level, they have advanced their own organizational process. AWAI is their highest instance of participation, control, and national regulation. It supports the Inga to address issues internally and, accordingly, when these must be elevated to other institutional settings, within their own uses and customs. In addition to AWAI, territorial or zonal organizations have also emerged, among them the Association of Ingas Cabildos of Villagarzón, Putumayo - ASIMVIP, the Association of Ingas Cabildos of Caquetá - *Tandachirido*, the Association of Inga Cabildos and Resguardos of the Municipality of Piamonte, Cauca - *Nukanchipa Atunkunapa Alpa*, the Association of Inga Cabildos of the middle Putumayo - *Suma Kausai* and the *Musu Runakuna* (New People) organization in the upper Putumayo.

In May 2023, the First National Congress of the Inga People of Colombia was held in Piamonte, Cauca. It was an event that had the participation of more than 500 delegates from 98 councils nationwide. At this meeting, activities related to all themes of the *plan de salvaguarda* were carried out, a fact that allowed the general mandate of the 2017 General Assembly to be renewed and ratified, giving

² *Nukanchi Ñambi Katiatishisunshi Ñugpama* - Comprehensive Life Plan of the Inga Indigenous Council of Santiago de Cali PIVCIISC, page 36



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strategic orientations in its lines of action to achieve the guarantee of individual and collective rights of the Inga people.

AWAI is an Indigenous organization with one of the largest community bases in Colombia. All 98 Inga community councils in Colombia participated in the general assembly (2017) and in its first national congress (2023). In both spaces they supported the creation and launch of their national organization. The programmatic essence of AWAI is framed in the content and scope of the *plan de salvaguarda* of the Inga People of Colombia, and has a democratic and pluralistic organizational structure that facilitates the interaction between the representative bodies of the organization and its base communities. AWAI has a board headed by the legal representative, a technical secretary, a financial secretary and a supplementary member, who guide the interrelation of all the thematic axes, which are led by zone coordinators, who in turn guarantee the participation of the community, assisted by zonal councilors and thematic coordinators.

3. Mandates of the First National Congress of the Inga People of Colombia.

During the First National Congress of the Inga People of Colombia, and in accordance with the *plan de salvaguarda* and its statutes, mandates were defined to formalize autonomous and self-determined internal agreements. To give continuity to processes that require harmonization between the Indigenous special jurisdiction, ordinary justice and the current situation, which shows the need to focus on nine thematic axes of work: Territory, biodiversity, environment, climate change, prevention and attention to natural disasters (cross-cutting to all thematic axes); governance, self-justice and *wasikamas* (guardians of the environment); education and culture; woman, family, generation and older adult; youth; *chagras* (agroecology), food sovereignty and Inga economy; communication and intercultural relations; Inga health and medicine; and comprehensive life and self-development plans. The promotion of each of the thematic axes is under the responsibility of a team of eight Inga people delegated by each of the zones, according to the territorial structure of AWAI. There are eight thematic teams coordinated by a zonal counselor. They have the duty to organize a work plan based on the *plan de salvaguarda*, the statutory mandates of the national congress, and the reality of the communities of the Inga people in each one of the thematic areas. These plans constitute the roadmap for compliance with the mandates established for a four-year period.

4. Human rights, the peace agreement and the Inga people of Colombia

Like many Indigenous peoples of Colombia, during the last decades the Inga people have faced serious violations of human rights due to internal armed conflict³, drug trafficking, and the promotion and development of mining and oil extraction megaprojects. Forced displacement has caused several members of the Inga people to leave their territory towards urban areas of the country. For the Inga, this is very serious since the guarantee of the right to land, territory and their own education is crucial

³According to information presented by the Human Rights Observatory of the Vice Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, in the years following 2001, the Inga, as victims, occupy seventh place nationally with 10 violent acts and massacres, which represent 5% of the national total (183) in that year (Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, 2009).



for their physical and cultural integrity, as recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (2007) in Article 14(1).

Faced with these facts, and in response to the multiple demands for protection, the Constitutional Court of Colombia issued Decision T-025 of 2004, which highlighted the human rights situation of the Inga and other 33 Indigenous peoples of the country. The reality for Indigenous peoples in Colombia proved to be contrary to what was established in the 1991 political constitution, of which Indigenous peoples are co-authors through their participation with three Indigenous constituents democratically elected in the National Constituent Assembly. Following-up on compliance with the orders of this Decision, the Constitutional Court declared, through Judgment 004 of 2009, that 34 Indigenous peoples in Colombia, of which the Inga people are a part, are in a situation of high risk of physical and cultural extinction, and ordered the competent public entities of the Colombian State to build, in consultation, two instruments that would allow the protection of the physical integrity of its communities. To this end, the construction of a program of guarantees of fundamental and collective rights, and *planes de salvaguarda* (safeguard plans) that guarantee the physical and cultural survival of these Indigenous peoples were defined. From that moment, the Inga people of Colombia have moved forward with a participatory consultation process to formulate their *plan de salvaguarda*, for which they had the technical and financial support of the Ministry of the Interior.

The Inga People have their own system of internal law based on their *Ley Mayor* (Major Law), Law of Life or Origin, and Law of Good Living of Indigenous Peoples. These laws account for the deep relationship of the Inga people with the Taita *Inti* (Sun), the *Alpa Mama*, and all the beings that inhabit it, beyond any written or imposed rule.⁴ In addition, other legal milestones that must be taken into account are the following:

- a. At the international level, there are several instruments of relevance. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires that “[in] States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right to which they are entitled, in common with other members of their group, to have their own cultural life, to profess and practice their own religion and to use their own language.” More generally, Article 1 requires States to promote the exercise of self-determination. In Article 13(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the States Parties recognize the right of everyone to education and that “education should enable all people to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and among all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and to promote the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” Furthermore, Article 13 requires that “[nothing] in this article shall be construed as a restriction on the freedom of individuals and entities to establish and direct educational institutions, provided that the principles set forth in paragraph 1 and that the education given in these institutions conforms to the minimum standards prescribed by the State.” Article 15(1)(a) of the said Covenant recognizes the fundamental right to participate in cultural life. Colombia is a State party to both international Covenants.

⁴see *Nukanchi Ñambi Katiatishisunshi Ñugpama* - Comprehensive Life Plan of the Inga Indigenous Council of Santiago de Cali PIVCIISC, page 35



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- b. At the regional level, Colombia is part of the 1969 American Convention on Human Rights, Article 26 of which requires that the State parties “undertake to adopt measures [...] to progressively achieve the full effectiveness of the rights derived from the norms [...] on education, science, and culture”. Furthermore, Colombia is a party to the Additional Protocol of San Salvador of 1999, in which the States parties “recognize that, in order to achieve the full exercise of the right to education, [...] (c) higher education must be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of each person's capacity, by whatever means are appropriate and, in particular, by the progressive implementation of free education” (Article 13(3)(c)). The Protocol of San Salvador also provides that education must “be oriented towards the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and must strengthen respect for human rights, ideological pluralism, fundamental freedoms, justice and peace.” (Article 13(2)). Therefore, the Inga People are located in a territory where both the cultural rights of Indigenous peoples must be recognized, as well as the specific importance of the rights to receive their own education and open a path leading to peace.
- c. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DDPI), approved by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007, substantiates the need and usefulness of establishing their own higher education institutions. According to Article 5 of the DDPI, “Indigenous peoples have the right to preserve and strengthen their own political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions.” The university itself is a means that would ensure having its own educational institution that, in turn, would materialize the Indigenous right to “establish and control their institutional teaching systems [...] in line with their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (Art 14(1), DDPI).
- d. At the national level, the Political Constitution of Colombia of 1991 establishes that the recognition and protection of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Nation is one of the pillars that support the Social Rule of Law (Art. 7) and that education is a fundamental constitutional right of a person and a public service that has a social function; it promotes access to knowledge, science, technology, and other cultural goods and values” (Art. 67).
- e. The Constitutional Court of Colombia, through Judgment 004 of 2009, established that 34 Indigenous peoples are on the verge of physical and cultural extinction, given that they have been “displaced by armed conflict” or are “at risk of forced displacement, in the framework for overcoming the unconstitutional state of affairs declared in ruling T-025 of 2004.”
- f. Decision T-282 of 2011 establishes “the situation of some members of Indigenous communities forcibly displaced to an urban area and the possible loss of their cultural values... the will to preserve or reconstruct ancestral customs, ancestral lineage, and the self-recognition of "Aboriginal peoples as culturally diverse are determining criteria of differentiated ethnic identity."
- g. Decision T-973/09 on the Right to Political Autonomy of the Indigenous Community refers to the fundamental right to be governed by its own authorities, without the interference of the authority of the State.
- h. The Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace in Colombia, signed between the National Government and the FARC-EP in 2016, incorporated an Ethnic Chapter that reaffirms in its principles that the interpretation and implementation of all components of the Agreement will



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be carried out “with an ethnic approach”, “considered in the legal system of the international, constitutional, jurisprudential and legal framework, especially the principle of non-regression, recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the principles and rights recognized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – CERD, the Durban Declaration of Action, the United Nations Declaration United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.” The latter, commonly referred to as ILO Convention 169, created the legal basis for a more effective Indigenous struggle on a global scale. This Convention had an immediate impact on the new Constitution of Colombia signed in 1991, which recognizes several of these Indigenous rights, including the right to their specific culture and language and to an inalienable territory, eliminating previous policies that sought cultural assimilation.⁵

5. The law and education processes of the Inga people of Colombia

Taking into account the aforementioned legal parameters, the strengthening of higher education promoted by the Inga people is of the highest importance given that, for the Indigenous peoples in Colombia, according to decree 4633 of 2011, the territory is also a victim of the armed conflict and consequently, peace is not only between humans but also with non-human beings from a perspective of biocultural peace, as has already been stated by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace created by the Agreement.

Territory in the last three decades has become a basis from which ethnic communities in the world—especially in the so-called third world—can launch their processes of political recognition. ILO Convention 169 exalts the importance of territory for Indigenous and tribal peoples and the spiritual and cultural bond that is interwoven. Colombia ratified this Convention with the turn to multiculturalism that occurred after the 1991 Constitution, in which ethnic peoples and their territories were recognized and became subjects of rights.⁶

To commence, we start from the notion of the collective of ethnic peoples; because in what other way could the conception of the territory be arrived at? Colombian regulations based on Decrees 4633 and 4635 of 2011 [1], link collective communities to the term “territory”. However, in these regulations the treatment given to the territory “sometimes appears as a place that enables the emergence of certain cultural features; others, as a living entity, and others, simply as property.”⁷

In this context, in paragraph 4 of Article 3 of Decree 4633, the Colombian Government recognizes that “for the Indigenous peoples, the territory is a victim” of the internal armed conflict and that therefore the comprehensive reparation that must be carried out in the different Indigenous peoples as part of the mechanisms that seek truth, justice and guarantees of non-repetition, also allow us to understand

⁵see <https://deveniruniversidad.org/>

⁶<https://medioambiente.uexternado.edu.co/es-el-territorio-victima-del-conflicto-armado/>

⁷The territory as a victim. Political ontology and victim laws for Indigenous and black communities in Colombia, page 96.



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that this "worldview and the special and collective bond that unites them with Mother Earth" involves not only them as a group, but also their territory as an integral part of their community. For its part, Article 9 of Decree 4635 establishes that territorial environmental damage occurs when the victimizing events that occurred in accordance with the infractions and violations of human rights have also affected "the natural ecosystems, the sustainability and sustainability of the territory of the communities".

Up to this point, two clear distinctions are observed between both decrees regarding the idea of territory as victim. But, it is essential to consider that this classification as a victim does not have a basis per se in the laws of the Colombian Government, but rather has its origin and prominence in the ethnic communities whose demands regarding the "land are not questions of agrarian reform but more well issues of recognition of autonomy, of traditional socio-cultural spaces and the rights to benefit from the natural resources contained therein: that is, territorial rights."⁸

In practical terms, the territory as an entity is the victim and the damage caused are all those actions that occurred within the framework of generalized violence, which affected the environment⁹. These are arguments that, among others, were taken into account to regulate the victims law 1448, taking into account to the differential approach and the existence of environmental and spiritual impacts that affected the territory, and disharmonized it with the havoc caused by violence, such as the selective murder of male and female leaders, traditional doctors, Indigenous authorities, the indiscriminate logging of trees, contamination from oil spills, among others that are recognized in the Decree Law of Victims No. 4633 of 2011, "[t]hrough which measures of assistance, care, comprehensive reparation and restitution of territorial rights to the victims belonging to Indigenous peoples and communities", who within the framework of their autonomy and self-determination have demonstrated in defense of alpa mama (mother earth) and continue to weave in the transmission of their own ancestral knowledge for survival in time and space as Inga people wherever an Inga has been forced to move either due to factors of violence caused by armed groups or due to state abandonment.

Thus, in addition to the territories of origin, today there are also councils organized in the context of the city, which due to their principles of life and their sense of belonging, preserve their cultural roots and resist in defense of their human rights. Individuals and collectives facing the constant threat of extermination have prescribed the criteria for the formation of town councils in the context of the city through their political organizational process. This occurs via spaces of national consultation. There is the protocol booklet for Town Councils in the context of the city which creates the route, not only for the Inga people but also for the other Town Councils, which coexist in the city.

The Indigenous authorities, in coordination with the governing body, the Ministry of the Interior, have agreed on the requirements, taking into account the breadth of Article 3 of Law 89 of 1890, for the formation of **Cabildos**, whilst clarifying that in this regard the peoples, acting through their authorities, are autonomous to dictate whether or not they adhere to the protocol.

The University of the Inga people project is a process inspired by realizing a right that assists Indigenous peoples to no longer be forgotten and marginalized to their own fate, and to be able,

⁸<https://medioambiente.uexternado.edu.co/es-el-territorio-victima-del-conflicto-armado/>

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from their own voice and thoughts, to express their contributions to the world. It encompasses the climate crisis, health, spirituality, epistemic justice and new paradigms for inhabiting the “common home.”

Until the 1970s, the Colombian State provided education for Indigenous peoples, at the request of the missions of the Catholic Church, mediated by the concordat with the Vatican. In this sense, the Ingas received an education with a confessional and monocultural orientation, which weakened the values of cultural and linguistic identity. The Ingas and other Indigenous peoples of Colombia and the region lived an integrationist education under the parameters of the policy founded on the Patzcuaro Convention (1940) and Convention 107 on Indigenous populations of the ILO (1957).

Fortunately, and based on the Declaration of Barbados I of 1971, a historic step was taken in the education process of the Indigenous peoples of the region and of Colombia with the issuance of decree 1142 of 1978, regulating decree law 088 of 1976. This establishes in Colombia the ethno-education policy for Indigenous peoples and creates an institutional instance within the Ministry of National Education of Colombia (MEN) for its implementation. This official policy was based on methodological and pedagogical guidelines that were agreed upon with the Indigenous peoples and the competent public institutions at the national and territorial level in the first national meeting on Indigenous education, held in 1985 in the city of Girardot, Colombia, under the coordination of the MEN and the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC). Many Ingas participated in said meeting and contributed to the construction of these guidelines. Based on the guidelines worked out in the first national meeting on Indigenous education, and under the guidance of the MEN, the Ingas gave way to the process of bilingual education, without letting its administration remain in the hands of the missions of the Catholic Church.

The process of bilingual education, now intercultural, of the Inga people has advanced significantly in most of their communities. The Inga have their own education centers for early childhood, primary and secondary levels, which are pedagogically directed by professionals and Inga elders. These advances have allowed the Ingas to have a greater capacity for dialogue with public institutions and the majority non-Indigenous society.

It is important to note that these steps were the result of organizational processes at the national and regional level. At the National level, the ONIC was and continues to be key. At the regional level, in upper Putumayo, the organization *Musu Runakuna* (Young People) accompanied and supported the bilingual education process, as well as in the different regions and areas where the communities of the Inga people are located. Between 1985 and 1990, the Ingas of Putumayo carried out a pedagogical process of developing the Inga dictionary, unifying their alphabet with the technical and financial support of the MEN.

With respect to higher education, it is important to mention that, until the 1980s, the Inga were largely unable to access university due to the high costs and the distance from their communities. In 1986, thanks to an agreement between the ONIC and the National University of Colombia, access to university education was made possible for many young people (men and women) of the Indigenous peoples of Colombia, among them a group of young Ingas, who advanced studies in different faculties. In the following years, other public and private universities in the country also established inter-institutional agreements to facilitate the entry of Indigenous young people from the country, such as the University of Antioquia, del Valle, Nariño, etc. As a result of this process, today the Inga people



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have a hundred professionals who have graduated from different programs at public and private universities in the country. These advances warrant carrying out an objective balance to specify the impact on the education process of the Inga people in the last 50 years. From the professional education process, the Ingas have managed to influence and contribute to national and international processes of organization of Indigenous peoples, promotion and defense of fundamental and collective rights.

These advances have allowed the Inga to strengthen certain values of the Inga cultural identity and have facilitated intercultural relations with public and private institutions, as well as with the different sectors of general society and the communities of other peoples.

6. The University project of the Inga people of Colombia as a strategy for the recovery, protection, and projection of their ancient knowledge, science, and technology

“Since ancient times, our elders, majoras, Taitas and scholars, with the desire to understand life and death, dedicated themselves to carrying out profound analyzes of the behavior of Mother Nature and the cosmos. Thus they reached great and wise conclusions about where life came from and why death exists, that is the foundation of life and the identity of the people. Grandfathers and grandmothers realized that life comes from everything that surrounds us, from the cosmos and the microcosm. Likewise, in everything that surrounds us, two complementary forces are manifested (the negative and the positive, the masculine and the feminine, the new and the old) that make the life of every being possible and that if they did not exist, life would not be possible. .”¹⁰

Based on regulatory advances, in several Latin American countries and in Colombia, some Indigenous peoples have started a discussion around the creation of higher education institutions, universities, with a view to consolidating the process from initial education to the secondary stage. They envisage the production and systematization of new knowledge based on historical memory, worldview, spirituality, territoriality, and the cultural identity of peoples. This is important to restore their dignity as ancient peoples, and to offer paths to new paradigms of professional training and development planning for humanity in the face of so many crises in the world today. This is how progress has been made with the creation of the Uraccan University of the Miskito people of Bilwi (Nicaragua), of the Aymaras, Quechuas and Guaraní in Bolivia. Several Indigenous universities in Mexico. Ecuador has also advanced along this path. In Panama, the National Indigenous University of Panama has been formally created and is beginning its operation. In Colombia, for more than 20 years the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) has been advancing from the grassroots the process of creating the Autonomous Intercultural University - UAIIN as the first Indigenous university formally and officially recognized by the competent authorities of the Colombian state. Currently, similar processes are also advancing in Colombia among the Misak, Wayuu and Pastos peoples.

¹⁰ Inga People of Colombia (2013). Safeguard Plan of the Inga People / *Nukanchipa Kausaita Iuiaita Mana Uañungapa Sakisunchi* “So that our life and thoughts survive.” Diagnosis and general guidelines, p. twenty



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The Inga people of Colombia, based on their *plan de salvaguarda*, discussed and made the decision at their 2017 General Assembly to advance the process of creating their own university, a mandate that is part of the statutes of the National Organization of the Inga People of Colombia, *Atun Wasi Iuai - AWAI*, and which was ratified by the First National Congress of the Inga People of Colombia in 2023.

Following the mandate of the general assembly, AWAI's education and culture team is advancing the socialization process of the university project. The vision of the Inga people is to achieve a process and space of higher education that offers comprehensive and intercultural, technical and scientific training programs that contribute to the production of knowledge for a new way of relating to the world and new forms of planning. development.

In this process of promoting the creation of the University of the Inga people of Colombia, AWAI has had the cooperation and support of universities and people committed to its cause, at a national and international level. In Colombia, there is collaboration with the National University of Colombia, the National Pedagogical University of Colombia, the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá), the University of Los Andes and the EAN University. At the international level, universities and organizations such as the Spencer Foundation of the United States of America have cooperated; the Universities of Essex and Central Saint Martins in the United Kingdom, the Universities of St. Gallen and ETH Zurich in Switzerland, among others. These institutions have provided support through professionals and academics who collaborate technically with the process and financially to support the implementation of activities and production of technical material. The Inga people thank everyone and invite everyone to continue joining efforts for the common purpose of building new paths for the formation of people with a deep sense and respect for human rights, essential to achieve a stable and lasting peace.

7. Risks and challenges for the conservation and strengthening of the ancient cultural knowledge and practices of the Inga people of Colombia

The Inga people of Colombia, like all Indigenous peoples in the country, the region and the world, have faced policies of denial, integrationism and folklorization that have led to a situation of high risk of extinction of many riches and many ancient cultural values. This situation has been aggravated by the violation of individual and collective rights due to the internal armed conflict, drug trafficking, and the promotion of welfare and paternalistic plans, programs and projects. Fortunately, and thanks to community organizational processes and “cultural resistance,” the Ingas still keep alive the essential principles of their own thought structure. However, the different crises that humanity faces in the world today pose great challenges to the physical and cultural survival of the people, including the Inga people.

The violation of human rights is a constant challenge for the Inga people, not only due to armed groups, but also due to gaps in social inequality, racism, lack of institutional response, lack of access to higher education and therefore to jobs that guarantee a good life. It is a fact that has become clear in the social outbreaks that Colombia has experienced in recent years.

In the face of phenomena that put the essential elements of the identity and cultural integrity of the people at greater risk, it is essential and crucial to strengthen the processes of proper and appropriate education that allow the recovery and strengthening of the knowledge of their historical memory and



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the elements essential to their worldview on life and development. From this perspective, it is essential to promote the mandate of participatory creation of the University of the Inga people, as an institution that allows the recreation, recovery and strengthening of the essential elements of their thinking with a view to restoring the dignity of a great people in their processes. historical events, and that offers alternatives to the great crises facing humanity in our times.

8. Call to guarantee the fundamental and collective rights of the Inga people of Colombia, solidarity with their organizational process, and the strengthening of their own education, including the project to create the University as a path to strengthen peace and transitional justice

The situation of the Inga people and their efforts to fight for the defense of their dignity and the guarantee of their individual and collective rights demand that the support of the competent public institutions of the Colombian State and that the cooperation and solidarity of the peoples of the world be horizontal and two-way, with a comprehensive and intercultural vision. The strengthening of local and intercultural education, as well as the promotion of the mandate to create the University of the Inga people, are the true path to guarantee the desired stable and lasting peace for all.

The University of the Inga people project is not only intended as a space for education, but as a platform that will contribute to consolidating peace and human rights in an Andean-Amazonian territory that seeks to escape the pain and ravages of war. The university will be a space that represents the resilience and survival of a people thanks to its spirituality, life principles and transmission of transgenerational ancestral knowledge. Despite the multiple forms of violence of which individuals and groups have been victims, the Inga have known how to safeguard and protect life and territory in the midst of the armed conflict and resist extermination, preserving their practices and customs as a means of protection and survival.

The urgency of a University of the Inga people lies in its potential to transition towards lasting peace. A university guided by authorities, taitas, mamas, as experts who, thanks to the knowledge provided by the sacred yage plant, guide the path to those who follow the route to *Suma Kausai*, which not only impacts the communities of the Inga people, but also to humanity. It will be a university focused on preparing sensitive beings with the ability to heal their mind and spirit, because peace begins within each human being.

Based on the reasons given, the Inga people ask the international community for support in guaranteeing the resources with which they can continue the community work that is necessary to materialize the creation of their own innovative university of higher education as an instrument to consolidate the peace and human rights in an ancestral Indigenous territory that seeks to emerge from a long and complex conflict process.

9. General conclusions

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all peoples and nations should endeavor to ensure that all individuals and institutions promote, through teaching and education, respect for rights and freedoms through progressive national measures, for its recognition and effective application.



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In the face of the various crises that put the identity and cultural integrity of the Inga people at risk, it is essential and crucial to strengthen the processes of retention and transfer of adequate and appropriate education for future generations. The Inga people seek to recover and strengthen the memory knowledge of their traditional worldview on life and development. One of the means by which this is sought is the creation of its own University.

The University of the Inga people will constitute an institution that allows the recovery of the essential elements of their thought with a vision of restoring the dignity of a great people in their historical processes of civilization, which offer alternatives to the great crises that the peoples face in our time.

The strengthening of higher education promoted by the Inga people is of the highest importance given that, for the Indigenous peoples in Colombia, the Earth is a victim of armed conflict and consequently peace is not only between humans but also with non-human beings. from a perspective of biocultural peace, as has already been stated by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The project for a University of the Inga people is inspired by realizing a right that assists Indigenous peoples to no longer be forgotten and marginalized but, on the contrary, to be empowered to preserve, strengthen and develop their own voice and collective thought. to inhabit the “common house” .

Document prepared by Freider Legarda Mojomboy, Gabriel Muyuy and Yuli Meneses, directors of AWAI, with the support of Matthew Gillett and Marina Lostal, University of Essex and Santiago del Hierro, ETH Zurich.



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Conceptual Glossary

Autonomy and self-determination: In the processes of survival and full exercise of their rights, Indigenous peoples autonomously determine their institutions, structures, government authorities and their requirements through public policies aimed at integral good living and with dignity.

Traditional Indigenous Authorities: They are the members of an Indigenous community who exercise, within the structure of the respective culture, power of organization, government, management or social control.

Comprehensive well-being and Good Living: Indigenous peoples daily develop, in a harmonious and balanced manner, processes of living, coexistence, resistance and internal and external collective relationships, in accordance with their worldview, spirituality, identity, uses, customs and traditions, to achieve autonomous satisfaction their needs and requirements in achieving a dignified and better quality life, which must be respected, protected and strengthened by the State and its institutions.

Indigenous Council: It is a special public entity, whose members are members of an Indigenous community, elected and recognized by it, with a traditional sociopolitical organization, whose function is to legally represent the community, exercise authority and carry out the activities attributed to it. laws, their uses, customs and the internal regulations of each community. (Decree 1071 of 2015, art. 2.14.7.1.2.)

Indigenous community: It is the group or set of families of Amerindian descent, who are aware of their identity and share values, traits, uses or customs of their culture, as well as forms of government, management, social control or their own regulatory systems that distinguish them from other communities, whether or not they have property titles, or who cannot legally prove them, or whose reservations were dissolved, divided or declared vacant (Decree 1071 of 2015, art. 2.14.7.1.2.)

Indigenous spirituality: It is the essence of the Indigenous being that makes it unique, special, culturally differentiated, with a special relationship with Mother Earth and the elements of the universe, to maintain harmony and balance based on the worldview of each people, their ancient wisdom and practices.

Government and own governance: It is responsible for the political, cultural, social, environmental, economic and territorial orientation of its respective community/Indigenous people, in all the internal processes that they develop, from the worldview, Laws of Origin, Major Law, Own Law and Life Plan.

Collective memory: It constitutes the primary basis for the vitalization of ancestral wisdom, through the elders, mayoras, tatas, taitas, mamas, sabers, sages, wise men and women of the Indigenous peoples, which is essential for the understanding of the processes own internal processes and the contextual application of public policies for Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous reservation: It is a legal and sociopolitical institution of a special nature, whose collective property is owned by the Indigenous communities; They have the character of inalienable, imprescriptible and non-seizable and enjoy the guarantees of private property. It owns its territory and is governed by an autonomous organization protected by Indigenous jurisdiction and its own regulatory system for its management and internal life.



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Subjects of rights: Indigenous peoples, from before birth to after death, enjoy special individual, collective and territorial rights recognized nationally and internationally, which must be respected, abided by and guaranteed by the State and its institutions.

Territoriality: It is the area from which Indigenous peoples develop and experience their own internal processes, relationships, interactions and living spaces to guarantee permanence and survival as Indigenous peoples, in accordance with their uses, customs, traditions, symbols, cultural forms, Laws of origin, Greater Law and Own Law

Territory: As the main source of cultural, social, political and economic survival of Indigenous peoples, which helps to understand the integrality of life and nature beings, in accordance with the cultural traditions of each people.

Indigenous territory: These are the areas that an Indigenous Community owns or does not own on a regular and permanent basis, and constitute the traditional scope of its social, economic and cultural activities.