



A Call to Protect Indigenous Peoples

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My delegation mates are in awe. Nestled in the mountains of Guatemala, pristine forest and a rushing, dammed river stretches out below us. Yet, surrounded by all this beauty, I feel the most unsettled I've been since touching down in Guatemala five days earlier. As we take in the beauty of the mountains and the river one thing is clear—the mountains we look upon have a clear line of demarcation. The water should never be this high.

The delegation I'm travelling with is sponsored by [Mayflower UCC](#) in Minnesota. Members of Mayflower have been coming to Guatemala on these delegations for the past decade and have invited a team of incredible people from Minnesota, Texas and DC on this trip. We are midway through our trip to meet Indigenous land and water defenders across Guatemala who were victims of a genocide in the 1980s, rebuilt their lives as best they could, and now spend their days fighting for truth, justice, and reparations. The community center of Rio Negro where I sit, in unsettled reverence, is just a few hundred feet from where one of the Mayan Achi massacres occurred in 1982, when the Guatemalan government murdered, displaced, and drowned Mayan Achi villages to develop a dam project in the Chixoy (pronounced chi-choy) River which now generates hydroelectric power, supplying the country's national power grid.

I thought I was going to Guatemala to learn about mining resistance struggles, and I did, but more than that I was really being reminded of the true underlying issue: the exploitation and oppression of Indigenous peoples.

Throughout our journey through the towns of La Puya, Rabinal, El Estor, and Rio Negro, we heard from villagers and activists about intimidation tactics, disrespect, oppression, and killing of Indigenous people. We learned about their struggle to exist. Whether they were forced off their land so that foreign companies could mine the earth for minerals that would be exported to the Global North or they were subjected to arbitrary stops by the local police, their stories resonated with the stories of Indigenous people all over the world. The Global South is endowed with incredible resources. The past several hundred years have witnessed those in the Global North exploiting those resources and the peoples who have traditionally lived on those lands and waters. Over and over, the people who lived in harmony with the earth, defended it, tried to keep it whole, and worked to teach others how to live in harmony were subjected to abhorrent abuses of humanity.

It could be rubber in Liberia or bananas in Columbia or nickel in Guatemala, the same story will be told with different names and dates. This truth shakes me to my very core and shows me only one path forward. We must, in our everyday lives, and in our local, state, and federal halls of power, push for Indigenous rights and the protection of Indigenous ways of life. Often in the United States, we only think of those labeled American Indian as Indigenous, but there are Indigenous peoples all over the world doing this work to rebuild and reconnect with themselves, their culture, and the earth.

Many Indigenous people in the United States are currently working to reconnect with their culture and learn about their tribes and nations practices, languages, and culture after centuries of the United States attempting wholesale cultural erasure of all Indigeneity. We need to support them in these efforts, and devote time, money, and robust supportive policy to those who are doing this hard emotional and intellectual labor. Especially as we face the consequences of our own actions globally with climate change, Indigenous practices of land usage, bioecology, farming, and so many other practices will only serve to benefit all of us. Genesis calls on us as humans to care for the earth, I cannot fathom why we as people of faith would not gladly learn from and follow the practices of those who have been caring for the earth successfully for millennia.

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