

PATRICIA GUALINGA's PAPER

Subject: Recognition of the Olof Palme Memorial Fund

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I want to start by saying that sometimes in this world there are people whose light transcends time, crosses borders, languages or cultures and regardless of differences, they constitute a legacy for humanity. This is what Olof Palme did, who fought for equality, justice and peace on a global level.

I come from the indigenous Kichwa people of Sarayaku, in the Ecuadorian Amazon region, the land of the zenith. My indigenous tribe is known for its fight in defence of the Amazon jungle, the collective human rights as culture and the protection of nature, thus becoming a symbol of defence for other indigenous peoples in America and the world.

During centuries of colonisation, the vision of the indigenous peoples has been misunderstood and despised. Over the centuries, thousands of indigenous leaders, who defended their territories and natural environment and ways of life, have been harassed and killed. Other non-indigenous environmental rights defenders have also been persecuted in a similar way. In this way, an attempt has been made to silence these voices of denunciation. And so we continue today under new forms of colonisation in the Amazon region, which put economic interests above life and the right to live, a situation that we must energetically reject and denounce.

Nowadays we live in very difficult times. The global covid-19 pandemic has affected us all and these are times for reflection and decision-making; but they are also times for solidarity and awareness that we share the same common home, which is this beautiful planet called Earth, a home that has been overexploited and whose consequences we are seeing and feeling, expressed in the environmental and climate crisis.

When our grandparents warned about the environmental and climate crisis, no one listened to us. Science has taken a long time to reach the same conclusion as our wise men and women and that is now a terrible reality and we are already suffering its consequences. Severe floods, forest fires, droughts, excessive sun radiation, hail, etc. And this is no

longer only happening in the Amazon region, because we see that it affects many places.

Unfortunately we feel that governments are not taking these problems as seriously as they should. And as always, there are also those forces that seek to generate business also from this environmental crisis that is real and those that insist on continuing to base their economy on fossil fuels, oil, mining and logging. Activities that irreversibly affect megadiverse sites such as the Amazon region and other indigenous territories. It is as a result of this that hundreds of indigenous leaders and others who defended those places are persecuted and criminalised or have already been killed.

The Amazon region is a fragile biome vital for humanity and for other forms of life. It is the lung of the world, one of the most important sources of fresh water on the planet. It is a space that maintains the climatic balance, which is why we indigenous peoples have fought so hard. They must understand that our struggle is not just an isolated struggle, for a local right; our struggle is for the universal welfare of all living beings, including humans.

Living Jungle

Many times it has been commented that we indigenous people have no proposals, nor do we contribute with alternatives; that is not true. We contribute with our knowledge, Sarayaku has a proposal that is known as Living Forest or Kawsak Sacha in Kichwa, and it is a proposal that seeks global recognition of forests as ecosystems, the forest is a conscious living being, subject to rights, whose destruction implies the destruction of everything that exists in it. Understanding this means breaking with existing paradigms to come up with a different vision of protection and care for our environment. We share this deep and sacred knowledge of indigenous peoples, to face this global environmental and climate crisis.

We, the Amazonian women defenders of the Jungle, who despite the violence that exists in our environment and against the environment in which we live, have been on the front line, defending the territories, speaking with our own voice, denouncing the abuses and stopping new revenues from oil companies coming from indigenous territories; that is why we have also been criminalised. But there we are, as always supporting and helping each other.

Apart from the situation in the Amazonian territory, it is also important to talk about the world. A fairer, more balanced and sustainable world that

inspires us to continue fighting. Is that world possible? My optimism tells me that, yes, we could achieve it. We, in our Amazon region, try to create living spaces where justice, equality and sustainability prevail. We do this by valuing what is ancestral, what is our own, and incorporating some external alternatives that help us realise our dreams, our visions, and forge new paradigms. I call it spaces of life and peace, next to a living jungle.

Finally, it is an honour for me to have been awarded this prize in memory of someone as inspiring as Olof Palme, whose time in this world made a great difference, since it helped to add value to the struggles in defence of human rights.

I am grateful to those who are part of the Olof Palme Fund, who managed to find me and my people so far away, in the vast Amazonian territory, which they did with the desire to fulfil their vision and internationalist mission of solidarity, balance and spirit of justice. Many thanks.