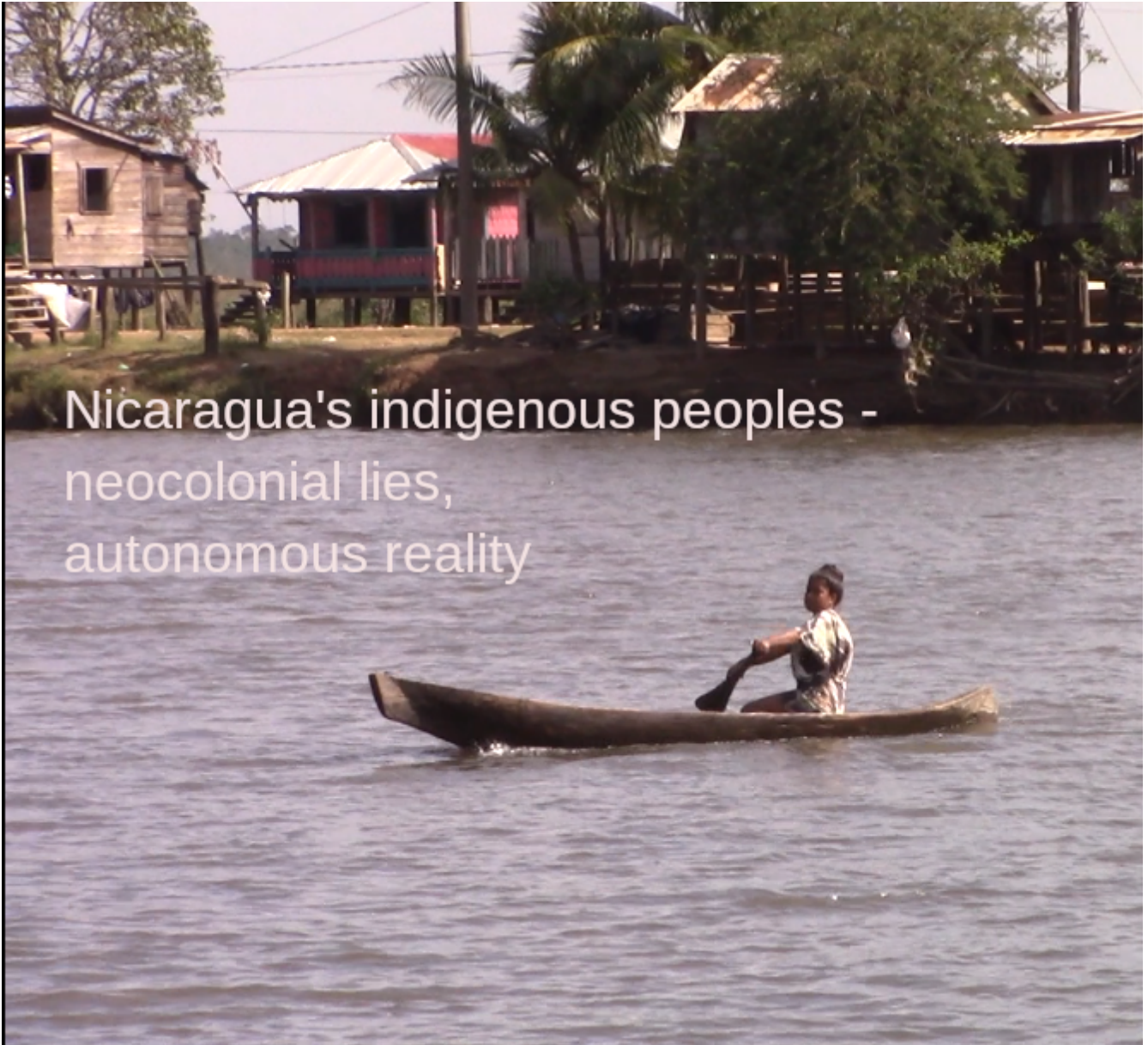


Nicaragua's indigenous peoples -
neocolonial lies,
autonomous reality





Conversations with indigenous leaders,
and people at grass roots in Nicaragua's
Northern Caribbean Autonomous Region

March 2021

Introduction

Between November 11 and 16, 2020, between the passing of Hurricane Eta and the arrival of Hurricane Iota, the Tortilla con Sal media collective visited Nicaragua's Autonomous Region of the Northern Caribbean Coast. There we interviewed representatives of different indigenous and afro-descendant territorial governments in Siuna, Bilwi, Waspam and community members of the Miskito communities of Wisconsin and Santa Clara. We also spoke with cattle farmers, residents and officials from the municipalities of Siuna and Prinzapolka about various aspects of the area's social and economic development. The interviews confirm the success of Nicaragua's indigenous and afro-descendant peoples in their historic struggle to reclaim their ancestral rights.

The conversations also confirm that the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast have achieved progressive restitution of their rights in large part due to the commitment to the reincorporation of the Caribbean Coast by the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) ever since their [historic program of 1969](#). While in government in 1987, the FSLN passed Law 28 "Statute of Autonomy of the Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua". Later, while in opposition, the FSLN in 2005 managed to secure the passage of Law 445 "Law of Communal Property Regime of the Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Bocay, Coco, Indio and Maíz Rivers".

To date on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, 23 original peoples' territories have been titled and delimited, covering 314 communities with a territorial extension of 37,859.32 km² in which lives a population of more than 200,000 people in more than 35,000 families. The area is equivalent to 31% of the national territory and more than 55% of the territory of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast. A significant body of laws, administrative norms and declarations attest to the reality of an innovative and ambitious process vindicating the rights of Nicaragua's indigenous and afro-descendant peoples.

The interviews collected here also explain how these legislative and administrative advances were achieved in various extremely adverse contexts. For example, in 1987 Nicaragua was in the seventh year of a war imposed by the U.S. government in which much of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast was the scene of constant military conflict.

Then, after 1990, during the period of the Liberal party governments, the process of defending and promoting the rights of Nicaragua's native peoples was in effect deliberately undermined. So, when Daniel Ortega and the FSLN took office in January 2007, they inherited a process seriously sabotaged and damaged by the neoliberal policies of the previous sixteen years.

The interviews collected here demonstrate, too, the great scope of the process of restitution of the rights of Nicaragua's original peoples since 2007, in all its social, political, economic and cultural complexity. For example, they clarify that the leaders of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant Territories are people elected by their communities not on the basis of political allegiances but on the basis of community criteria.

Their Territorial Governments and their Community Governments are two of the five levels of government working together in the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. The two levels of government of the indigenous peoples collaborate intimately with the relevant instances of the National Government, with the Regional Governments and with the respective municipal authorities.

This system of government has enabled important changes on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, for example, in terms of electrification and the development of health and water infrastructure and land communications with the Pacific Coast and also in terms of judicial practice, education and health care.

On the Northern Caribbean Coast, the new road to Bilwi, which includes the construction of a 240-meter long bridge over the Wawa River, will shorten the overland travel time to Managua from 24 to 12 hours. In 2021, the entire northern Caribbean coast will be connected to the national electric power system.

A new regional hospital and a new drinking water system are being built in Bilwi. Economic democratization promoted by the central government has promoted new commercial possibilities for the region's agricultural, fishing and other producers.

In this context of infrastructure modernization and important social and economic advances, the political opposition desperately uses downright falsehoods exploiting the issue of property conflicts in order to attack the Sandinista government led by President Comandante Daniel Ortega.

The big lie promoted by the political opposition in relation to the phenomenon of property conflicts in the territories and communities of the native peoples is that the Sandinista government promotes the invasion by mestizo families of indigenous and afro-descendant lands.

These interviews with indigenous and afro-descendant leaders completely disprove this gross lie. Instead, they explain the historical context in which indigenous leaders associated with the Miskito Yatama political party, have sold lands that were allocated to them under the government of Violeta Chamorro.

Subsequently, during the period in which Yatama and the ruling government Liberal party controlled the regional government and most of the region's municipal authorities, various corrupt indigenous leaders continued with the illegal sale of indigenous lands to mestizo families. The natural consequence of this process has been that the mestizo families who bought those lands, in turn sold them on to other mestizo families, thus making the problem progressively more complicated and difficult to solve.

The problem of property conflicts only became international news from 2012 onward because in that year the FSLN displaced Yatama in the municipal elections as the region's main political force and then in 2014 managed to gain control of the regional government.

The following table indicates the development of the change of political control in the Northern Caribbean of Nicaragua at the municipal level through the results of municipal elections from 2008 to 2017.

Municipality	Elections 2008/9	Elections 2012	Elections 2017
Bilwi	Yatama	FSLN	FSLN
Bonanza	FSLN	FSLN	FSLN
Mulukuku	PLC	PLI	PLC
Prinzapolka	Yatama	Yatama	FSLN
Rosita	PLC	FSLN	FSLN
Siuna	PLC	FSLN	FSLN
Waspam	Yatama	Yatama	FSLN
Waslala	PLC	PLI	FSLN
Regional government	Until 2014 Yatama	After 2014 FSLN	

In 2009 Yatama and the Constitutional Liberal Party controlled seven of the eight municipalities in the Northern Caribbean Region. In the 2012 municipal elections Yatama and the Independent Liberal Party won four municipalities between them and the FSLN also four. Then in 2014 Yatama lost the regional elections to the FSLN and in the 2017 municipal elections the FSLN won seven municipalities, leaving only the municipality of Mulukukú in the hands of the PLC. Yatama and the PLC still won a good number of municipal councilors, but without overall control of any municipality.

In response to this decline in the power and influence of Yatama and the Liberal parties in the region, an intense smear campaign has been mounted against the Sandinista government. The campaign is promoted by Yatama and its allies in Nicaragua's non-governmental organizations associated with the national political opposition, such as the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista, financed [from the United States](#) and countries of the European Union.

Similarly, Yatama lost influence at the territorial government level partly because of the deep internal differences within the party and partly because many community members stopped giving the same level of support they had previously given to Yatama's historic leader Brooklyn Rivera and the indigenous leaders associated with him.

This reality of the unfolding political scene in the Caribbean Coast region of Nicaragua has been systematically suppressed, both by national opposition aligned media and intellectuals and, internationally, by foreign academics and intellectuals allied with Yatama and the MRS. However, the testimony of the indigenous leaders in these interviews convincingly demonstrates the reality, completely disproving the lies that have been spread internationally.

In relation to the issue of bad faith on the part of non-governmental human rights organizations, it may well be worth noting the personal testimony from our visit to interview community members of the Miskito communities of Wisconsin and Santa Clara in the Tasba Raya area, southwest of Waspam. Since 2013, this area has been the scene of some of the most violent incidents of conflict between the indigenous peoples and mestizo settlers.

We arrived in Wisconsin around four o'clock in the afternoon on Saturday, November 14th, 2020. Despite the heavy rains from Hurricane Eta, the road had not deteriorated so badly as to prevent our journey. We went to Wisconsin and Santa Clara because we wanted to talk to people there about their version of local history and events in their community since 2012.

However, the people we were seeking in Wisconsin told us they did not want to be interviewed because they were being watched by community members collaborating with the Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (CEJUDHCAN) led by Lottie Cunningham Wren. One of the people we wanted to talk to told us, in the presence of three witnesses, they were especially afraid to be interviewed because shortly before our visit, at a community assembly with CEJUDHCAN, Lottie Cunningham Wren had incited hatred against this person, saying that they deserved "to have their throat cut".

Wisconsin is an impoverished community. However, the people observing our visit had the latest smart phones with which they filmed us. When we asked how it was possible for these very poor people to have such expensive cell phones, we were told that the phones were given out by Lottie Cunningham Wren and her colleagues to CEJUDHCAN collaborators in the community. In any case, we agreed with the community members at that time to record some brief interviews on the subject of local property conflicts and their possible resolution, which we did in a superficially friendly but somewhat tense atmosphere.

Indeed, without the presence of the territorial authorities who accompanied us, we believe it would not have been possible to record interviews in this community. Subsequently, after recording the interviews in Wisconsin, we went to the community of Santa Clara.

There, the community members spoke freely, without fear. They explained what had happened to them in previous years. They spoke of their anxieties and fears regarding the Mestizos and explained their hopes of being able to resolve the problem of property conflicts according to the law.

In both communities, Wisconsin and Santa Clara, the community members insisted that they wanted to avoid the kind of violent incidents of the past and called on the regional and central government authorities to provide the necessary support to expedite the last phase of the titling of their lands, which is called remediation. This term is interpreted in different ways, but the Wisconsin and Santa Clara community members believe that this phase requires clearing a direct lane between the already established trig points in order to clearly define the limits of each territory on the ground.

Taken together, this series of interviews provides an extensive overview of the reality of the Northern Caribbean Coast region based on the concrete experiences of five of the region's territorial leaders as well as local community members. An undeniable part of that experience has been the incitement to violence by political forces and allied organizations in opposition to the government.

The interviews make clear the mercenary role of foreign funded neocolonial clients like Lottie Cunningham Wren and CEJUDHCAN in that regard. But they also make clear how Liberal party activists and municipal officials have historically promoted the illegal invasion of indigenous lands.

They also highlight the political aspect of organized crime activities in the region, for example the massacre of three police officers in June 2018 near Mulukukú. That massacre occurred in the context of a long-running campaign of systematic harassment in the Mining Triangle of Siuna, Rosita and Bonanza in which dozens of Sandinista militants have been killed in recent years.

It has been a campaign of violence promoted by people associated with the region's Liberal parties very similar to what has happened in the South Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. There, the activities of the so-called Anti-Canal Movement have been used to cover up organized crime activities aimed at displacing Sandinista families from the area on the municipal border between Nueva Guinea and Bluefields.

The interview series "[Nicaragua 2018 - Uncensoring the Truth](#)" extensively details the criminal activities promoted at the time by Anti Canal Movement leaders Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena. Similarly, the interviews compiled here on the reality of Nicaragua's Northern Caribbean Coast region reveal how opportunist local NGOs such as CEJUDHCAN distort the truth under the guise of promoting the rights of indigenous peoples.

These interviews demonstrate once again that international human rights organizations by no means rigorously and seriously corroborate the denunciations they receive. On the contrary, they act in a morally obtuse, methodologically incompetent and politically biased way, in effect promoting the sinister anti-democratic and anti-humanitarian political agenda of the U.S. government and its allies.

In doing so, they harm and betray the human rights of the very populations they falsely claim they want to defend. Their bad faith has been demonstrated on multiple occasions in the case of Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela as well as other countries defending their autonomy and sovereignty against the North American and European imperialist powers.

When former UN Human Rights Rapporteur Alfredo de Zayas [said in relation to Venezuela](#) "I realized that the media narrative does not correspond to reality" he could just as well have been talking about Nicaragua. Taken together, the interviews compiled here offer yet more confirmation of the moral bankruptcy of the Western human rights industry and the international media that disseminate their reports with no serious effort to corroborate them, while suppressing other information, such as interviews like these, which contradict them.

**List of the interviews recorded
between November 11th and 16th 2020**

**Interview with the President and the Secretary of the Mayangna Nation
Arisio Genaro Celso and Eloy Frank Gomez respectively**

Part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZDufZnQOMs>

Part 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyTpGBP1pd0>

Part 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZCRBIQGseY>

**Interview with Fresly Janes Zamora
President Gobierno Territorial Indígena Twi Yahbra**

Part 1 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI5PWPTggfo>

Part 2 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBz_4Z7kKW4

**Interview with Ronald Whittingham Dennis
President Gobierno Territorial Indígena y Afrodescendiente Karata**

Part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDblIWTCuXM>

Part 2- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PsYbjB3D5U>

**Interview with Lejan Mora
President Gobierno Territorial Indígena Wangki Twi / Tasba Raya**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqO9RRROMt_4

**Interview with Rose Cunningham Kain. Mayor of Waspam
and President Gobierno Territorial Indígena Wangki Awala Kupia**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK_u8znX8E4

**Interview with Dra. Loyda Martínez Rodríguez
District Judge of Waspam,**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkaN9PJIcY>

**Interviews in Wisconsin and Santa Clara
with miskito community members**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ev2cpO14K6k>

**Interview with Sub Comisionado Zavala Olivas,
survivor of the attack on the police station near Mulukuku in 2018**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPzspFtxe2U>

*We very much appreciate the contributions
of Susan Lagos and Calvin McCoy
who transcribed these videos.*

Resources

Leyes, normas y declaraciones relacionadas con pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes

<http://odha-ni.org/es/documento/informes/pueblos-indigenas-y-afrodescendientes>

http://odha-ni.org/system/files_force/web%20observatorio.pdf?download=1

Demarcación y Titulación de Territorios Indígenas :

la Reivindicación de Derechos Ancestrales

[https://94c6f660-fa6f-4682-89e8-](https://94c6f660-fa6f-4682-89e8-d18f4d81c943.filesusr.com/ugd/8af53c_11bb432ae67d42a6a464c7c7ff4789f5.pdf)

[d18f4d81c943.filesusr.com/ugd/8af53c_11bb432ae67d42a6a464c7c7ff4789f5.pdf](https://94c6f660-fa6f-4682-89e8-d18f4d81c943.filesusr.com/ugd/8af53c_11bb432ae67d42a6a464c7c7ff4789f5.pdf)

Pueblos originarios y afrodescendientes de Nicaragua - etnografía, ecosistemas naturales y áreas protegidas

<http://www.pueblosindigenaspcn.net/documentos/manual-de-pueblos-originarios-y-afrodescendientes-de-nicaragua>

Ficha Municipal Waspám

http://observatorio.uraccan.edu.ni/sites/default/files/documentos/Ficha_Municipal_Waspam.pdf

Interview with compañera Carmen Hernández Jarquín widow of murdered sandinista (audio)

http://www.tortillaconsal.com/sonido/carmen_hernandez_11-11-2020.mp3

Interview with compañera Alejandra Sánchez Zeledón widow of murdered sandinista (audio)

http://www.tortillaconsal.com/sonido/alejandra_sanchez_11-11-2020.mp3

Interviews with eight ganaderos of the Siuna Cattle Ranchers Association

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOrt54HRJW0>

Uniting a Country and its People: 32 Years of Autonomy on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast in "Nicaragua's Revolution Won't Be Stopped"

UN Independent Expert Alfred de Zayas: 'This is How the Human Rights Industry Works'

<https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/15103>

Progressive Media Promoted a False Story of 'Conflict Beef' From Nicaragua

<https://fair.org/home/progressive-media-promoted-a-false-story-of-conflict-beef-from-nicaragua/>

How Neocolonial Progressives Support Western Imperialism

<http://www.tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/922>

Global false witness - targeting Nicaragua

<http://www.tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/1008>

Neocolonial psy-warfare : the collusion of Western media and NGOS

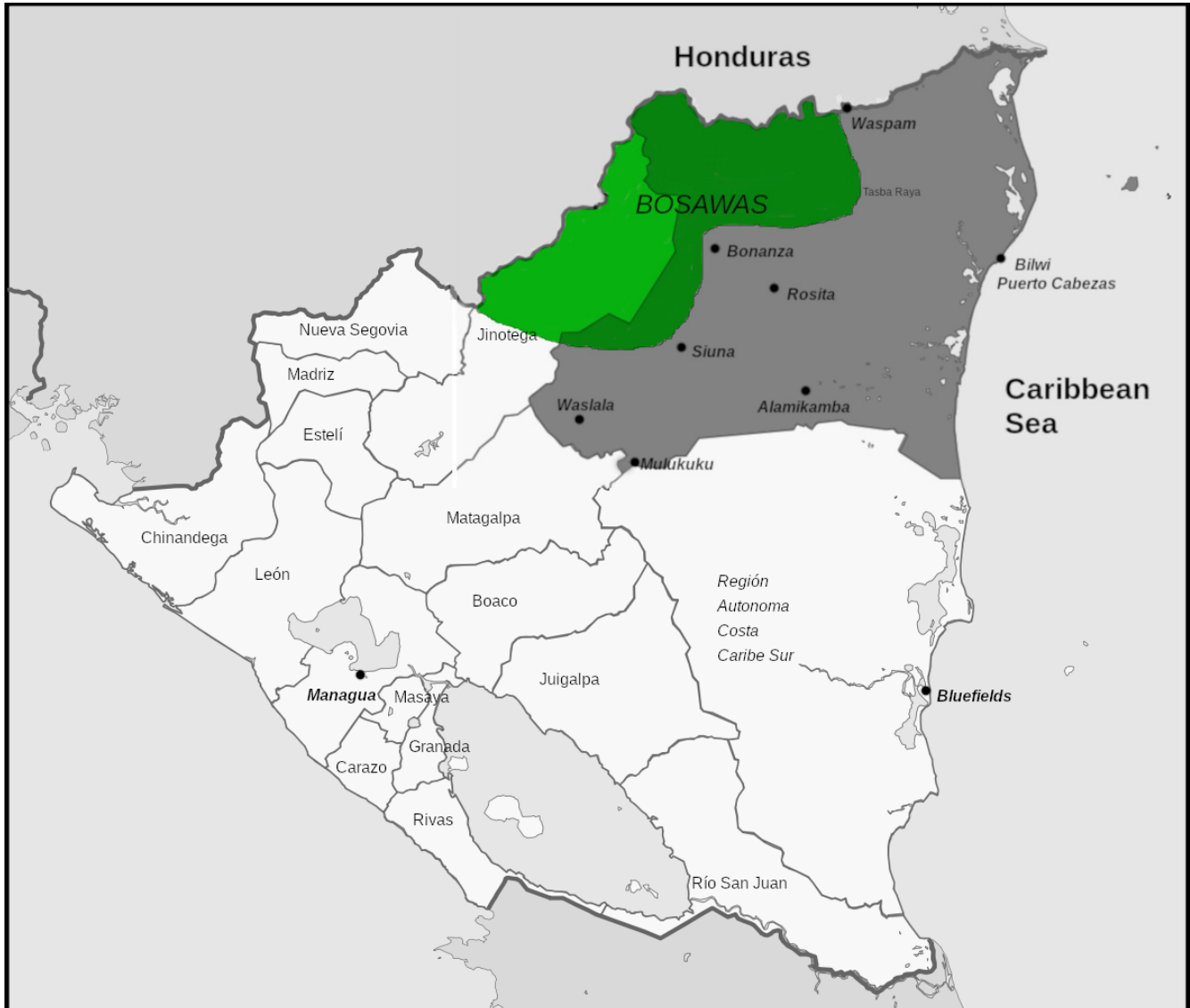
<https://libya360.wordpress.com/2016/07/25/neocolonial-psy-warfare-the-collusion-of-western->

Nicaragua under attack - profit, phony news media and political power

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Profit-Phony-News-Media-and-Political-Power-20160809-0021.html>

Maps

The Northern Caribbean Coast Region relative to Nicaragua's national territory



The Bosawas Biosphere Reserve occupies the northern part of the department of Jinotega and the north western part of the Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region. Bosawas is the Western Hemisphere's second largest area of [tropical forest](#). Covering around 20,000 km², it was designated in 1997 as a [UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#). The reserve comprises about 15% of Nicaragua's total land area. Bosawas is the richest biome in the planet, and is reckoned to contain 13% of known species worldwide.

**Nicaragua's Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region with the municipal capitals
Alamikamba is the municipal capital of the municipality of Prinzapolka.**



Glossary of acronyms

CEJUDHCAN Center for Justice and Human Rights in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast

CLS Sandinista Leadership Committee

CONADETI National Commission for Demarcation and Titling

FSLN Sandinista Front for National Liberation

GCI Indigenous Communal Government

GTI Indigenous Territorial Government

INAFOR National Forestry Institute

INETER Nicaraguan Institute for Territorial Studies.

INTA – Instituto Nicaragüense de Tecnología Agropecuaria

IPSA – Instituto de Protección Sanitaria Agropecuaria

MAGFOR Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Forestal.

MARENA Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales

MINED -Ministerio de Educación

MINSA – Ministerio de Salud

OEA - Organización de Estados Americanos

PGR – Procuraduría General de la República.

PLC – Partido Liberal Constitucionalista

PLI – Partido Liberal Independiente

RACCN Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Norte

RACCS Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Sur

SERENA Secretaria Regional de Recursos Naturales

YATAMA Yapti Tasba Masraka Asla Takanka

**Interview with Mayangna leaders,
President Arisio Genaro Selso
and Secretary Eloy Frank Gomez
Siuna, RACCN, November 11th 2020.**



Tortilla con Sal: What is your perception of the seriousness of the problem of the intrusion of outsiders into indigenous lands, in your case of the Mayangna people?

Arisio Genaro Celso: We need to go back a bit to the past, to remember some negative actions generated by past governments. To explain this simple situation. Bearing in mind, for example, this problem of the invasion of mestizo settlers from the Pacific, towards our lands in the Caribbean, indigenous lands, above all land of the Mayangna and Miskito, but especially the Mayangna, because the Bosawas Reserve is located inside, the Bosawas Reserve is within Mayangna territories because these have been our ancestral lands.

TcS: Does that include Miskito or Afro-descendant land?

Arisio: More Miskito, we have... there are, for example, the limits of the Mayangna territory border with the Miskito territory, but the problem of invasion is not between indigenous people, it is not between Miskitos and Mayangnas. It is more to do with mestizos coming from the Pacific. Why do I want to mention this? In order to go back to the 90's, to the government of Arnoldo Alemán.

Arnoldo Alemán at the time was the one who promoted most, started and promoted the issue of what we call colonization by mestizos of the Caribbean, with the purpose of destabilizing the whole Autonomy project, which was being developed at that time. The Liberals then, led by Arnoldo Alemán, wanted a strategy, and the only way to disappear the Autonomy project in the Caribbean was to invade the Caribbean Coast with a mestizo population.

And via that mestizo population take over indigenous lands so as to have control, most especially at election time, so that they would be favored with the votes of the mestizo settlers they were locating in those indigenous territories. I remember at the time the Nicaraguan army once detained about eight or ten trucks belonging to Liberal municipal authorities, full of mestizo people whom the Alemán government was sending to take over the lands on the Caribbean Coast.

Because the problem was also that back then, they made an interpretation and decided that the Caribbean Coast lands were national lands. There in itself was the question of recognition of the culture of the original peoples, we the Mayangna, for example, and the Miskitos too, traditionally ordered the territories into hunting areas, reproduction areas, artisanal mining areas, production areas, fishing areas, that is the way they have been ordered. So for example...

TcS: As part of the autonomy process?

Arisio: Before that. Before that. That has been the way the territories have been organized. With the Autonomy process, this was reinforced. The issue of ordering the territories well was reinforced. Prior to this, also talking about the years of 1979 after the Revolution, the indigenous peoples also knew their limits, where they could go hunting, where they could not go to cut down trees, because there were already large wooded areas or areas for the reproduction of bird species.

So that area was taken care of. So for the mestizo culture of the Pacific, at that time, the people who arrived there said "There are 1200 manzanas of land but nobody lives there". For them, it was understood that they were national lands, because nobody lived there, however those were areas, territories belonging to the indigenous peoples where they went to hunt, they went to....

TcS: And they were also protected areas...?

Arisio: Correct. Those are protected areas, reserves, historically they are preserved. If you notice, the great Natural Reserve in Nicaragua is in the indigenous territories. For example, the Bosawas Reserve is in our Mayangna territories, which our ancestors, our forebears, our grandparents have been taking care of for generations. Because conservation is also part of the culture.

For example, in our culture before, if a boy came and cut down a tree and left it lying there and didn't use it, the community was punished. This is a rule designed to protect. In this way, values of protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources were instilled in our communities. Then, from that time on, the issue of the invasion of indigenous lands towards the Caribbean Coast began, that process started in the '90s, in the time of Arnaldo Alemán when he was in the government.

TcS: Not with Violeta?

Arisio: No, with Arnaldo Alemán. Although in Doña Violeta's time, they also set up kind of land banks to locate some of the Nicaraguan Resistance.

Eloy Frank Gomez: Permit me to say, first, we, the Mayangna People, are organized at the communal level, at the territorial level and the structure of the Mayangna Nation of which the compañero is President, and myself as Secretary. We represent nine territories, of which four territories are located within the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, and five are outside the area of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve.

What I want to say is that before 1990, we lived in our communities. We did not need to have documents. But with time from '90 around the time of the government of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, we, the Mayangna vision is to live in nature, to live with the relationship between nature and living beings. Life was in the land, rivers and forests. But for them, their interest was power.

They made commitments with their people and at that time in the '90s, they began to organize what they called development poles, without thinking about where, they had no lands there but they sent people on to our lands. On seeing that situation, we the Mayangna Nation organized to seek the title of communal property of the nine territories.

Today, after 2007 with the arrival to power of our Commander Daniel, we have achieved the titling of our lands, an area of 8,101 square kilometers, titled and the title handed over by our Comandante Daniel to the communities. So what happened earlier?

As our president just explained, in that period of 15 years, the time of Violeta, the time of Arnaldo Alemán, the time of Enrique Bolaños, there they began promoting the invasion of our lands. But nowadays, we are able to enjoy this space, where we always historically lived with the land, today we have problems because as I was saying we have artisanal mining areas. But those areas, we, as our people use to survive for example at Christmas time, people work there but in an artisanal way, it was not on the scale of large exports but rather to solve basic needs.

Now, when they realize that, then other people, other peoples, in this case the mestizos, are now trying to take over. They go there because there are rivers, there is forest, there is gold, there is wood. We do not live off the export of wood, our life has been agriculture to feed our families, or hunting, fishing.

But now invasion is everywhere, the rivers are drying up, the rivers are drying up and our anxiety if for our government to sustain its interest in maintaining the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, we all have to unite here at the level of the municipal and regional authorities.

On the other hand, we accuse the invaders, because these people are not poor people. They are individuals who have money and they send their people. They are not being sent by the government because there they not only clear land for pasture but rather they are like traffickers, land traffickers. They come in, they sell.

We don't have resources ourselves because those resources are there, we live with nature. But these people set out boundaries, and then they sell....

TcS: How can they sell if they don't have title? You have the title. So how can you sell it?

Eloy: That is why I said traffickers, mafia, because sometimes they go armed. For example, there some documents came to light claiming in such and such an area, but they are not in that area, rather they are inside Bosawas, with a rubric that might say Kukalaya, for example, with an area of such and such, but it is not in Kukalaya, instead it's in Bosawas. So there are various documents. There are forged documents, with forged signatures of the authorities.

We don't believe our government is doing that, because we have seen at various times how, rather, it has restored our right to property with title deeds. What happens is that people manipulate things and go out in the media to blame the government. We are convinced that it is not like that, rather it's the other way around and they want to take advantage of this situation for their political aspirations.

Arisio: It's worth highlighting some elements, elements of judgment on this issue, as the Secretary says.... It is necessary to see the situation of land trafficking from different perspectives as well. For example, the vision of our people and our communities, is one of respect, of coexistence, of harmonious relationship between the indigenous Mayangna and nature. Someone said to me, "Where do you Mayangnas have your pharmacy?"

Our pharmacies are the large natural reserves in the mountains, those are our pharmacies. However, in today's situation, with the large clearings that settlers are causing in the indigenous territories, they are also exterminating that material, those resources that we have, that natural pharmacy our communities have, that we have, that we have lived historically from traditional medicine, from the knowledge, from the wisdom of our culture.

So, the culture of conservation, as I was saying, has been with us over time, for many generations. However, another perspective on the issue means looking at several elements. One is organized crime, because organized crime is fully involved in this issue of usurpation of indigenous property, trafficking of indigenous lands, even the sale of the wealth of indigenous lands.

Apart from that, there are also armed groups, armed delinquents who come to harass, threaten the community members and dispossess the communities of their lands. We have this situation too. Then again, there are political operators.

For example, there have been episodes of incidents in some Mayangna and Miskito indigenous territories and there were also deaths in our indigenous territories because of the land issue. The settlers invading the lands, killing indigenous people.

But when we did some work on that and we realized that those who were behind this were regional councilors of Yatama, Yatama mayors, and even some of them, we could even say were deputies of Yatama, also involved in the sale of indigenous lands. The community members didn't know, the mestizos came in big numbers, families after families entering indigenous territories, for example in the area of the Rio Coco.

In certain areas of our communities in the Bosawas Reserve, which borders with Miskito land, many mestizo settlers came to enter our Mayangna lands. But how? Through these sales authorized by politicians from Yatama.

And another issue that is precisely well known, it's no secret is that the Liberal mayors and municipalities with mayors opposed to the government also promoted land trafficking, even financed organized groups, armed groups to invade indigenous lands and to dispossess the indigenous people of their lands. There is evidence of that.

We have spent years following this situation. And we know for example that in El Cuá and in San José de Bocay, the mayor in San José de Bocay, where there is a Mayangna territory, which was invaded and financed by the mayor who was at that time a Liberal. He financed the groups, that mayor. And what did he do? He recruited peasants and told them: get organized, go there, take the land. We will support you. And he gave them weapons and that is not a secret.

The indigenous people, we have been used to it, the Mayangnas if you look at the history of Nicaragua, the Mayangnas are one of the most peaceful people. For example, during the time of the war of the '80s, perhaps some communities got involved in the war in an involuntary and forced way as well. It was not their wish to go to Honduras there with the Nicaraguan Resistance. Many were kidnapped.

They have been a peaceful people, a peaceful culture. We do not go around inciting violence in these types of situations. So, from the political point of view, these political operators came to impose a war on us, that is, there was a personal interest, invading indigenous lands but the effect was unfortunate, because many families were displaced, both Miskito and Mayangna families.

TcS: Do you produce cattle on the lands of your people in Bosawas?

Arisio: In the lands that correspond to the area of the Reserve where our territories are located, there is very little cattle ranching, or only recently, one might say. But it is on a minimal scale.

In the Caribbean Coast there is cattle ranching, but more in areas that are not indigenous territories, but there is ranching on the Caribbean Coast on private properties, where people from the Pacific have come to buy private property and what they have done is perhaps double the rate of cattle ranching... Look, the issue of the invasions is this, what we are seeing is that the invasion of indigenous lands by mestizos is for two reasons.

Many are dedicated to large-scale production. Indigenous farmers work the land only to sustain their families, for subsistence self-consumption. On the other hand, the mestizo farmer produces more, works the land more because he trades the product. They are dedicated to selling their produce. The indigenous are not.

The indigenous Mayangna work, they keep their produce but for their own consumption, their self-consumption. So, yes, work and production have increased, but in the buffer zones which are protected, because as you know indigenous lands are inside the Reserve, but inside the Reserve too is the core zone, so not in the core zone, which has the main concentration of forestry reserves and biodiversity, so we also have the core area near the heart of the Reserve.

But these cases get a different treatment. For example, with the settlers in the buffer zone in the indigenous territories, an agreement has been made, for example, you can stay on those lands but with the agreement that at the same time you are going to remain and produce there, but you are going to protect them so that no more families enter, so that they do not continue causing damage, causing a lot of deforestation.

We should explain that we, for example, the government of the Mayangna Nation, we are an indigenous institution with a national character that covers six territories nationally with 75 communities and we also participate in government decision making.

We are members of the National Commission for the Defense of Mother Earth where there is also the Army, the Police, the Attorney General's Office, the Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Regional Government, the Secretariat of the Caribbean Coast, the entire government structure, also MARENA, we are part of it.

Now, what happens? This allows us to do advocacy work, to be able to dialogue, to make proposals to the government, and also to participate in decision making. Before, we did not have that possibility. Before, we were not mentioned. What was the political reality of the indigenous peoples in the Caribbean from the '90s until 2006, for example?

That was the period where we lived with racism and discrimination practiced on a large scale. So we can say, there was a situation of terrible discrimination against the indigenous people by the neoliberal governments. And that is not a lie. That is a reality with facts that people lived.

There was a period in the '90s when that situation was very difficult. Why? Because all the functionaries came from Managua, they came to govern here in the Caribbean Coast. Here the indigenous peoples had no opportunities, they had no right to express their opinion, to participate in the decision making process over policies that were made at the whim of the government.

So, look now, for example, as of 2006, or before even, from '79 in the first stage of the Revolution, this issue was changed. It was already improving so as to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. For example, there are many important elements. The issue of education in the languages of the indigenous peoples, the issue of the restitution of their rights to indigenous territories.

This issue was being worked on during the first stage of the Revolution. For example, talking about a health model that gathers the knowledge and experience and the wisdom of the indigenous peoples' traditional medicine. Examples of this type.

Now, since 2006, the hold up of the Autonomy project has been reversed and it has become more concrete. How? In fact, take the example of the existence of regional government structures. This has allowed the region to manage all its political, social and cultural issues. Everything.

That is what is happening. For example, since 2006, the autonomous institutions have been strengthened. For example, here we have what you mentioned, there is a Regional Secretariat of Natural Resources, SERENA, so here everything is coordinated with Managua.

Managua coordinates with these institutions, for example we have here a Regional Secretariat of Education that is working and administering the whole model of Intercultural Bilingual Education, to strengthen the issue of indigenous languages and to rescue the literary culture of our peoples.

We have a regional health model, a regional and intercultural health model that also incorporates the knowledge and wisdom of the indigenous peoples in this health model. And in this way, Western knowledge and the knowledge of the native peoples work together. These are some of the experiences, right?

So we have been working on how all this has been restored, how this strengthening of Autonomy has been worked out, and another element that must be highlighted, for example. Before, we can say that indigenous peoples were relegated, there was no recognition by previous governments.

Today, since the creation of the Territorial Governments, their territories have been restored. The government is making a broad recognition to all these peoples, to these territorial governments.

As regards what you were saying, about how are they financed, the government is funding the strengthening of these indigenous institutions, the indigenous territorial governments because they have an economic allocation from the government's national budget from the Ministry of Finance. What for?

To strengthen capacity and develop capacity in such a way that these structures of the indigenous governments, which are the indigenous institutions, do support some social things but also pay attention to all the organizational matters within their communities. So they also have an economic allocation like other institutions.

Eloy: For example, every 2 or 3 months the regional government convenes the territories, the territorial governments of the whole region. There, the communities participate and present their proposals to the government. This is a way, a new way for the Mayangna people to participate in this system of government.

Arisio: Something else that is important, we have talked about the issue of the Reserve. During those three neoliberal governments, there was a large project financed by GTZ, the Germans at the time. It was a large project in the Bosawás Reserve. We are often asked this question and I remember that at the time they called a consultation meeting with all the leaders of the territorial governments of the indigenous territories within the Reserve.

It was understood that it was also for the indigenous peoples to make proposals for development programs within their territories and that they were going to be financed by that project for the Bosawas of the GTZ, of the Germans.

The thing is that the project ended without taking note of various irregularities. And what happened with that project? Instead of stopping, for example, the issue of the invasion of the colonists, it got worse, expanded, increased the invasion.

So what are we trying to say? It's that there are organizations, NGOs that use the name of the indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations to make accusations against the government, to denigrate the government, to try to destroy the government's image and that of the work it does within the protected areas, for example, in the case of the Río San Juan, for example, or in the case of the Indio Maíz Reserve, and here in the case of the Bosawas Reserve.

However, at the time, when their side had power, there was no decision for indigenous people to participate in decisions so that the decisions would have some real effect. At no time was this the case. For example, right now there is an issue that is very topical now that is under discussion, which is the issue of the Bioclimate, the Green Fund, a project.

This is an issue that at least.... What was done? A consultation process was carried out with the territories within the Reserve.

TcS: Someone told me that they held 400 assemblies...

Arisio: That is why I am telling you, there were consultations, at least with the Mayangna territories, they were part of the consultation team as well. With a national team sent by the government, the Mayangna Nation provided a team of personnel to participate in the consultation, so that they could also participate in the design of the project, what they want to do, how it is going to be done, why it is going to be done, where it is going to be implemented and how it is going to be implemented.

The point is that now anyway it is possible for indigenous peoples to participate in the decision making process. For example, there is much mention of the issue of prior, free and informed consultation, where the indigenous peoples also have the right to participate, to be consulted when a program or project is to be implemented and executed in their territories, and this process has been complied with.

The indigenous people are taken into account for consultation. For example this project was all about the deforested areas due to the self-same effect of the invasions of the settlers, how they were going to work on the natural regeneration of trees for example, or they are going to work on reforestation projects in all those areas to give life back to those affected areas and this has been coordinated with the territorial governments, with the indigenous institutions.

And it wasn't before. Before, there was this great project for Bosawas, it was worse, there was no consultation, the decisions weren't taken by the indigenous communities. However now things are different.

So this is an opportunity for the indigenous peoples, this recognition, this respect of the government towards indigenous institutions, towards indigenous peoples and this also allows indigenous peoples to participate directly and broadly in the decisions that are being taken.

On the issue of artisanal mining in the Mayangna territories, for example, in the Mayangna territories and in the Reserve we don't have problems with mining companies, with the large mining companies that are in the indigenous territories. No. We do not have that problem.

The problem is with groups of settlers, because it is known that we have large mining reserves in our territories. So, people, as the compañero said, settlers enter for two reasons. One is to take advantage of the mining reserves that we have, and the other is to try and take over land for production.

TcS: But they do it illegally, right? Because in order to do it legally, they have to have a document that allows them to do that work.

Eloy: There is a management plan in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve where the use of this resource by the community members is outlined. That is why I mentioned earlier that our people do not work permanently in the reserve - for example, maybe in December, September, a few people go and work for a week like this

That is why nature is virgin in the Reserve and that is why we do not want other people to go there, because other people have other cultures, as I was saying, they make large land clearings and they want to bring in machinery and we do not agree with this....

Arisio: With the large extractive mining companies we do not have that problem but yes, for example, over the long term, many of the settlers that are invading come and establish themselves in a violent way, not with the consent of the communities. That is the problem we have had there but we are also working on it and that is another point....

As a result of this whole situation of invasion, an experience is being developed and in the case of the Mayangna territories our territorial governments and the national instance which is us, the government of the Mayangna Nation.

We are making an effort articulated with the Army and the Police and also with some groups of indigenous forest rangers in which there is recognition for example by police of these forest rangers. Even... How is this coordinated?

The rangers do their patrols, the Mayangna indigenous rangers do their patrols of the boundaries and if there are settlers and they are there without authorization or without permission or something like that, they detain them and bring them and hand them over to the police. But there are also joint patrols with the National Police and the Army, the Ecological Battalion. So what exactly are we doing?

So far we have consolidated this working relationship, this inter-institutional coordination on this matter between the Mayangna Nation, the territorial governments, the National Police, MARENA and the Nicaraguan Army. So that is how patrols are carried out, that is how surveillance and protection are carried out. But of course, this requires more effort, an effort between all the parties concerned because it implies resources in order to happen.

Because, for example, the police cannot be there, let's say, for a month. When they go, to set boundaries, to clean up the boundaries or to make patrols. So these are quick interventions, maybe four or five days to see how the area is, if there is more invasion, or if there is more encroachment, if there is more settlement, if there is, for example....

MARENA accompanies these visits, these patrols, to identify the damage that has been caused, and if they identify the people that are going around with chainsaws, these invaders, then on the order from MARENA these people are captured and brought to court, where they are prosecuted and MARENA, for example, accuses them of environmental damage, the indigenous territorial governments accuse them of usurpation of indigenous property.

What we feel is that we have made progress in consolidating this working relationship with these institutions. We have good communication with the National Police in the Mining Triangle, for example here where we have four or five Mayangna territories, which are also within the reserve, and with the Army.

So, we work on a plan, we present a joint plan, we have meetings with the police and the Army, with BECO, the Ecological Battalion, with MARENA. A plan is made, the plan is shared, the necessary resources are negotiated and the patrolling plan is made. Now we don't have many problems with that.

We have overcome that, because before it was difficult, very difficult for the Army to get involved, or for the police to get involved in these issues of indigenous land ownership. But not now. Now they are participating and accompanying the indigenous peoples and the relationship between the police and the Army and the indigenous peoples in our case here, we have a good experience. We always get advised, for example if there is a change of authorities in the Army or the police, they share with us, they invite us, we are always working with them.

TcS: Is it fair to say that there has also been an improvement in terms of your relationship with the Attorney General's Office?

Arisio: Of course. Look, in this particular, the good things must be highlighted, must be mentioned. That is why I was telling you, during this period of the second stage of the Revolution, as we call it, on the issue of the restitution of rights of the indigenous peoples, in our case the Mayangnas, we feel that there is greater recognition, greater respect, greater opportunity. On that score, for example, we have had some situations.

For example, if the forest rangers or the police brought and captured the settlers and brought them to the courts, it used to happen that after three, four days, they would release them immediately and let them go. Why?

So there were some anomalous situations within the system and then we started to raise with the government institutions, with the same government authorities, in the National Commission that we needed more support from the Court, for example, from the Supreme Court of Justice, from the Public Prosecutor's Office, from the Public Defender's Office, even from the PGR itself, and there has been progress on this issue.

Progress has been made. Why? Because the government authorized the creation of a body within the courts, namely the figure of Defenders of Indigenous Peoples was created, wherever there is the presence of indigenous population. What is the function of these Defenders? It is the direct accompaniment these Defenders provide to the indigenous organizations for the judicial process of settlers, those who are destroying the environment, all these types of cases. So there is greater accompaniment.

And the other thing, the other important element is that we have also achieved is that, within the judiciary, our indigenous officials also hold positions in the courts. So now the recent appointments of the Defenders of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples are also indigenous people who speak the indigenous languages, because that is the other element, which for us is vital.

This is important, that there is an indigenous official in the judiciary for example in the courts, because a Mayangna or Miskito indigenous person may arrive who does not speak Spanish so he has communication problems as well as all the problem of procedural delays, perhaps to do with the charges that have to be made or whatever other legal procedures that may need to be carried out?

So now this is an issue that the government has guaranteed, that in all the municipalities where indigenous peoples are present there will also be functionaries who speak indigenous languages. And this is something important because now these Defenders of Indigenous Peoples are accompanying the organizations to file the complaint because sometimes due to technical issues, perhaps the sisters and brothers of the indigenous organizations cannot lodge an accusation correctly, with the relevant technical criteria.

So these Defenders of Indigenous Peoples accompany them to make or place the accusation and prepare all the corresponding process so that the case is formalized, that the accusation is duly filed and that those guilty of the damage being caused in the territories are punished.

TcS: How do you view the work of NGOs led by people like Lottie Cunningham?

Arisio: Look at CEJUDHCAN, CEJUDHCAN for Lottie Cunningham is like her piggy bank. Maybe you know the term piggy bank, right? That's CEJUDHCAN because CEJUDHCAN is not the institution she claims or as it projects itself at the international level, as an organization or institution defending indigenous rights.

Why doesn't she ever consult us? Why doesn't she come to the communities to consult us? Why not our national leadership which is who we are, leading the national government of the Mayangna Nation, or else to the presidents in our territorial governments...? She is not present. She speaks from afar. She uses the indigenous name. She uses it without having been there, when the events are taking place. For example, when [the Alal case](#) occurred, up there in the Reserve, she said that the government was not defending the indigenous people.

But there are other elements that should also be mentioned, so there is the potential of all the efforts on which progress has been made, in which we have advanced together with government institutions in defense of Mother Earth. But there are also some weaknesses that we have for example.

And what does Lottie do? In practice, Lottie works with opposition activists. They are people who live as we Nicaraguans say, making accusations against the government, talking badly about the government. So she takes that and exploits it to say that the government does such and such, but really if it were the organization she says it is, she should be open to consultation. But she is not. She just turns up for a short while. And sometimes she exaggerates things. And she makes use of the indigenous peoples. And that is why, as we have always said, that is why Autonomy gave the right for each of our native indigenous people to have their own voice.

No one can represent them, ever. We were clear and categorical. Brooklyn Rivera said: I am the leader of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean Coast. We have to say that this is not true, this is a lie. Brooklyn Rivera does not represent the Mayangnas. The Mayangnas have our own indigenous institutions, they have their own government of their Nation that is of a national character and at the same time they have their territorial governments in the municipalities. So each one has its own voice. They give their opinion. They contribute. They can say and decide on the model of government, the governance that is being developed there in the communities.

But it isn't that Brooklyn or Yatama can come and say: I represent the indigenous people of Nicaragua. Because that is not true. Because here each people is sovereign. Each people has its autonomy. We have a regime of self-determination so that each people can decide for itself.

TcS: In [the case of Alal](#), what is your appreciation of that terrible incident? How do you perceive it?

Eloy: At root, there was a problem of settlers who attacked the community, but afterwards the government, its institutions immediately attended to the community, rebuilt the houses, provided care, ensured the presence of the police and the Army to guarantee the security of the families. So, the government has looked after and continues to look after the families of Alal.

TcS: Was it a criminal gang of the type of organized crime? What was it?

Eloy: Yes, they were practically organized settlers, criminal gangs. But the police and the army did their job, and that situation has calmed down.

Arisio: I think that, as I was saying at the beginning, cattle ranching in the Caribbean has grown, has increased, there's a boom, but as I was saying, for example, the boom in cattle raising is on private properties. Because here, for example, where we are in the Mining Triangle, there have been many people who had private properties with large extensions of land, but they did not make much use of them.

The landowner maybe had few animals but they had large amounts of land, then the farmers from the Pacific came and since they are private properties, then they buy and start to put in a lot of cattle. Of course, after a year there is a valuable production of these cattle and there are many people who will remark how many cattle trucks are leaving the Caribbean Coast for the slaughterhouses because this cattle ranching has really grown.

But as I was saying, for example, in our area in the Reserve, we have seen very little extensive cattle ranching. There we have seen more agricultural production, and the artisanal mining activities. Yes, but in fact these things have to be regulated.

TcS: In relation to deforestation, are you optimistic that there is slowly a process that will reverse this? Or is it going to be a problem that will become even more acute?

Arisio: We consider that this issue is going to improve. Improve because government institutions are paying attention to the issue. An effort is also being made to make large investments in these affected areas, and in fact there are also some local initiatives on the part of the territorial governments in conjunction with some environmental institutions, MARENA, INAFOR.

For example, there is a youth group called Guardabarranco and in the municipalities they coordinate with INAFOR, which has large tree nurseries. And they deliver the plants so that they can work for example in some watersheds where they are quite degraded and reforestation work is being done.

So this is important, for example, in all the boundaries, the boundaries marking Mayangna territories, they are planting fruit trees or other types of trees for timber, in order to recover from the deforestation in our Reserve in some cases where there was damage and there are plans for the future to continue working on this.

TcS: There are people who criticize the indigenous peoples and say that they themselves or people within the indigenous populations break the rules. How true is this phenomenon in your experience?

Eloy: According to our assessment of the matter, yes there are some irresponsible people who commit these types of crimes. But maybe they don't involve the large extensions that get mentioned, because the settlers also have the strategy of using that, those people, to traffic large extensions of land. But we have already proved that there are Mayangnas who are also involved in this illegal business.

TcS: Yes, because I imagine that they offer bribes...

Arisio: Yes, because there are good children and bad children anywhere, so unfortunately we have cases, for example, of some situations of violence that have occurred in some territories and so on, practically for that very reason. Although within the norms, within the statutes that we have of the constitution of the national organization, it mentions and is categorical in that sense.

And it states that any Mayangna, be it an authority or someone from the community that incurs in the crime of buying and selling or trafficking of lands, has to be tried according to the laws of the State of Nicaragua.

And in that particular there are also brother mayangnas who are serving jail time for the sale of land, they are convicted and also there is this other issue that must be mentioned. Namely there are groups, there are mafia, criminal groups that are dedicated to land trafficking, recruiting peasants and putting them on indigenous lands, and then when that's done, it is not the peasants who are the owners of the land but other people who have money.

We were surprised recently when a helicopter arrived in a community and landed near a farm that is near an indigenous community, so everybody was startled, what was going on? Everybody was abuzz, could it be narcos or who could it be? Even the police arrived. The police arrived and they found out that it was a cattle rancher who has many farms here in the Caribbean zone, and he flew over because he had a friend who is also a cattle rancher with land there and he came to visit him on his birthday.

The peasants do what they are told. Someone tells them to take 200,000 pesos, go, get in there, do this, buy, and when the tensions calm down and there is no longer a problem, there he comes with their fancy SUVs, or some fancy thing like that helicopter. So, as often as not there are different situations. They use the peasants, they swindle them too, and there are also cases of indigenous brothers who have dedicated themselves to this. And as I was saying, they have been prosecuted by the law. They are serving jail time.

TcS: In general, do you think that the situation is getting better or worse in terms of invasions?

Arisio: Well, the situation is quite moderate, there is nothing massive like it was at some point. Maybe there are four or five families, in some sectors, but there are other sectors where they continue to enter from other parts because we have to take into account, for example, the territory of Siquita, this Mayangna territory of ours here in Siuna.

But there is a part of this territory that borders with the department of Jinotega with the area of San José de Bocay, so they are border territories one could say, because it borders with Siuna, it borders with Jinotega, it borders with Bonanza, so settlers enter there from all sides and sometimes it is uncontrollable.

While in another territory, for example one that is in the center between Rosita and Bonanza, but it does not have much border with other departments with a mestizo population, so there is less of an invasion issue.

TcS: And how is your relationship with your fellow Miskitos?

Eloy: As Mayangnas, we each have our limits there and we have no problems with them, as people there is good communication. Besides that, I mentioned the Mayangna territories and the Miskito territories through the regional government meet every so often and there they share the situations of their territories. So I consider that there are no problems between Mayangnas and Miskitos.

Arisio: Maybe we have to reinforce what the compañero says in the case of the relationship between the Miskitos and the Mayangnas. I think it can be said that the experience of life has marked a direction, a guideline, a route to follow. I believe that the experience that both the Mayangnas and the Miskitos have lived through because of this issue of the invasion of property, has made them more aware of the unity between indigenous peoples in Nicaragua.

Because now it's being pointed out that we cannot be divided. It doesn't matter if you are Krioll, Miskito or Mayangna, but here the problem is the same, and we all have to be united to face this situation. If we are more united we are stronger, better able to sit down, to make proposals to the government. And the government itself sees that we are united.

And I think that on that score many achievements have been reached, and it has been because that culture of internal conflicts that there may have been perhaps before...because during the '80s the ethnic war in the Caribbean Coast was also not only against the government, but also between the Miskitos and the Mayangnas there were conflicts, and before of course there has been an history of antagonism.

The Miskitos and Mayangnas never got along well because the Miskitos kidnapped Mayangna women and children, stole their property, burned their communities. So the elders as I told you at the beginning, remember we lived like this, we suffered like this because the Mayangna communities in Nicaragua, if you check the map of Nicaragua, the location of the Mayangna communities mostly, maybe ninety percent of the communities, are in the rural areas, in the big mountains.

So many elders say that we are here because they persecuted us, they wanted to exterminate us, and it was a way to defend ourselves, to protect ourselves in the mountains, to protect ourselves in the mountains from the Miskitos so that they would not exterminate us.

So there were stories of that kind, but I think we are now living another reality, we are living another situation. Both we and the Miskito sisters and brothers have realized that this is a thing of the past and that the reality is different now and we have to be united as peoples.

And that has strengthened us, and has brought us progress and has allowed us to do many things. So we have come a long way and we have overcome the past.

Eloy: It might be worth saying that I was talking in a personal sense, because the Miskitos have their organizations and we have to see that. As for the Yatama structure, not all Miskitos are from Yatama.

Arisio: And there are internal situations as well. Don't think for a moment that internally they don't have their conflicts and here there is another element that is important.

Before there was a feeling... there was a mistrust perhaps on the part of the Mayangnas towards the Miskitos, one might say. The Miskitos were in power during the Liberal governments.

Sixteen years they had control of the Regional Council governing body. And during that period the Mayangnas were forgotten, they kept everything for themselves.

And it was not all their Miskito people that received those benefits, it was just a group of them. It was a Yatama elite that benefited from that.

But thanks to the second stage of the Revolution, there was recognition and institutionalization of the territorial governments, and the allocation of a budget to each one. This also allowed for greater autonomy and better governance for the territorial governments to administer their own territories.

TcS: When did this reorganization of the territorial governments take place, in what year?

Eloy: From two thousand nine onwards...

TcS: There is a topic that I had completely forgotten about... What do you understand by the phrase "remediation" and what does that mean?

Eloy: For example, according to Law 445 there are five stages. Law 445 has five stages for the property titling process. So, we complied with all of them.

The last stage is remediation. And that is a legal term. For us at the moment we think that there is another way of dealing with it that can be a reordering of property.

For example, in the zone mentioned by our colleague, perhaps people are currently entering there without knowing that this area is a conservation area.

Well, neither we nor the indigenous peoples can live there. So, one way of managing that could be to place them in another part of a buffer zone of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve.

We think that this is the term "reordering", to bring order to our property. If someone came here, and we don't want them to be there, we want them to be in another part.

But that has to come about through the opinion of the majority of our population through a communal assembly, a territorial assembly of the people themselves. That is to say, there in the assembly they can approve if those people can be there or not.

Arisio: We have to understand that the concept of remediation does not directly imply eviction. In other words, it is not only eviction.

The issue of remediation also has different concepts from the point of view that remediation also has to do with the way in which we establish the mechanisms for coexistence. We cannot enter a situation where there is already conflict, and go and stoke that conflict even more, but it has to be a strategy proposed by the indigenous peoples.

For example, let's be clear, when the situation of Alal occurred, we Mayangnas did not go to shout to the four winds, nor make riots or demonstrations against the government, because we have a direct communication channel from the Mayangna Nation to central government.

We who are speaking to you now are the spokespersons for the problems, the situations in the territorial governments and we make the national government aware of what is going on.

What happened? We said we need to sit down to review this situation of Alal. What was the next step after this situation? Immediately, the government ordered that the police must be there, the army must be there, the PGR must be there, all the structures of the responsible institutions must be there to look for a way out of this problem. To make an analysis of why, what generated, what provoked, that conflict, those deaths. What response we give to that situation.

And we directly drew up a balance, an analysis, and we realized that also in certain sectors of Mayangna territory, in the areas of Musawas, Alal, all that area there and also another part, for example, the Betlel River, Suliwas, people had entered in an uncontrolled way, they had taken lands, some even went as far as to fence off part of the properties of the indigenous people, so that cannot be...

In these cases of extreme situations, where indigenous people are no longer allowed freedom of movement, freedom to produce, and feel under siege, we cannot allow it. We have to evict. And so we coordinated with the government institutions and the evictions of the 140-odd families in the area of the Reserve were carried out in coordination with our government institutions.

That is why I was telling you that we have no problems with the relationship between the police and the Army and the government and the indigenous communities. And this was an example, a demonstration that yes, we work, we coordinate, we articulate with government institutions. The eviction of these families that had invaded that territory, that area, those 140-odd families, was carried out.

And then, what did we do? Then, their representatives arrived to say yes, we recognize that these are your lands, we respect that, but we want to live there, we want to return, we want to go back. But what was the basic idea?

Really to give indigenous peoples the opportunity to decide what they want, how they want to administer their territory. And on that score the government has never denied that. On the contrary, it has said, well, you are free, decide what you want, if you want to, are you going to lease your territory or do you want eviction? An example, right?

And what was done? Immediately the territorial assembly was summoned to know what the decision was. A consultation was made to know the consent of the communities, what they thought about this case. Immediately, 23 communities gathered from that territory. And the communities said well, we want our territory to be cleaned up.

But more in the complex zones, where I mentioned, where they no longer allow free circulation because there are zones in the buffer zone, which are being treated differently and there is a different spirit and type of dialogue with the peasants as well. As I was saying... they remain, but under an agreement with the owners of the territories. Some can stay, some cannot, but always maintaining that balance of dialogue, peace and tranquility because what everyone wants is to avoid the type of violent situation that happened in Alal.

These are the strategies that are being used. So, remediation is not only ordering evictions, dialogue is also part of it. And it also has to do with the process of reviewing indigenous properties.

For example, there are rural families who once went and bought indigenous lands and went to register them in the property registry of the region, but they cannot, the law says no, it is not allowed, it is illegal.

So remediation is also part of that, reviewing all the documentation and if people went and register it when it was indigenous land, well, a revocation is made. This is also part of the remediation, it is part of the reordering of the territories. So maybe the position of someone like Lottie who goes around saying that the remediation is not being done or that such and such is being done, is not correct.

Each person manages their discourse as they please, according to their interests. And we and our people say what we are seeing, what we are living, what we are experiencing, what we are living in the communities. Our vision is different because we are living the experience ourselves. So one can go around with a legal document and it can be made out to mean anything... really...

**Interview with Fresly Janes Zamora
President of the Indigenous Territorial Government Twi Yabra
Autonomous Region of the Northern Caribbean Coast**

November 24th 2020

TcS: We are here in Bilwi with compañero Fresly Janes Zamora, he is President of the Indigenous Territorial Government Twi Yabra.... How are relations between the indigenous people here in the area and the mestizo people who also live in the area?

Fresly Janes Zamora: My name is Fresly Janes and I am president of the GTI (Indigenous Territorial Government) Twi Yabra. Our territory is made up of 16 communities. I am the representative of those 16 communities. We are 100% indigenous Miskitos, our territory. Our territorial extension is more than 1520 square kilometers. With respect to your question, each indigenous people, we are all indigenous but of different ethnicities. We are supported, we are covered by [Law 445, law of the indigenous properties](#), and at the same time each territory has a territorial statute, an internal regulation. So they can all be indigenous, but with different ideologies, cultures, their traditional way.



So in the case of us as Miskitos, our relationship with third parties, like the mestizo brothers, on the issue of property, yes at the beginning, before 2014 we can say that, to us the mestizo brothers did not recognize the rights of indigenous peoples.

Because we have a property title, a property title in the region for I think it is 23 GTI, which means Indigenous Territorial Governments, that is the general name, but they have more specific names like Miskito, Mayangna, or in our case, as Miskitos of the Twi Yabra Territory, which is North Yabra in Spanish. Our relationship with the mestizos up until 2014, was they did not recognize that the lands are ours, that we are the owners.

TcS: Fresly, can I interrupt and ask you if you could give us some historical overview of why they didn't recognize that? Because what we understand is that many of these problems are inherited from the time of previous governments.

Fresly: On that score, you know that previously, the lands were not communal lands. It was national land that was administered by the municipal governments, the national government, since the demarcation process began during the administration of the Frente Sandinista government.

TcS: Didn't Autonomy give you rights?

Fresly: No, the Autonomy, more than anything else, the right it gave was the creation or the administration of the two Regional Governments, or we can say the Government Councils. That was what Autonomy was all about.

But at the communal level there was no Autonomy. Because the lands were not delimited, they were not demarcated. But after 2007 onwards, the demarcation process started and the demarcation began in 2007 and ended in 2012.

TcS: Was that demarcation carried out by the Attorney General's Office?

Fresly: As a government institution they created a commission, and the commission was made up by ethnic group, one representative for each ethnic group, this commission was created and they were given the power and authority to carry out the demarcation process. So there were representatives of each ethnic group in the demarcation commission. And then they were in charge of carrying out the process of Law 445.

TcS: When was Law 445 passed?

Fresly: It started in 2008, because in 2007 it was approved, authorized so that the demarcation commission could be brought in and started the consultations.

TcS: And the law came into force when it was published in La Gaceta in 2008 or 2007?

Fresly: No. The law already existed. That law already existed since Liberal times but it had not been executed.

So when the Sandinista government took over, that was one of the main points, because the biggest demand of the indigenous peoples was that they requested, they demanded that this demarcation be carried out and that they recognize that we are the original peoples and therefore we are the owners.

Because ancestrally you know that there were kings and that here we had our own administration, ancestrally. As indigenous people we always insisted that we wanted at least that dominion over our lands.

TcS: So this process was able to begin in 2007, 2008?

Fresly: Well, it took almost five years. That process took more than five years because there are 23 indigenous territories and, you know, it had five points, five stages. So this process took almost ten years.

Because there were five stages, the consultation, the harmonization. Then, in consultation, in what was the prior, free and informed consent authorized by each community.

For example, we, on our territory, we have had title since 1905. At that time it comprised ten communities, but now it is no longer ten communities, now it is more communities. So what does that mean? At that time, despite having real title, we did not have total dominion over our lands.

TcS: You only had possession?

Fresly: Yes, only possession. Since then, since 1905, more than 120 years or 105 years more exactly, we have not had dominion, we only have the right to possession. We only have the right to possession. Who had dominion? It was always the government. Back then those governments were Liberal governments.

So, what's going on now? Now, with this government, that right has been recognized and now we do have that dominion in our communities. So, what does that mean? The mestizos... you know that in the Northern Caribbean Coast Region there are indigenous peoples, while in the Pacific zone, things are different.

So the mestizos that come here are immigrants from the Pacific. We are all Nicaraguans but they enter with this ideology, you understand, that the lands are not communal?

TcS: That they are national?

Fresly: That they are national and therefore they as Nicaraguans have the right to it. Now we as indigenous people, with us the culture is different from the culture of the mestizos, the outsiders. So then what? We the Miskitos occupy the forest or cultivation, not so much... not for commerce, only for subsistence, for their food, for their family. They don't do things, they don't work to have something to sell.

So that's why they don't do so much, on a bigger scale. That is the culture. So now, they may make use of some woodland and then after 5 years they return to that same place they had already worked on. But the mestizos, their culture is different. That is why we indigenous peoples have always conserved the forest.

Now back to the issue of how we relate to the mestizos. The mestizos, their culture is to work extensively, not just in cattle farming, but also in agriculture. Because they need to eat too. They need to feed themselves too. They have families too. So, what does that mean? After we received the title deeds here in Twi Yabra, the 23 territories have their title in their hands.

But there is another stage, a final stage, the remediation, which is what they insist on, that they need remediation, remediation. But to clarify indigenous lands is a very complicated issue. It is not just a matter of expelling outsiders. It also means making clear with our own brothers and sisters the delimitation of intercommunal boundaries, intercommunal limits.

What does that mean? There are ancestral boundaries and now there are communities that are recently... or not so long ago. As I told you, in the 1905 title there were only ten communities. Now there are more communities, each community, because it is a community, they also have rights, they are independent, they have autonomy.

So now you as a father, your son went to occupy part of your area, and your son has the right for his family to occupy that area, you have to concede. So in this case, the ancestral communities, some ancestral communities do not want to concede that right to their children, which are the communities that emerged after 50 years ago. Do you see?

There is an internal conflict. And that is what causes us the most internal conflict. For us this is a remediation. Because to outsiders, Law 445 clearly states that indigenous land cannot be sold, it cannot be given away, but it can be leased if they want to. So, what are the legal procedures?

Well, we are an administrative territorial directorate. We are the legal representative but at the same time we are administrators. So, what does that mean? First they come to us. Then we hold a communal assembly. Even if the government does not want it, if the community wants it, it is leased. Because it has that authority, it has that autonomy.

TcS: Fresly, so that autonomy is based on the title of 1905? How was that title issued? What was the authority that issued that title?

Fresly: From 1905?

TcS: Yes, was it the national government? Or not?

Fresly: From 1905, at that time there were kings of the Mosquitia. So they had to go to register in Bluefields. Still, back then. OK now, but that was a title, it was just a piece of paper. But of course, over there, over here, by various means we worked things out and managed things administratively, but in terms of having dominion, no. But in that case, as indigenous people, we as an indigenous people, we had to go to Bluefields.

But now, as indigenous people, as our legal representatives, the national government, neither the government nor the president can say that someone can go to do something in the indigenous communities. He is not in charge there. We are in charge there, as the owners. And the president recognizes that, he always tells people, in relation to indigenous lands you have to reach an understanding with the owners.

And that is why there is a territorial government. That is why there is a *wihsta*. It is another government, ancestral. Because there is no law that says the communal governments are recognized as such, but the State of Nicaragua recognizes them, because they are a natural, ancestral government. Now the territorial governments, the *wihsta*, are our structures.

TcS: Fresly, many people like me don't understand the legal administrative structure here in the Caribbean Coast. So an obvious question is what is the relationship between the territorial governments, and the municipal governments? Are the GTIs part of the regional government, of the regional council? What is the legal administrative relationship?

Fresly: We are a communal government. We are apolitical. We are not elected under a political banner or as some political figure. We are a communal government. But we always coordinate, we work for the people. Because the same people elect the municipal government as political figures, the regional governments, the council members of the Regional Council. So, what does that imply?

They are structures of the regional government. We are a structure of the communal government that we represent legally, juridically. So, the relationship with them and us is one of coordination, communication. Be it regional government, be it municipal government, they always have to coordinate with us, because we are the owners of the land.

And who represents the people? We do. They elected us so that we can represent them, so that we can represent them. So as long as they do so with us. For example, the regional government is the legal representative of this region at the national level, at the international level. The same for us. So here there are several territorial governments of different ethnic groups.

Now, we were talking about the coordination or the relationship with the mestizos. In the case of the mestizos and ourselves us, as I told you, there are different manipulations as too. Why? Because of the issue of remediation. Remediation is a broad topic and at the same time it is conflictive. Why? Sometimes, yes, we have the will to resolve things. Because we are a government, right? We have autonomy and the people are the owners of the land.

At the same time we also have community leaders who advise us, they are people who know, who understand things that have happened, or that can happen. It is a structure that we have. In each community there are elders who are our advisors. So when we hold an assembly, be it communal or territorial, they are special guests with a voice and a vote, any opinion, any recommendation, any ...and so on. So what does that mean?

Sometimes we have a conflict, for example. With two, three, of the ten mestizos that are within our lands, not all of them agree to recognize us. Always, in everything, there are two, three families that do not agree, that do not want to recognize us. So what do we do?

When this is the case, we visit the place, because it is our land, and we go in a commission to explain to them the internal regulations of our communities, or the internal regulations of the territory. If they agree, we can reach an understanding.

We can sit down and start a dialogue, negotiate. Because the lands cannot be sold, even if I want to sell, I cannot, even if I want to give them away, I cannot. Because that's a crime. But yes, the land can be leased.

So what we are doing is, as Twi Yabra, we are leasing land. We are leasing land, after several lawsuits, there was even bloodshed? But what good's that?

We were evicting, kicking people out, there is loss of life, there is instability in our territories, in our communities. Because the mestizos also threaten the Miskitos. The Miskitos threaten the Mestizos. In that area when it is like that, there are conflicts as a result of that.

TcS: Carlos explained to me that one of the problems is that they have been promoting the concept of self-remediation. What is that?

Fresly: Self-remediation means... At the beginning we were led to be convinced, manipulated, so that we would carry out self-remediation. There is international funding. There is funding for remediation, the issue of remediation. But the issue of remediation is the responsibility of the State. It is not the prerogative of just anyone.

But then again, the State cannot enter into remediation while there is conflict. Because you know that within the community, within the country, there are several political ideologies.

There is opposition. And where there is opposition there is conflict. So, even more so with funding, the opposition gains strength. And that goes on within the communities. So what happens? They come. They train us.

They make available the means to do self-remediation. Self-remediation means... self-remediation means that the community has the right to expel people in a violent way. I in my first term in 2014, I practiced that self-remediation. And I was not convinced. It was not... in that regard, I decided it is not right. There was loss of life, damage. In our territory that was back in 2014.

There in other territories it took place before and later. But what's going on? Always, always we, in our culture, the indigenous Miskito people always trust their leaders. They trust their leaders. So what does that mean? If they always come and want to convince or manipulate us leaders first. That's why they convinced me to begin with. They manipulated me. And I fell for it, I carried out and set up that self-remediation operation.

TcS: Who was encouraging you to do that?

Fresly: There are NGOs, for example CEJUDHCAN. CEJUDHCAN on certain issues they do training on the rights of indigenous peoples. But at the same time they have another interest. Two programs came for my territory, that they are going to help me, that are going to help me with remediation, this and that. But that apart, on CEJUDHCAN's program, that funding, at the outset, we said, look, these are our conditions and priorities. So help me on such and such a matter.

For example, when in my second year as president, they saw things were going to improve, change, become more formalized, and they did not like that. Why? Well, as long as there are incidents, then there are conflicts, so for them that means there is always funding. So what did I do? I told them, I sent two letters, saying that we want nothing to do with them. We no longer want to have a relationship with them.

Because the thing is that they want to drag things out in order to get some benefit. The benefit is meant for us. But since they are intermediaries, they are the ones who administer the resources. So that is why we said no. In a territorial assembly I said, we are no longer going to continue with this organization because they are promoting violence in the communities.

So what did we do then? First of all we went to the regional government to ask for their help. For them to be intermediaries in the dialogue with the mestizos. The mestizos... Why did we do this? Because when we expelled 86 families there, including children, pregnant women, adults, even? We took them out tying them up, they were effectively kidnapped people. They burned the houses.

The damage... the loss... I was sued for something close to eight million córdobas in losses. So we handed these families over to the regional government. As the community government we delivered them formally, alive and well. We handed them over to the regional government and the regional government sent them off. I don't know if they were relocated or something, but we did expel them from our area.

Then, the same families, not all 85 but 50 of the families presented themselves to the office of our institution, stating that they have need an area. So then a formal request was made up and it was signed. Then we carried out an assembly community by community, in consultation, and so, in that way, we did accept 50 families in 2015 so they can work there in our area, the same families we evicted.

So we did accept them but with one condition, that they would be forest rangers of our territory, that is, only them, just the 50 families. No more. But now what happens also? You know that within the communities there are also leaders. There are also leaders who have autonomy. For example the *wihsta*. They have autonomy within their community. We have autonomy within our territory, however we do not have autonomy at the municipal level because we are not municipal authorities.

So then other leaders, they also negotiated with other mestizos, with other families, whom they endorsed, they authorized, and who entered. After that, that's how things start... Now in our territory there are mestizos, there are mestizo families, but there is a certain number that are also illegal, without the consent of the community. So what we are asking the government is, "man, we need institutional support to put things in order, we need order in our territories".

So for me, for me, remediation is for helping me to resolve internal conflicts. Why? Mestizo versus mestizo is different. Miskito versus Miskito is also different. Why? He's Miskito, I'm Miskito, we both have the same rights. Here what's in conflict is how to define what's his and what's mine. For me that is remediation. That's remediation.

Because to expel a mestizo, to give a mestizo a place, or to negotiate with a mestizo, for us that is not remediation. Why? Because from the moment that the State of Nicaragua recognized to us that the land is ours, then it's ours and we have the autonomy and the power to say what happens there. If we want to expel people, we expel them.

So on the issue of remediation for example. The government can come along and the government may want us to remove, evict the outsiders. But if we already...

...if we already have affection and trust with them and if we do not want to remove the outsiders, then you can't call that remediation.

The outsiders, if they want an area within the indigenous lands, they have to reach an understanding with the owners and the owners are the indigenous peoples.

And the indigenous peoples have their leaders and their representatives. Without prior authorization from them, if they enter, they have to be expelled and for that the government is always there to support us because every time we ask for accompaniment they always support us.

So for us, remediation is not just evicting or expelling third parties, it's an internal problem, one that is intercommunal in each territory.

So what then? For example, right now? Let's say a community does not have, as a community, that it still does not have its own domain. Who has dominion? The territory does. But the community still does not have dominion.

Why? Because one person says that the boundary is this way and I say the boundary is another way. So there is a conflict. Every territory has this kind of things. For example, the ancestral territories. We talk about ancestral times, ancestral persons, ancestral communities.

As I say. Previously we only had ten ancestral communities. But now there are seven communities that are not ancestral but are recognized according to this new title extended by the government of the Sandinista Front. And this title has equal rights, however big it is, whether its ancestral, or is one issued now.

However, if the name appears on it, then that seals the community and it has equal rights, equal with the other communities. In the case of the mestizos, as the law stands... the law says, mestizos are "third parties". It does not say "mestizos" or "colonists". They are outsiders who came to live here from the 1980s onwards, and the law recognizes them. The law says that they are recognized....

TcS: As people living there with longstanding....

Fresly: That's right, they are recognized, why? From the 1980s to date, if that person lives in that area, in that community, they already know the language, the culture, they already live with the same culture. The children, for example, are already over 30 years old. So all these things give them that right. But what happened? The problem of the invasions started after the year 2000.

TcS: Could you tell me if this is correct? Carlos told me about a time in 1990 when Doña Violeta gave 22,000 hectares... as an example. So in the 1990s land was sold to the mestizos and apparently the indigenous leaders at that time, I guess they thought that a government was never going to come that was going to solve the problem, and they sold land to those people at the time of the neoliberal governments. And I guess you have inherited that kind of problem?

Fresly: Yes because at that time, that's what I was explaining. The land was national. Still the self-same national government administered it, managed it, had dominion. It was difficult for the communities... they didn't even have the authority to make decisions. So what happens then? From 2013 onwards, we do have that dominion.

We have that dominion, and we do still have that conflict, not with the government, not with the State of Nicaragua, but the people, the mestizos themselves are invading properties. Because as I told you, we conserve areas. Our ancestors, that is our culture. We are few but we have large tracts of land, because they are the areas where we go out to hunt animals, to sow our crops, to fish. So these are areas where we as indigenous peoples abide. That is our culture.

So, we now have the title. We have ... dominion, we do have now, and the government, the State recognizes it. The only problem we have is that sometimes outsiders want to invade us or are invading our property. So something that we have to teach them is to recognize that they are our lands, and that this land is not empty and unclaimed.

It has an owner. And the owner is the indigenous peoples. Therefore, although they do need land, they have to coordinate, to reach an arrangement, to engage in dialogue, a negotiation with the owners... We also have gold in our territories. We do have gold...

TcS: And you exploit it?

Fresly: Of course, we do exploit it. And now they are coming in to do cattle ranching. They come in for agriculture. But not everyone works in cattle ranching and not everyone works in agriculture. Everyone has their own vision. There are outsiders that want to occupy an area for cattle raising, so we apply the specific rules for cattle raising because there are prohibitions, their lease payment cannot be the same as the one for a farmer. Because agriculture is different from cattle ranching... and so on.

Now, the complications that our brothers have mentioned in other GTIs, that's.... really it's up to us. It depends on each government. Because you have to reach an understanding, engage in dialogue, get them to understand that we are the owners of the land. But if we don't get them to understand that we are the owners then they, as I told you, will always come with this ideology that the lands belong to the State. But that is only so over on the Pacific. In the Caribbean Region it's different.

So then what? Suddenly two, three impoverished looking Miskitos come to them and say "we are the owners of these lands". So then the mestizos say "you're wrong" and from where they are maybe the nearest miskito community is 30 kilometers away. So then they say, "This land is nobody's. This is an area that has no owner. No one owns this area." That's what they always think. So then what? You have to visit, talk, reach understanding, dialogue. Then in the end they realize, "man, it's true, someone does own this land."

Not all of them, but with one, with two, with three, with four, then they start to get it, to come around to saying, "man, yes, we have to reach an understanding with the owners because the Miskitos, the indigenous, the Mayangnas are the owners of these lands".

TcS: Is this issue of invasions intensifying or is it diminishing?

Fresly: Well, anyway, that's.... it depends on us, it depends on how the administration works. Because the mestizos, there are a great many that want to get in, but what happens? In my experience, my own experience. Five families settle, and I want to evict these five families. I mean, I don't even want to talk to these five families. Nor do I want to respond to their demand, to their request. Nothing, nothing, I don't want mestizos on my land. I want to evict them.

But for me to go to the area where they are, that's a day or two days' journey and we as a people are not occupying that area because the area our people are occupying is mostly close to their communities, maybe a two hour walk to get to their hacienda, but to get to where the mestizos are, it is much farther. So then what happens? When I arrive to threaten those five families, then those five families, fearing that I am going to do something, start to bring more people, as protection. As their protection, in my experience, right?

They start to bring more people, more people, more people, more people. So then over six months those five families will bring another hundred families. Then they really have strength. They have protection from the other families that they brought. So that's how the invasion starts to increase. And all those who come are illegal.

So what we did was to say ... "No, stop, hold on. Who is there? Okay, ten families". Well, we went to verify that there are only ten families. We went to verify that there are only ten families and see there are no more. So we talked, we negotiated with those ten families. Then, with those ten families we made an agreement..... What did we agree?

I told them, we accept you all right but not others. That means, I can manage ten families, but I cannot manage 100 families. Because with ten families, are not going to occupy what 100 families are going to occupy, which I am not going to be able to control, put up with, nor tolerate, nor permit because it is going to affect my people.

So in this way we reach an understanding, we dialogue with them and we get them to understand that we are the owners and we let them stay with conditions. But any territorial government or community that does not reach an agreement, hold a negotiation or set conditions, if they don't set conditions, as I said, just making threats, brings more people, more people.

Now, what happens? A mestizo who threatens or hurts a Miskito, the Miskito stands up and hurts the mestizos again. And so the fighting starts, the conflicts. Then what happens? Death. This is due to lack of communication, lack of dialogue.

Because if you, or if I am the owner of a house and I was traveling and someone came to occupy my house, as soon as I find out or when I realize that someone is living in my house, I have to go to my house and question them: "No, I moved in because I needed to...because I was in real need, and because the house was empty, I occupied it".

Okay. I as the owner will tell them, "No sir, I'm going to live here, I've come to live here so..." So that person leaves. Right? Ah, but if I stop living there and occupying that house for more than a year, two years, three years, then people see that the other person is really the owner because they have been there for a long time and nobody comes to complain. Ah, but from the moment I realize what's happened, then I visit. I say, "Ok sir, Juan", for example, "Juan, how did you come here, how did you end up here?" And sometimes he may tell me, "Well, I have this paper..." "Let's see, show me the paper." And when I look, man, somebody in my community authorized it. They authorized it. So in that case I can't say...

TcS: Without consulting with the community?

Fresly: No. Because there's a leader or a former leader, so they endorsed it that yes that person can be there, it's illegal. But in this case, that person is not a settler, this outsider, this mestizo, is not a settler. Nor is he invading the indigenous properties. Why? Because he, one way or another, in good faith sought out a Miskito, an indigenous person, and that indigenous person endorsed him, but illegally. I have the competency to settle that case, when families are taking, occupying area in our territory like that. So, it is my responsibility together with the leaders to bring order. Whereas the remediation being promoted by other organizations, opposition organizations, their remediation is to immediately expel the mestizos from indigenous lands.

TcS: Under their interpretation...

Fresly: Yes, that is their vision, or their ideology. Their objective is to expel the mestizos from the lands of the indigenous lands and then put pressure on the State, because there are a great many mestizos. So, by evicting all those mestizos, where are they going to go? So there is pressure on the Nicaraguan government, because there is no land. There is no other land. Here we are the only ones who have land.

Now, we as a culture, our production, as I told you, indigenous people cultivate, not to produce quantities to sell, they produce only for their sustenance.

We Miskitos have a lot of cattle, quite a lot of cattle. But the cattle roam free, they do not have a corral, because that is our culture. Now the Mestizos, as I said, in the area where they are, there is no road for vehicles to be able to get their products out, there is no road.

There is not that much cattle raising there either, but of course they have come to work there for that purpose, to bring cattle, although they don't have that much. There in those fifty families that we have, if you go there, it makes my heart ache to see how these families live. I feel sorry for the way they live.

TcS: Are they very impoverished?

Fresly: Yes, they are poor people. They are poor people but, of course, they are good at working hard. That's their culture. In this case, this cattle ranching thing, man, for example here in the unoccupied area of Tasba Pri there's quite a lot of cattle ranching and people are starting to sell cattle.

So now people come with trucks, I don't know from where, they enter our territory and start buying cattle. There are families that have quite a lot of cattle. But they does not have the capacity to buy my cattle nor do I have the capacity to buy their cattle.

So, since there is no buyer, I have my cattle there. Who buys them? Not only us sometimes when we doing recreation, when we have cultural activities with that luk-luk meal which is beef with yucca and is a typical food.

So when there are activities, inaugurations, maybe an improvement, a religious festival, when there are activities like that we even there we buy from those who have cattle. "Ok, sell me a steer to make luk-luk". But only like that.

Now people are beginning to see that there are buyers and their trucks arrive and they say, always in coordination with the communal authorities like the *wihstas*, "*Wihsta* look, we want to buy so many cattle, how many are there?"

Then he starts looking and maybe there are ten people who have cattle, but not all of them want to sell their cattle. That's the way they are doing it. So directly and indirectly, this help the families' income. We can see that there are many people who go around manipulating, inventing, falsifying news, because they may even come and tell you, "There's a kidnapping" they say, "There's a death" they say, "There's this...".

Man, it is pure lies, there are times they even give me a fright and I say "how come I didn't realize that this type of conflict or problem exists within the community and I haven't taken care of it". And I immediately look for ways to go there and discover what's happened and the community says "man, here everything is calm"....

TcS: In general do you feel optimistic that the process that you have started since that stage of conflict, in 2014, 2015, is improving?

Fresly: After that agreement that we made, we had two years of calm, because it was orderly. But after two years it got a little bit messed up. I told you why. Because there are members of the communities who are also involved illegally. So those people are generating conflicts. So, for that reason, we do have certain difficulties within the communities, but the important thing is that the outsiders recognize, they recognize that we are the owners.

But what's wrong now? Now they are abusing a lot. They are occupying areas they are not authorized to occupy. So those families that are occupying unauthorized areas, we are going to evict them.

TcS: And in terms of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve and the reserves, do your territories fall within the Bosawas Reserve?

Fresly: No, we don't. But it's like I tell you, we have our internal reserve. We practice conservation in our reserve and if they want to invade it, we don't agree with that. As I told you, always with prior authorization from us. If not, then they are illegal and those people have to leave. We, the territorial governments, our mission is the defense, protection, administration of our resources, of our lands. That is our mission.

But what happens? There are territorial governments that let themselves to be manipulated. Then they let themselves go along with this idea of self-remediation... then, since the regional government has to support us, to coordinate with us, because it has to, because as you know, we are representatives of the communities, of the indigenous peoples.

We are representatives, so if the authority doesn't talk to us, how is he going to... so then he has to reach an understanding, he has to coordinate and cooperate, and in this case we are grateful to Carlos Alemán and we are happy in that part... But remediation is not the responsibility of the regional government either, so we understand, we understand that, but we do have a...we have a...

TcS: Is remediation an obligation of the State?

Fresly: Of course, because in Law 445, the last stage is remediation, but there it is something that is only stated as a concept and there are no set procedures, who is going to do it. So then, after the law took effect, when people saw that the indigenous communities really did have autonomy and control over their lands, then people began to maneuver because other interested groups didn't agree that the indigenous people should have that autonomy.

TcS: But the opposition alleges that the delay in the regulation process is the fault of the government because it wants to promote the invasion...

Fresly: No. That is not the case. remediation is an issue still outstanding, it is a process, a final stage because the other stages have already been completed. And no one can say that, because they have not completed that last stage, which is remediation, the indigenous communities do not have dominion. We have dominion. The communities, we recognize that the communities are the owners, the State recognizes that the communities are the owners. But then what?

Now, the outsiders, they're migrating, looking for land to work, to produce. So, as I say, in the Pacific, there they only plant, cultivate, produce with chemicals. While here they do not. In the North and South Caribbean Coast we have lands that are virgin, that our grandparents preserved. So, now they come to occupy that area for agriculture, for cattle raising, but, with norms, as I told you, the law is clear.

They may come to buy, they may want to take over, they may want to privatize, but the law forbids it. The law prohibits the privatization of indigenous lands. So we cannot cede that right either, the right to privatize. The only option we have is leasing. But in order to lease indigenous lands there are requirements and those requirements have to be fulfilled and if they are not fulfilled, the outsiders cannot stay, they cannot occupy that indigenous land. And if they do occupy it, it is illegal.

The opposition is promoting violence, violence between indigenous and mestizos. What's going on? As I told you, always when indigenous peoples respect and trust their leaders, then, the first thing others do is to convince the leader to promote that violence. Self-remediation is violence, promoting violence. Self-remediation means promoting violence, between indigenous against mestizos.

So, when they throw a stone, someone else will throw stones. And when it is like that other people stoke the fire. When there is already fire they throw more brush onto it. When there is fire they go out to declare, there's conflict, there's a problem, they need help, they need this or that, so people send money... and that's how other people make a living. And then again, if organizations want to support indigenous communities, why don't they coordinate, why don't they send their money directly to the territorial governments?

Because we are the legal representative. Administratively, legally, we are the representatives. Why don't they send funding to the territorial governments of each indigenous people? Why do they send NGOs and programs for this? Because they do not do what... on paper it says one thing, but on the ground it's something else. That's it. So that's what they are promoting. When there is no fire, there is no money. As I told you, things are calm, things are resolved, but that's what they do.

So we as Twi Yabra territory are against those people. That is why we are not involved with any organization. Because at the beginning we thought they entered or wanted to enter in good faith to support us. But in the course of the execution of these projects, of these visits, which they did in my absence, they were already doing other things. So we immediately prohibited their visits to our communities, because they were trying to destabilize the structure of the territorial government, the structure of the communal authorities and at the same time to bring violence between the Miskito peoples and outsiders, so we are against it.

Interview with Ronald Whittingham Dennis, President of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant Territorial Government Karatá

November 13th 2020

In this interview, compañero Ronald Whittingham Dennis discusses the historical development of the rights of the indigenous peoples of the Northern Caribbean area of Nicaragua. He focuses especially on the municipality of Puerto Cabezas (now perhaps better known as Bilwi) from the time of the Mosquitia Kingdom to the new Indigenous Territorial Government (GTI) land titles defined by the National Commission for the Demarcation of Indigenous Territories (CONADETI). Ronald explains the work and coordination between the territorial and communal governments, the regional government and the municipal government. He also comments on various aspects of the transition from the period of regional government controlled by the opposition parties, Partido Liberal Constitucionalista and Yatama, under its historic leader Brooklyn Rivera, until 2014 and the current period of regional and municipal government of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional.



Tortilla con Sal: We are here in Bilwí with compañero Ronald Whittingham Dennis, who is President of the Indigenous and Afrodescendant Territorial Government Karatá.... Perhaps Ronald you could help by explaining to us or giving us a brief summary of the historical context of this problem of land conflicts here in the area.

Ronald Whittingham Dennis: Well, maybe to talk a little bit about that I'm going to go back a little bit further with the indigenous peoples. In the nineteen hundreds, in the early nineteen hundreds or before in the eighteen hundreds, the Atlantic Coast was more or less the La Mosquitia reserve and at that time it was protected by the British, by the British. But when the British were about to leave the Miskitos on their own, they

made a treaty with the Nicaraguan government and that was the Harrison-Altamirano treaty.

Back then several communities benefited from this treaty with rights to land. So the government at that time signed it and gave land to many communities both in the south and in the north. But at the time we are talking about there there was no access, no communication routes.

That is why the communities that are on the Coco River, on the banks of the Coco River did not benefit, because the commission did not reach that area. So few communities benefited from that Harrison-Altamirano treaty, from which treaty the territory that I represent did benefit.

So, we, we have, we had, because we already had, that right, but now after we were given another title, that was closed administratively. But from that closure there, from that right that was extended back then, we came to administer the city of Puerto Cabezas.... For the territory of Karatá there is no differentiation of ethnicity, race or color. That is why you see here in the city of Bilwi, everyone lives here, here live Chinese, gringos, Miskitos, Spaniards, all under the norms of the community, the community has norms.

TcS: Ronald, maybe it would be a help to the people who are watching this if you could explain the territory that Karatá covers. Is it all the town of Bilwi?

Ronald: Yes, everything that is the entire town of Bilwi. Everything that is the urban center of Bilwi and the rural communities, and Karatá which is the community of which that we are natives, the closest community to Bilwi is approximately two and a half kilometers but right now I think it is not even two kilometers, it could be a kilometer or half a kilometer, which is Lamlaya and the other community that we have is Dakban and the other communities we have after Dakban are agricultural areas.

So we have been administering, we are administering according to our own norms, our own system based on our customs as ethnic groups. Now it's been more than.... more than a century, maybe almost a century because during that time no government, no State government recognized the rights of the indigenous peoples. None.

Until 1987 when this government in its first... in its first period of government recognized the rights of indigenous peoples in the Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua. After that came Law 28, always to protect how we choose our own regional parliament. Then comes Law 445, which is the law governing the titling of the communities' lands.

TcS: What year was that?

Ronald: 2005, Law 445. And then when the turn came of the current government, then they set about issuing titles. 36.5 percent of the national territory is in the hands of the territorial governments, the indigenous peoples.

We are indigenous peoples recognized by the State of Nicaragua today and not only recognized but we have been given those rights, the right to communal property which we never had, the right to education, all the rights prescribed in the Constitution, to health, housing, and the territorial governments always work with, which is why Law 445 establishes the framework, a coordination mechanism for the four levels of government.

You might ask, how is that? Only in Nicaragua are three, four, five levels of government. Central government, which is the same as the state. Municipal government, which administers the municipality with its administrative, political-administrative dimension. And the regional governments.

The regional government, which is the seat of government of Puerto Cabezas. The territorial governments which are us and the communal governments. The five governments established by the Constitution must work in a coordinated way.

TcS: Ronald, can you explain to us the difference between the territorial government and the communal government?

Ronald: The difference is that the communal government is directly for a specific community. The territorial government is a group of communities. If there are five or six communities, it represents that group of communities. But the communal government is specifically for a single community. Therefore, while each territorial government has five or six communities, in each community there's a communal government that functions in an articulated way.

Who is the communal government? Law 445 says that it is the judge, or that the community decides who it might be. So, since the tradition for a long time has been that the judges are the highest authority, then we go along with that custom with the judges.

TcS: When you talk about the judges you are talking about the communal judges...

Ronald: Communal. In Miskito they are called *wihstas*...., so we are working on that basis. Now, by law, since you asked me to explain the panorama a little bit, by law there are five stages for titling the land. Now the law says that the last stage is the remediation. That's what the law says. So we, the territorial governments, are primarily responsible for watching over, administering, conserving, taking care of the territory together with the communal governments, with the communal governments.

Now, the issue really is how the communal governments govern, how the territorial governments govern. Because the State already gave them title to their land. Because in my case, when it gave me the title the government, "Ronald, you are president of the Karatá territory, it is in your hands to administer, take care and give good use to the natural resources that belong to your territory."

So the government already authorized me that I can administer. I can have that power over those lands. That is why as a territorial government I do not speak for any other territory, I don't know how other territories manage, but I can speak about how we manage things. So as regards how we manage things. We have rules, rules and regulations about how to apply them and how to govern the territory.

So the rules are classified as how they should be applied in the communities and in the urban area, as I was saying, and that's how we are working without distinction as regards the kinds of ethnicity or race that exist in the territory. And not only here in the city. We also have mestizo rural communities, but we are working with norms, the norms that regulate our territorial government, we are characterizing and controlling this territory, as a community, as a territory, based on that.

Now, in a few communities, there are problems with remediation, but we also have to see some realities, realities that we, or at least in my case I have seen, because I have gone to some of the territories and I have seen that there are people from the self-same communities, authorities of those same communities that have sold land, sometimes up to 350 hectares, or as much as 700 hectares. So, if I sell to you even though the law, the law... the law prohibits the sale of land.

But nevertheless, through ignorance of the law, sometimes people sell it. So really these are problems that sometimes we, as indigenous peoples, in the territorial governments, we blame the State. But what happens?

The people now that... when they are sold 350 hectares, or even a thousand hectares, then those people bring their relatives. Because if you buy something from someone. It's something you bought, then you are going to think it is yours, although the law says otherwise. Do you see?

It's true that maybe some have entered on their own, but there must be a negotiation. There must be a negotiation as to how to go about ordering things because there are lands that can be zoned really, where the community or the territory can say, "well here there are outsiders, but where can we put things in order, where can they be and what can or cannot be there, and under what system can they be there. It is like Karatá saying, "okay, you want, we're...you have 700 hectares? no, you can't have 700, you are going to have 70". An example. "But this is going to be the area where you can be...under what terms? you'll pay me a lease...".

The lease can consist of things apart from money, because the farmers or outsiders are producers and they might pay you in kind, with livestock if they have livestock. An example, say... if a farmer has one hundred head of cattle, in one year he produces another fifty head of cattle. You work out, you had fifty this year, so then you are going to give... just an example, five head of cattle, or you harvested 100 hundredweight of rice, so you are going to give the community ten sacks... just as an example I tell you, or you took out 2000 measures of beans, so then you are going to give ten hundredweight...So, there has to be... all that depends on the rules you are going to create and on your administration.

TcS: Fresly suggested a difference, a distinction between what he called reordering and that term that so many people manipulate, remediation. Do you think that distinction is valid? And if you think it is valid, what is reordering and what is sanitation?

Ronald: There are several hypotheses. And various people interpret things in different ways. Because there are people who say remediation is to clear out, to get everyone out, one.... But some people say no, remediation is to seek an understanding, to remediate is to reach an understanding. And part of that understanding is the well known term of reordering. That is the concept.

So, what does it mean to reorder? It is not that the mestizos or the outsiders that are within your territory, within your area, that they are going to decide where they are going to be. You will tell them where they are going to be. That is reordering. And how much you can give in the portion of land. That is the zoning.

TcS: It is a component of this...

Ronald: It is a component for solving problems. Now in that reordering you also have to see who will go and who can stay. That is reordering.

TcS: Ronald, in this whole process it's the responsibility of the communal governments, of the territorial governments to insist on their rights to their property, but since Law 445 is a national law, surely the remediation must be a responsibility of the State. So how is the relationship between the process of the territorial and communal governments defending their rights and this process directed by the State, promoted by the State of remediation so as to guarantee completion of the land titling process.

Ronald: As far as I understand the matter, this process is one of accompaniment. The State provides that through the Army and the Army's Ecological Battalion, and no territory can say that's not the case. They have indeed provided accompaniment. They have provided accompaniment.

But as I was saying, the will to resolve problems is up to the territorial governments and the community. And I am going to tell you why.

Sometimes... sometimes the... to tell you the truth there are many, shall we say, aspects that are inconvenient for one person, inconvenient for another person and annoying for yet another person, but the reality is that you cannot, if a member of the community sold a certain portion of land for whatever reason, you are forced to sit down and negotiate. So as to see what can be done.

And to negotiate you have to do so in a spirit of wanting to solve the problem. But if there is no will to resolve the problem rather than to create more problem, then you will never solve the problem.

Because CONADETI... CONADETI is an institution created by the State and has always provided accompaniment, in various communities, in Francia Sirpe, in Fresly's territory and even in mine...

What happens is that sometimes there is no will and no follow up, the key word is follow up, to go resolving matters case by case. Because the community has to decide how they want the remediation stage to be effective. That is what we have to bear in mind.

So when you have that clear vision, then you know how you are going to go about things. For example, I was in the Fresly's territory,... in Fresly's territory, there is a man... there is a man called.... Collective so and so... there is this collective there, which has a lease of a thousand, I think, hectares, but what happened?

This collective had a contract with the community and with the territory, but this collective brought in other people and their families, when according to the community's rules that is forbidden.

So, they take a thousand hectares and bring other families and give them thirty hectares, for which are going to pay so much. So the territory's space, the space of the community's land becomes a merchandise and these are things that have to be regulated.

If I rent you a thousand hectares, that land is for you. And if you... if you violate that clause, immediately a negative effect arises, which is cancellation of the lease. And those are the rules. I don't know if they have those rules.

So say you are president of the territory, that gives you the power, and you gave someone a thousand hectares and you realize that eleven or twelve families that don't have a contract have occupied the land, so I call the police so that they remove those people from the land. I told the person concerned that this is the contract, they violated the rights of the community...

And in this case there is a reordering. This person is going to leave of their own accord. Why? Because they violated the norm... So I believe it may be the case that things are being done in that way.

TcS: One of the things that the compañeros in Siuna explained to me is that much of this kind of problem has resulted from mismanagement by previous administrations. For example, the Regional Council was controlled by the compañeros of Yatama until 2014. And we were also noting that in the 2009 municipal elections here in the Northern Caribbean area, most or perhaps half of the six or seven municipalities were in the hands of Yatama and the PLC and that many of the problems that are coming out now results from mismanagement, maybe corruption, but in any case the irresponsibility of those previous administrations. How true is that in your opinion?

Ronald: That is well confirmed. Why? That's why I was telling you now, I was explaining to you that the leaders... why do I insist so much on the leaders?

Because maybe you didn't want to get deep into this but you asked me the question... Because the leaders that the communities had were from Yatama and most of them were ex-combatants, so they had the blessing of their maximum leader and so they sold their lands. Do you understand?

Now with this government, the new GTIs want to clear people out, and what do the people say? "No, no, no no, here I bought this land and I have been living here for ten, fifteen years". That's what they tell you. "And if you want to get me out of here, you'll have to carry me out dead..."

TcS: "Over my dead body"....

Ronald: Right, "over my dead body" they say.... So, that's the thing, the previous mismanagement and maladministration. So that's the problem, and that's why I was telling you it's the GTIs that have to resolve things, it can't be the government, nor can the government come to....

It's the GTIs and the community that have to create certain norms to resolve this problem that the previous regional governments and mayors have left behind and that has caused....

So you have to look for strategies on how you are going to resolve it. Because these people who have already, imagine, who have already come to live here for fourteen years, fifteen years, they came to plant their crops, they have their own livestock, they have their animals, they are already well established.

It's not someone who came today, yesterday, for just one year, two years.... It is difficult, if a person has already made their investment, so then how things get reordered is really what this well known reordering is all about... how to reorder things...

Because I don't believe... and I always say I don't believe that if such and such a person previously sold a thousand hectares of land and perhaps sold it for a few thousand dollars... that is not the real price and in any case the land cannot be sold.... so then you have to say:

"Well, you want to stay here, but not based on a sale. You are going to agree to a lease and we are going to allocate land to you. How much land we are going to allocate? So you are going to work here, maybe not a hundred hectares, maybe not fifty, maybe thirty depending on the outsider's capacity...." That is a negotiation.

But you cannot clear people out by force, precisely when there may be deaths, when there may be this or that... people may say that "the government..." But no, the government has not played a role, the government has not said to anyone "go, and clear people out by force", it has not said that. What the government has said is "as Nicaraguan brothers and sisters we have to look for a solution ". And that is what we in the territories have to understand. The damage is already done. What we have to look for is how to resolve the problem.

It is like zinc sheets on your house, a hurricane came and made a hole in them. What are you going to do? Change all the zinc or patch where the hole is? In the territories we have to work together with the communal governments on how we are going to resolve this problem. We already know how the problem has come about and we will solve it little by little.

TcS: Ronald, can you help me understand a few details? For example, there is something that I don't understand, which is the difference between... let's say that some mestizo comrades arrive and say to the territorial government "we want to settle here to do, let's say cattle raising or artisanal mining" and the territorial government agrees and they can lease it or they can assign it, but what is the difference between leasing and assigning? Is there a difference?

Ronald: Of course there is a difference. Remember that assigning something is without, how do you say...it's not something onerous as they say in law, or that you are not going to pay, I assign you this land, period. But that does not exist. Donations do not exist. In the law the communal lands are sacred... they cannot be taxed, sold, nor donated, nor assigned. But the issue is that someone may come and say to the territorial president, "I want five hundred hectares of land to live on". But the territorial president doesn't have the power to negotiate that.

The instance with the right to negotiate and to decide if they are going to lease is the community. The communal assembly is where a negotiation becomes effective or where it gets authorized, always taking into account free, prior and informed consent in accordance with the United Nations rules. But as the person is asking for five hundred and we do not have a great deal of land then we can lease him three hundred but under these conditions.

So if the outsider says they agree, there is no problem. If he doesn't agree then the community doesn't have to offer the land. But the difference is that just assigning the land is inapplicable, null in other words. Leasing is what applies.

The only way the community can get something for their land is to lease. And they want...what are they going to lease? I'll give you an example. If in a woodland there is precious wood, the mestizo is going to go after the wood, not the land. What is on the land, who owns it, who pays for it? Is the community going to give it away?

And what if in the land being leased, there's what's on the surface, but also in the subsoil? What do I mean? If there is gold in that land, it always belongs to the community. Or if the resource is only on the surface. So then all these details should be known to the communal governments and the territorial presidents.

Because many times it has been said by way of false news that "No," they say, "they came, they invaded us, they took our wood" or I don't know what, "they seized our plantation..." But what happened..?. Where were the community leaders? What kind of negotiation did they do? The thing is that each community has its own norms but based on national laws. You can't go beyond those. And the State recognizes the norms of the community, its form of administration, that is set out in the Constitution, how the community administers itself.

And also the State protects the rights of the community. That is why the State has ordered the no sale of lands because the lands are sacred for the community. Then, under this legal framework, the community creates its norms, how it wants its land to be leased, on what terms.... So, the community cannot lease a land where there is gold, which is the wealth of the community. The community cannot lease a land where there is precious wood.

The community must know. So there must be a conditional clause, completing the agreement, conditions set.... So that is where the territorial government must seek guidance and advise the community as the legal representative of those communities, so that things work out well. But what happens?

I have always said to the territories, what is the use of just having, just having and not knowing what to do? Many people, many communities have... because the government has given them large amounts of land... some communities have up to one hundred and eighty... three hundred thousand hectares... a very big area of land. So you have to know how they should take advantage of that, how to take advantage of that....

TcS: What do you think of the argument, that the national government manipulates the communal governments?

Ronald: Well, to answer that, I am going to talk a little bit to ideology, the way of thinking. When I talk to you about that... the word position refers to when a person is at an opposite pole to the other party and everything that speaks well for him is not regarded as good by the other party. That's normal. Now, addressing specifically the issue of indigenous peoples...

There's news that spreads overseas that are... I cannot say that they are false news, but they are examples of manipulated information, of various falsehoods that are not based on reality. And this information is one-sided. There is no interview like what you are doing coming to ask us about the whys and wherefores... ah well....

When you say that the government puts parallel presidents of indigenous territories to the ones the community chooses or they say that the community elects two parallel *wihstas*, that is not so.... Look, do you think that things here it would be as they are, just with that information and that there there would be no demonstrations against the government? But that has not happened here...

Why has it not happened? Because the communities made there choice. Right? And the other part I noted is the political part of Yatama I mentioned. Because Yatama wants to have counterweight against what the people in the community, the majority... we in the communities elect from our community democracy.... That's right.

So, that's when they see that and say "No, since the community elected that person sympathetic to the government then we are also going to elect another one who is aligned with our political party." That doesn't work.

But after all that ended. Things are normal. Here why not... why if you go to all the communities that have been mentioned internationally, you go there and the community is calm, they are very calm with their leaders. Why? Because the community elected them.

If I had not been elected by the community's sovereign will there would have been a problem because I would not have any authority? If here I had not been elected by the five communities, do you think that the communities would allow me to visit them? No. First they will reject me. "No. I have not elected you. You are from the government...so you go to the government." But that has not happened. It's just not true.

I think no information internationally can truthfully say that in the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and the Miskito, Afrodescendant, Mayangna indigenous peoples there is conflict because there is double election or there are demonstrations, have you seen any? No one has seen any. Not one. They just say that. But it is not the reality. That is not the reality. There is information that appears...Now, if we in this world did not have, if there had been no problems, this would not be our world, it would be a paradise. In every country there are problems...

It may be, after a while, after a week or so there may be some dissatisfaction. This happens everywhere, in any country, look at the United States, now the president there is unhappy. That's normal. But then people are satisfied and realize that this is not the reality.

You have to accept reality. So it is something that really... what happens sometimes is that information is distorted for their personal benefit and it should not be like that. That is how I see it. Because I have always said and I am going to tell you with complete confidence. The Miskitos...the Miskitos, above all the Miskitos do not have a political ideology. The Miskitos are with whoever solves their problems. The Miskitos are with whoever stands by them. The Miskitos are with whoever respects their rights. That is the Miskitos for you.

If you take away the Miskito's property rights, the Miskito will rise up. But the government gives them those rights. That's why the Miskitos... the Miskitos are calm, the Afro-descendants are calm, the Sumus are calm. Why? Because they know that they are getting their rights. So there it is...

I think that sometimes one has to reflect , comparing, how we are, how we were and how we are now and how we think as indigenous peoples. That is why I said that the indigenous cosmovision is different from what Westerners, as we call them, think. We think differently, we live differently.

TcS: Is the arrival of a highway positive from the point of view of the indigenous peoples of the area or is it negative, or does it have elements of both?

Ronald: Look, the dream of the indigenous peoples is a dream for development, for progress. Who doesn't want progress? Who doesn't want development?

Who doesn't want a paved road providing access from Managua to Puerto Cabezas? Who wouldn't like to see paved roads from here to Waspam? Who? Which Miskito? You do an interview with the community and the first thing they will say is "Brother, we need our roads paved".

Who is not going to need to go from here to Managua, which is five hundred and something kilometers in a pickup truck in a bus, to be able to go in six or seven hours? Who is not going to want that?

How much is a bus ticket to go, a ticket to go to Managua? And how much is the cost from here to travel by bus in comfort? Look... There is a biblical phrase that says "change your way of thinking to change your way of living".

The Miskitos are not like a hundred years ago. The Miskitos think about how to get ahead. That is what we, the indigenous peoples, that is what we think and dream of. Why in other countries...?

I am going to tell you about Oaxaca, I don't know if you know Oaxaca, the three indigenous peoples... in every corner there are paved roads, means of communication... that is what has been done here...

TcS: That's in Mexico...

Ronald: In Mexico... here the government is trying to make roads to provide access, to make people's produce accessible. How much can you produce and take of your product all the way to Managua to sell? And not only in Managua, internationallytoo?

That is why I told you when we started, the government, this government is restoring the rights of the indigenous peoples, which for many years it could not and I am going to tell you something, sometimes when I say this, people don't like it.

I always say, the main leader of the indigenous peoples, I am not going to name him because we all know, he was the worst violator of the rights of the indigenous peoples. Why?

Because the government, when it arrived in the first period of government, wanted to start the project for a highway. And what did he say? "No. You cannot have a paved road to Puerto because it will fill up with settlers..." he said.

And so the road was not done, but the settlers still came... yes or no? So, one needs a paved highway to be able to produce and exploit the resources that one has. Here we need Free Trade Zones to create jobs... because we to want to live well and have a nice life. And if there are no such rights, how are we going to? Imagine...

Do you see how it is? That is why we are always grateful to the government. Imagine right now the problem at Wawa Boom. If that bridge is built we won't have problems we had just now with hurricane Eta, because of the hurricane a lot of trucks that the government sent with food could not get through...

TcS: Which bridge...?

Ronald: By Wawa Boom

TcS: Over the River Wawa?

Ronald: That was going to be done about ten years ago by the government...they had the plans, it was going to happen with support from Venezuela, but what did the leader say when Yatama had the regional government and municipal authority, what did he say? "No...no..." So what does he want?

For us to be like in the eighteenth century, without clothes, without anything, only with.... no not that... No Miskito is going to tell you that. Just like a Miskito tells you that you prefer to walk around naked with just something to cover your private parts.... No one is going to want that...That's absurd....

Interview with Rose Cunningham Kain, Mayor of Waspám, and president of the Territorial Indigenous Government of Wangki Awala Kupia

November 14th 2020

Tortilla con Sal: We came to ask about the problem of so-called invasions of indigenous lands, so perhaps you could tell us a little bit about the reality, perhaps bit about the historical context and what the reality is now?

Rose Cunningham Kain: I think in today's world, there are so many ways to distort history. There are so many ways to make up stories to believe that sometimes one is amazed at the stories that people tell about one's life. I think they are very disrespectful in that sense. Indeed, in the Río Coco communities, we have had about six communities that have had serious difficulties with people who have invaded indigenous lands.



Indigenous lands and remediation

All these invasions began in the 1990s when the government presided by Doña Violeta assigned some lands to ex-combatants, also violating the indigenous rights over indigenous people's lands. Back then she gave some areas so that indigenous people could subsist who had been in the conflict and many of them returned without a serious process of social reinsertion.

"Take your machete, your waterproof boots, and three sheets of zinc and demobilize". There was no serious social reinsertion process. Therefore, these indigenous people started selling land to non-indigenous people. And that's where all the invasions began... that process began.

But, please note that the dimension of the problem is not the one that is depicted. In other words, as if there was chaos here, as if there was a great conflict here. We have different indigenous territories. In this municipality there are seven indigenous territories and I am president of one of those indigenous territories. In one indigenous territory, the people have been protecting their lands through a model of forest rangers. Forest rangers have been taking care of all the part that corresponds to them as a territory. And that is the Li Lani model.

There is another territory called Li Aubra. So they have their own groups of forest rangers that protect the area. Li Lani is made up of 27 communities. They protect their area and they do not have any type of conflict to date with non-indigenous people. They have not had any invasion of non-indigenous people on their lands. Their methodology has been working.

Then we have the other methodology, the other model, which is the Li Aubra model. Li Aubra is the middle part of the river basin. This model has been developed by the indigenous leaders of 18 communities that have initiated a process with their territorial government of talks with non-indigenous people.

TcS: Is that what is meant by remediation?

Rose: The first remediation we should talk about is remediation via the social reinsertion of the people. In law, remediation has to do with seeing that the territory of the indigenous peoples does not have any type of conflict due to properties overlapping that might exist there. But in the context of our whole history of struggle for rights as indigenous peoples, we have had historical legal achievements that have not been seen in the overall indigenous movement, at least in Latin America, namely to have a law of indigenous peoples' property... that empowers us for the use, enjoyment and enjoyment of our resources.

So, the presence of non-indigenous people in our lands logically creates tension for us because it means that these non-indigenous people are occupying our lands, they are occupying our resources. For this situation, the territorial government of Li Aubra initiated a couple of years ago contact with the non-indigenous people and dialogues, talks. We have been observing the meetings that are held between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Indigenous people meet in their communities and build consensus on whether or not they want to expel them, whether or not they want to lease to them, whether or not they want to live or not to live with them. And then, they get together. There are some mining properties, some mines where there are non-indigenous people, and they have managed to go and make agreements with them in situ.

At this point, the Li Aubra model is a model in which the indigenous families have already been building consensus to discuss with non-indigenous people the legality of their presence on indigenous peoples' lands. And there you have to respect the self-determination of the people and our government does that. It is a door, a window that has been opened to us to be able to exercise our rights. So, some of the communities, in this territory what we want to do is agree a lease, and the law permits that.

In other communities they have said that what we need is to change. To change is for the the non indigenous settlers to go back, to expel them, to remove them. And they continue talking, they continue dialoguing, no consensus is built in a single assembly... in the framework of the indigenous peoples. We always leave for tomorrow another little bit more and we go on talking and going deeper in the effort to reach a consensus. Because that is precisely why it is a consensus. So one of the... one of our basic practices is to build consensus with sincere dialogue and in good faith.

The other model is the model of the territory of Wangki Twi Tasba Raya where you just came from, which is pure forest, beautiful, the pine trees, right? That landscape, the people love their landscape, they love their trees, they love their water, their resources. There the model that is being developed is the judicial model.

It is to be able to capture invaders on indigenous lands and put them through a legal process where they come to trial and currently they already have seven people who have been convicted for buying or selling indigenous lands. This is another type of process that is being carried out in this other territory.

This territory of Wangki Maya, which also belongs to this municipality, is a territory free of invaders. It is free of invaders. In Waspam we could say that we have a territory, the Wangki Awala Kupia territory, which is part of Waspam municipality, here where you are currently. It is a territory where we have a harmonious coexistence. Because we have indigenous Miskito and we always say to the non-indigenous, the mestizos of the Pacific, that we call them hispanes, Spaniards. Now we call them indigenous too, it's just that they lost their identity along their way in life.

But, here in Waspam we are practicing coexistence with those who have come to settle in Waspam. So in this municipality we have different models of relations with non-indigenous peoples, with non-indigenous settlers. At this moment in the context of the hurricane, we have also had news of agricultural losses these non-indigenous people have suffered too. And as the mayor's office we have to listen to them because they are Nicaraguan citizens. They have human rights. They are human too.

What is true is that we always call on them to reach agreement with the indigenous peoples. Either they leave or they come to an agreement with the owners of the land. The last violent activity must have been in about 2013/14. We have not had violent activities in this part of our territory. Here we have seen meetings where people speak their minds. We have documented meetings that have taken place in the mountains between non-indigenous settlers and indigenous settlers where 17 communities, leaders of 17 communities, come together and walk to meet at a certain point.

The NGOs, Lottie Cunningham

I think that, like this person, there are many who take advantage of the poverty and conflict of others. That is not and never has been the spirit of the creation of non-governmental organizations. For me, non-governmental organizations should not want to profit from poverty or people's conflicts. And when I say poverty, it's not that we are poor.

We have been impoverished by the same people who have funded the people who say that we live in conflict. Yes, because we have our wealth. And we have the capacity to make decisions about our wealth because that is what the law allows us to do, and this law is a law that we are executing from every point of view.

We are... there are some organizations that you can see here in the shelters, in this emergency mobilization to protect us against hurricanes, organizations that are working together with the State, that believe in the State because they have seen how it works. But there are other organizations that have even reached out to people sheltering against these winds and hurricanes to talk to them suggesting "Isn't it true that the government doesn't feed you? Isn't it true that things are very bad? That kind of harmful, corrupt, underhand manipulation, and those are the same people who then say that we are in conflict.

We have had conflicts. We have had problems. But we have been overcoming all that and trying with the people of the communities to reach our full potential as indigenous peoples. Exercising and living in the exercise of our rights. So, it is a pity that there are Miskitos who found an easy life through those who finance evil. A pity also that they some even say sometimes they are Christians. And that is an issue. Let's not go into that issue but yes, they go to mass, they take communion and they put on their Sunday best but they are incapable of having compassion for their indigenous brothers and sisters who are trying to get ahead.

It is a big lie and we have not had that kind of conflict for many years. We are building peace. Peace is not just words. Peace is a process. And the social reinsertion after the eighties, when the counterrevolution was also financed from the north, that peace process that led us to Autonomy, we continue to weave it, we continue to build it, and we continue to strengthen it. And today, after 33 years of Autonomy, we feel, and I in particular feel very proud to see how our community leaders are able to give you an interview and tell you the reality. And they know where the bad is and where the good is.

Cattle

TcS: Specifically in relation to cattle, can you give us a profile of how cattle are managed here in the municipality of Waspam?

Rose: The cattle in the municipality of Waspam, the cattle among us indigenous people, I remember my father, who is no longer alive, who used to name each one of the cows. Our cattle were cattle we kept like a piggy bank, like our own bank, so cattle that perhaps we might slaughter maybe would for a wake. Or if we had to send our son to school, or at Christmas time. Cattle here has been like pets in other countries. And little by little we have been making a shift to having more cattle. But here there has been no certification process to permit meat exports. That is not true.

The people here supply the local market and, as often as not with some difficulty, we manage to find someone who wants to butcher their cattle for the local market. Of course, in the last few years we have been encouraging people to improve their cattle stock, so that IPSA can do its work teaching us how to improve our cattle rearing.

But we keep animals on a very small scale. So this report saying that settlers are killing us for land to raise cattle on is not true either. That is not true. Not one cattle rancher has died here, not one Miskito involved in any kind of cattle related killing. It's a Disney World story, maybe, a Mickey Mouse story, who knows. But it is not a real story of this municipality Waspam or any of these municipalities where there are indigenous peoples.

Because we love our cattle very much still . I am sure that when you go down the road you will find cattle there walking among the people and that very harmonious relationship between all of us whether we have cattle or not. In fact, cattle are wandering around, in many cases without being fenced off, without a place to keep them, and occasionally we even joke among ourselves because in some cases our people don't like to milk our cows. It is our culture. It is a different way of thinking about cattle raising.

TcS: I understand that because of the communal management of cattle, the IPSA system, which is based on farmsteads, on the registration of individual farms, cannot operate because there are no farms as such.

Rose: There aren't. There aren't. And cattle roam free. The cattle roam free. Among the communities we receive here at the mayor's office, many communities ask us as a priority for wire, barbed wire, to be able to put a wire fence so the community's cattle cannot enter the area where they are cultivating agriculture for self-consumption. But these are cattle of all the people in the community all mixed together and these are not the farms they are talking about.

So, I think their reports have failed really because first they talked about mining, that mining... here we are not going to deny it, on the river there are people who work in artisanal mining and they pan maybe in banana leaves and sometimes in sieves. And they are careful because there's been awareness raising on the issue.

But it is not the case that there's an extractive industry here that's contaminating. So, that lie didn't work and now they are coming with the lies about cattle and the lies about the settlers. And it's all untrue just so that those who like weird stories can believe and fall for those stories and pay out money. That's the whole story.

So, in any case, I would say that when in the United States or in any part of the world it is said that indigenous people are killed here in order to promote cattle ranching and that beef from cattle equals indigenous people's blood, that is one of those stories. It is one of those stories. They are inventing and living off stories about indigenous peoples. And in the whole world of the indigenous peoples' movement, we deplore, we condemn this type of accusation involving the indigenous peoples.

From Nicaragua or from any part of the world we are always going to find nefarious people who want to invent this type of story in order to benefit themselves. And they do not really work from the cosmogony vision of our indigenous peoples, respecting our lives, our human rights. Respecting our history, our culture, our dignity. They play with the dignity of indigenous peoples and one feels sorry for those who take seriously the people who want to promote that story.

**Interview with Dr. Loyda del Carmen Martínez Rodríguez,
Jdistrict Judge of the municipality of Waspam, Rio Coco, RACCN**

14 de noviembre 2020

Tortilla con Sal: Perhaps compañera, you could identify yourself and explain to us about the property remediation process and about cases you have adjudicated.

Dr. Loyda Martínez Rodríguez: Ok. My name is Loyda del Carmen Martínez Rodríguez, and I am the Single Local Judge for the municipality of Waspam, Rio Coco. We have prosecuted six cases of usurpation of communal domain of indigenous peoples, where people who are not natives of that community have come to misappropriate land of indigenous peoples. So, how has this



procedure been carried out? In the territories, the owners of the land, who are the presidents of the territorial governments, file a complaint with the National Police. The National Police receives these and does all the investigative work. Then they refer the cases to the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Public Prosecutor's Office files the accusation before the Single Local Court. We have sentenced these people with the maximum penalty of 3 years, and have thus sent them to the penitentiary in Managua or Matagalpa.

Also, I have participated in dialogue between mestizos and Miskitos in which there are territories that want to resolve the remediation process by means of a leasing agreement with the territory. They make the proposal, then the territory, its president will decide if they are going to lease or not. So, we have carried out these procedures as a judicial authority... by way of accompaniment, then. So you see, we have participated listening to both parties, the mayor of the municipality has invited me to participate and listen to proposals made by the non-indigenous party.

The State has vindicated the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples' right to the land, and the State is also a guarantor in the efforts to secure social peace in our country and in our region. It is a process in which the State has guaranteed and has given those peoples this right, but the political opposition always does not see this. They also say that the cases we have prosecuted are of little importance. But no. The indigenous peoples are being protected and the rights the indigenous peoples are being vindicated. And the State has contributed a great deal to this because no other government had ever recognized the indigenous peoples, giving them a title to what before was only private property, where only the oligarchy and the bourgeoisie had the right to own land.

But now the State has guaranteed, has extended that legal protection by which the people of the Caribbean Coast have received the title to their land. And not only the title. You can go to the community and see how they have advanced significantly. They have their land, their crops and much more. It is the State has guaranteed that these peoples have their land in legal terms, namely the title to their property.

Likewise, we have made progress in this aspect of property remediation, and we are not trying to drag it out, although the opposition always sees it like that. But there has been a lot of progress, because there is a dialogue between mestizos and Miskitos in which the State guarantees as established in Law 445 that those communities, that now have their legal title, can lease their land and that is allowed by law. But this is something that as regards the State and the territories, each territory president is able say whether they want to lease or not.

TcS: What's the relationship between the justice administered by the State, which you represent, and the justice of the indigenous peoples, which is represented at the community level by their *wihsta*?

Loyda: You see, the State allows positive law and customary law, for the State there are the local judges, the district judges and in the case of customary law there are the *wihstas*, the original community authorities. Today in the Political Constitution and the reforms to it, the *wihstas* are recognized as the original community authorities of the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, with which the State interacts, as in Article 20 of Nicaragua's Penal Code, and as is also recognized in the Political Constitution. So, what do we do in that regard? We work together. We constantly train our *wihstas* in new legislation, and how those laws should be administered in their community.

And the law also establishes that they can mediate, and that mediation can be done via the Single Local Court which registers how citizens choose the form of justice they prefer. They can choose the positive justice that we represent or they can choose customary justice. So the citizen chooses one or other of those two forms of justice. Then, as long as it's in accordance with the law... they administer justice. So then, what do we do? In those cases that can be resolved amicably without the need to go to court, we write the resulting mediation in the mediation register that we have kept for many years. So that means there is access to justice, and for reasons of cost, or distance, people are able to choose their form of justice in their community, which we recognize and we respect the work of our traditional authorities, namely, the *wihstas*

Interview with compañero Lejan Mora President of the Indigenous Territorial Government Wangki Twi / Tasba Raya

November 14th 2020

Tortilla con Sal: Here we are with comrade Lejan Mora in the city of Waspam. So Lejan, perhaps you could explain to us a little bit about the origin of the problem of the so-called land invasions.

Lejan Mora: Well, I'm president of the indigenous territorial government of Wangki Twi Tasba Raya. As you can see in our country, in the area where the Miskito peoples live, they are divided, the region is divided into territories, into different territories.

Precisely here in this municipality, which is Waspam Rio Coco, which borders Honduras, in this municipality there are seven indigenous territorial governments. One of which is the Wangki Twi Tasba Raya Territory where we are right now. This is the office of the Territorial Government of Wangki Twi.

At the moment I am the president. I carry out the functions of territorial president and we are here today, and I would like to, I'd like to explain the current situation that has been developing and the situation in the past as well. The whys and wherefores that at this stage people are projecting images that are not the reality. Images that are not the reality in accordance with the actual situation.

The problem right now... here in Wangki Twi, there are around four, yes four communities that are under precautionary measures. Why the need for precautionary measures? Because supposedly...

TcS: From the Inter-American Court?

Lejan: Yes, indeed. There's a procedure to be done every three months in Costa Rica thanks to the measures put in place by the Inter-American Court. This is because of the problem of the invasion of indigenous lands that has been going on for several years now. And as a consequence of the sale of indigenous community lands by the community leaders themselves. In fact, no, not the community, but an organization, an indigenous people's organization, whose leaders are there and they have been there for almost thirty years now.

TcS: Would that be Yatama?

Lejan: Yatama. Those leaders were the ones who started selling land. We have documents showing they were the vendors. Who were the buyers? People from the Pacific, who don't have land. So they began selling, they began doing business, and that is where the problem of land invasion arose.



Now, there are invasions of communal lands so the people of the community are also left without land, and they are waiting for someone to do something. So we, as territorial government, right now we are working hard in coordination with all the institutions here in the municipality, at a regional level also with the regional government, and also with the central government because various laws that support us, that back us up.

The Law 445 talks about... where it talks about the right of the indigenous peoples to administer and so forth. And so, in accordance with that, based on the law that protects us, we are acting to keep to a minimum the situation that has taken place.

And so far we feel that we have, we've stopped the invasion that was taking place... we have stopped it... because by applying that law, we are able to get people imprisoned via a judicial process. We get them imprisoned and they end up with three year prison terms.

And that is how we are trying to calm the situation. And later on we seek to reach a peaceful solution, without confrontations or anything else. The issue of territorial rights here in Nicaragua is something new for us. Above all for indigenous peoples it is something new. But what the current government has done for us is a very good thing.

Because before, we did not have this right. Now with the new law that is Law 445 where we are protected, that law supports us. It protects us. And the authorities set to work to make the territorial divisions until there came a time... the work had to go through various phases and right now we are in the last phase, which is remediation.

So that is when we get to the problem where the land dealings have taken place. Then there comes a moment when they get paralyzed, they get frozen. And right now we are in that stage of remediation. Just three weeks ago we had a meeting with the regional government, with all the territorial presidents on the matter that soon... we are going to start working on the remediation issue. What's meant by the remediation issue?

Some are trying to manipulate people so that they go and get involved in confrontations with those who are invading land. They think that remediation is something that has to involve confrontation with those invading the land.

TcS: That's what they call....

Lejan: That's what they seek... and we are not on that path.

TcS: And they call that self-remediation?

Lejan: That's it. That's what they call it. That's what they call it, self-remediation. But we as a territorial government are working along other routes, along legal routes. And we are coordinating so as to be able to... to define boundaries, because the concrete trig points are already there, the territorial trig points, each territory already has its trig points, its coordinates. The technology is advanced enough for us to be able to see from here where they are located.

And we are already planning to start work on clearing the boundary limits and with that we will know where we are, to the point where we will know where each community is in which zone, the boundary limits for each territory and so on.

So we are, as I have said, we're in the last phase of the remediation, which is clearing the boundaries, the inter-territorial limits and so on. So we are at that stage right now. I remember very well indeed that in 2015 there were clashes between Miskitos and those who were invading the land. But that came about thanks to the same situation that has been... occurring.

The political opposition are insisting on self-remediation. So the people in the communities rise up, get involved in confrontations, and then they persist, and that's how it happened that, I think there have been four or three deaths, something like that.

But from that time until... since 2015, that happened in 2015 in the month of September. From that time until now, the situation... although there are rumors, although rumors spread scaring people in the area so that a false report results and then gets taken to the Inter-American Court.

These are the things that have been happening, but for now there's a situation of calm, there are no confrontations or anything. But I remember very well that last year, in February in the community of Santa Clara, there was a domestic accident, inside a house.

TcS: There is a famous photo of a girl.....

Lejan: Indeed. It's the case of a girl where a 13 year old boy was handling his father's handgun inside the house. The gun went off and the bullet pierced through here and came out here. What did they do when that accident happened? The creators of fake news took charge of spreading the word through the media, through Facebook, claiming that a lot of men appeared, 200 men and attacked the community. And we showed that was completely untrue. We went to the house and to the community.

We interviewed people. We even visited the site where it happened. Everything was false. But that information spread internationally as if it was something real, which is untrue. Today even we could go... if we go to the community, we can go and talk also to the mother of the girl about what happened and she can tell us the truth.

So these are situations they are manipulating. We have to work hard practically every day to prove the truth about all the false information that they are reporting. And we seek to demonstrate the truth because we don't go around lying to people.

TcS: And in your opinion, compañero, do you think this problem is getting better, is being resolved, even if only gradually?

Lejan: Yes, indeed. What I've seen during this year 2020, after 11 months now... in these 11 months, we have seen that the situation is improving. And people in the community also feel a little more secure, not like before, because since we began going through the judicial process with the people we sometimes get hold of, then they see that there is pressure via the legal route. So those people doing the invasions there, they are also withdrawing, practically retreating from the land.

And the people, on seeing that, we note that they feel safer more or less... safer than they were.... And right now we are working along those lines. This year is already coming to an end, finishing. And next year, if we continue along the same line, we think we are entitled to feel that the situation, the tension that exists, will decrease more and more until we reach a definitive solution. There are two more points.

We, as a territory, on June 10, June 10 of this year, we called a meeting in the Tea Keamp community. We were representatives of institutions, for example, mainly from the local court. There were two... the municipal judge and then the public defender as well. There were two from here. And the police accompanied us and as well as others.

To the Tea Keamp community, we invited other communities that are part of the territory, the ones closest, for them also see the meeting's importance. We invited community leaders. We even invited other territory leaders, that is Amasau, the other territory that is adjacent. So we invited them there and we sat down to talk and the people invading also, I would say that there were about 28 people who came from there.

TcS: The so-called settlers?

Lejan: Settlers, yes. We invited them and we sat there under a tree. We started to make a presentation of the real situation there because they know very well they are on land that does not belong to them, we presented this to them. And we have shown them what and how might be the most appropriate way forward. It is a negotiated way, not through confrontations or anything like that.

We talked and reached an agreement that... because there are people who have been on that land for several years. And that land where they are located, they got it because another territory sold it. One territory agreed the sale, but it is a piece of land that belongs to a different territory.

So it is a bit of a complicated situation. So we talked with them, and precisely this coming Wednesday we have planned to go and prepare the ground for to another type of approach, namely leasing. We as the territory of Wangki Twi have not yet taken that approach, but seeing the situation and to alleviate it a little, we have to take that step. To what end? To a point we regard as feasible for creating a calmer and more durable situation, so that there are no conflicts.

We are in that situation. So that's one thing. And the other thing is... when the war ended in the nineteen nineties, there were many ex-combatants coming from the war who needed land to work among other things. So, there, next to Tasba Raya, further down where it borders with another territory, the government granted a large piece of the land to each ex-combatant, 50 manzanas. That is to say, a very large area. So they were given it 30 years ago.

TcS: In total would that be about 14,000 hectares?

Lejan: Yes, more or less, yes, in other words, forest land, virgin land. So they have not worked it, but the leaders... at that time those who were involved, they were in charge of everything... and right now at this point we see that they are negotiating to sell the land to those settlers, to sell off the land. So, it's a situation coming about that is not good for Wangki Twi's territories either because....

TcS: So it is a historical problem?

Lejan: It is a historical problem yes, it is problematic.... But it's a matter of things happening within the same, in fact the same ethnicity. So that is the current situation and we too as a territory are very protective of the law that we have. Those ex-combatants got that land but being from a different territory, they were from another territory. But these are matters that maybe later on we will see how to reach an understanding with the owners of that territory, the land that they have been given.

Because they are people who do not belong to the territory in question. They are from a different territory. According to the norms of each territory... for example, at least our bye-law in Wangki Twi rules that if they come, even if they are Miskito but from another territory, if they come to live here, we consider them as outsiders. What does that mean? They are not legitimate members of the territory. The same way a foreigner may go to another country. Someone goes to another country and they feel exactly that, a foreigner.

Then that kind of outsider is also considered, viewed in that way. The authentic native born people are regarded as the legitimate owners of the territory. So the problem we have with the ex-combatants' land... is that most of them are from different territories. So they are things that...

TcS: But they are Miskitos...?

Lejan: They are Miskitos, yes. They are matters such that between us, maybe we can reach an understanding of how we can resolve things. But right now they are selling it, they have it up for sale. For us that would be another problem in addition to the one we already have. We do not want to end up with another territory with... for example, with legal precautionary measures. But we can see that someone is pushing them to do so in order to create more land subject to precautionary measures.

TcS: Would it be fair to say that the same people who procured or set out to procure the precautionary measures are among the group of people who created the problem in the first place? Would that be fair to say?

Lejan: That is how it works. Now people who understand the matter know where the problem comes from. We understand it. But people at the community level they don't know. That is why the people concerned choose people from the communities, manipulate them, and turn things on their head. For example, the issue of the sale of land. I have seen the video that Lottie* released. She says every drop of blood, no, every pound of meat that sold to the United States is a drop of blood of the Miskitos. Which is totally false.

TcS: "Conflict beef"

Lejan: It is totally false. For her, I don't know what her objective is in spreading so many lies. Because it's something that's not... it has nothing to do with anything, anything real, nothing at all. These are things that are not right. I mean, a lie of such magnitude.

TcS: Compañero, could you explain a little bit about, for example, this historical problem of the Yatama ex-combatants development pole? I understand that it's located very close to some of the communities of your territorial government. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Lejan: Yes. As I said before, that is in Tasba Raya zone. The northern zone... Tasba Raya has two zones. The north zone and south zone. So, if you go into the northern zone, you enter through the first community which is Miguel Bikan, which is in the plain. And then you continue 10 kilometers further down, and then you enter the community of Capri. From Capri, two and a half kilometers away is another community called Polo Lakia Sirpe. Yes, I mean there's people, a town is there. And then further down to the south west is Polo La Quietara.

That's where the ex-combatants' land is that was granted to them, where it is located. That's where they are. So, the whole area that includes... if you go further down, you will find the southern area of Tasba Raya, and the last community there is called Wisconsin. So you almost abuts onto the communal land of Wisconsin. that's where it is.

So all that strip, all that strip is covered by the Polo La Quietara zone. So that's where, as I told you before, that's where the owners of the land are trying to sell, that's where they are trying to sell their land. Some, not all, some. They want to do a transaction, put it for sale, or whatever, lease or whatever. So that's where the problem is occurring.

TcS: So the remediation process, with the right remediation process you hope to be able to solve that historical problem as well?

Lejan: We hope so. That is the hope we have, yes. After the completion of the boundaries, that is to say, inter-territorial limits, because up to now, as we can see... while the trig points have been set, the boundary setting has yet to be done. So the problem is there. And that is why we want to start from there.

TcS: Can you explain what boundary setting means?

Lejan: Ok, perfectly. For example one country with another country divides, splits. For example Spain with France. It has its territorial borders. Exactly the same. The territory of Wangki Twi borders with another territory, Li Aubra, which is a little bit above the Río Coco. So, the territory of Wangki Twi runs, everything is referred to the border from the Río Coco inwards, it borders with the Li Aubra territory. So the trig points, when they made the territorial division, the territorial divisions, they set the trig points.

TcS: The trig points are the reference points?

Lejan: Landmarks. Coordination points that they have set out. Yes, inter-territorial. So the trig points are there. So, right now what is needed, as I said, we are in the last phase of remediation, is just that. To do the remediation, that is to say, clearing the path from one trig point to another so that it is visible and so that everyone knows where they are located. That is what I mean. When I say boundary limit, that is what I mean.

Interviews with community members from the Miskito communities of Wisconsin and Santa Clara

November 14th 2020

Tortilla con Sal: Well, we're here with compañero Emsly Bolaños. Emsly, maybe you could say what your position is, why are we here in Wisconsin talking with the compañeros?

Emsly Bolaños: Well, here we've come to verify about the problem of most concern to the community, which is the issue of remediation.

Now the need, the demand most felt by the community according to the communal authorities and some community members, they propose that it is the boundary clearance, because others have totally invaded the areas where they used to work.

Also on the other hand, they mention that after 2015, 2017 there was not very much conflict for the simple reason that they are not actively claiming the area where other brothers and sisters are occupying.

But if they were to try and actively claim the communal areas where the other mestizo brothers and sisters are located, we call them outsiders, there could be another conflict equally like what happened in the years 2015 to 2017.

Taking that into account, they are waiting for the government, as they have done many times for years now, for the government to take steps, starting with the inter-territorial boundary setting so as to to know who is inside the territory, who are occupying those areas where the community used to sow their crops.

They also explain that there have been several meetings, meeting after meeting, talking about the same issue, about remediation, but according to them there has been no response from the government. So they request, they make the petition to the government that it is necessary to do the inter-territorial boundary clearance because the coordinates already exist, and are defined in the official title of the government of the Wangki Twi Tasba Raya territory.

But the bad thing is that they have not been cleared from one trig point to another, that is, from one coordinate to another,

TcS: That's the boundary clearance?



Emsly: Yes, that's the boundary clearance. So, they are asking the government to clear the boundary between the coordinates, the trig points where they are in the official title of the Wangki Twi Tasba Raya territory. And for them, they feel that this would be the starting point towards the solution of the problem.

Because then they can know who is inside their territory and then they can go to dialogue, to talk, because without knowing who is inside their territory, it is not possible to talk or dialogue.

Because there are people who are there, they carry a document that sometimes when they are reviewed turn out to be documents sold by other territorial authorities but they are land located within the territory of Wangki Twi Tasba Raya.

TcS: Authorities from another territory?

Emsly: Exactly. Except some do have property documents sold by some ex-combatants who also have a legal document that was issued by the government itself.

TcS: But in the time of President Violeta...

Emsly: Exactly, yes. So, there are all these classifications of people before they reach there, they mention that the inter-territorial boundary clearance is important so as to then move on to the second stage which is the negotiation, to see who can stay there, but under the agreement of the same community, and who cannot.

And they will select the appropriate area so that outsiders can be located where there is no problem. In other words, there are isolated areas of the community that can be located and there they can talk about leasing, they can, although it is not official, but it could be one of the solutions, the leasing concept.

But not with all the people. Yes. But that also they say, depending on what the community decides.

TcS: The community members insist that they can't do it alone, that they need the support of the State.... Is that so?

Emsly: Yes. This experience of the communal authorities and the community members is because there have been several meetings, of the territory with the communal authorities, with the regional authorities and there have never been any results.

So now they are making a petition so that this time the government will hear it, so that it will take this need into account.

The problem is to do with the economic resources, but nevertheless we as Wangki Twi Tasba Raya Territory with the laws that have been granted to us, with Law 28 and Law 445, currently we have imprisoned twelve outsiders and we also see that in some places the advance, the advance of the invasions has been stopped.

But however with this community specifically, we have not yet taken that step. But we do see that we have applied those laws and we have incarcerated people and that means that the government has made laws, regulations in our favor.

But we see here that there are several aspects that are involved. For example, in some cases, some Miskito leaders also sold land. So it is like there is a socio-political problem. Seeing that, others did so as well.

And at the same time, there is also another aspect, when they saw the mestizos occupying land, when they saw that there was land, then some outsiders came illegally as well. So here this problem has been created by several aspects, not just by one aspect only. There are others who are here illegally as well. This is due to the lack of ... that is, due to cultural differences.

For the mestizos, the forests are a... for them they use them for agricultural activities, they use them as economic resources. For us it is only for daily subsistence and we respect the forests. That's why we have forests and we use them properly. We do not do very much logging.

So, as I mentioned before, this problem up to now is a social problem that is influenced by several factors, but in synthesis it is necessary to get going, to start with the issue of inter-territorial boundary clearance.



TcS: Comrade, could you explain your name?

Ignacio: Ignacio Tez Williams, the oversight officer for Wisconsin. Compañero Emsly is Secretary of the Wangki Twi Tasba Raya Territorial Government... All the demands that we have made, they are our senior leaders and they handle all our requests, so many things that we have requested, countless things and still up to this moment we are not seeing any result...

The result is, in brief, that we don't want outsiders on the communal lands because we in our culture since naturally we have watched people coming from Cruz de Rio Grande, from Matagalpa from other places, coming to take the land here from the children of the community of Wisconsin.

So, that's why... if we act alone these people shoot at us, we cannot dialogue, "the land is ours" they say, "we bought it, from here we cannot leave... from here you'll have to carry us out dead"... so, poor us, what can we do?

That is why we always expect the State to act, only the State has that power. We can mention many things, for example, the resources that the State can use.... So, there it's all there is to it. We, our clamor is, is that they give us freedom, yes, to work well, to harvest well, to live well without any fear.

But now for that same reason, since many people have died, many people, now we are holding back because if we all die like that who is the land going to be left to? And this whole thing is up to our top leaders and the State.

There is no other instance, even if we ask for more things our territorial leaders are always the instance concerned and the final one is the State. So we are waiting for the remediation, the boundary clearance to begin.

Silvio Ángel Álvarez: Well, first of all I am going to introduce myself, because one has to know who is speaking. I am the former head of the community forest wardens and I was in charge at the time of the problem....

TcS: In 2015?

Silvio: Right. And I had to assume the responsibilities of chief forest warden and organize and direct the community members to defend themselves because of the land problem, plots of land that were in danger of being lost.

It turned out that there were certain leaders who were involved in the land sales, regional and national leaders.



They facilitated the entry of outsiders, settlers to occupy Miskito land. They facilitated and guaranteed the pieces of land to outsiders, who came with every intention of taking over Miskito land and among them came groups of violent delinquents, armed groups that were dedicated to land deals, selling Miskito land .

TcS: So you're explaining that leaders of the indigenous peoples in the region sold land...?

Silvio: Correct

TcS: To mestizos and those mestizos then invited others? ?

Silvio: Other mestizos...

TcS: Excuse me... thank you...

Silvio: Yes, for a while the Miskito people lived together with the mestizos in harmony, for a short period of time. But suddenly the attitudes of the outsiders, the settlers, changed and they began to buy more land and others came in with much worse intentions.

Many of them were violent delinquent groups that organized to steal cattle, steal property, take over farms by killing the farmers, take over the land and put it up for resale.

And that happened from 2013 to 2015 for two or three years they dedicated themselves to harassing the communities.

First, they took fifteen head of cattle from the community of La Esperanza, whose owner is a policeman, Lieutenant Dixon, they took fifteen head of cattle.

So, the community members were a little angry and then they stole 35 head of cattle from the community of Wisconsin and after that they came in, shot and wounded some community members here in the community of Santa Clara, and stole solar panels....

TcS: In 2015?

Silvio: In 2015, that's right. And then the community members, with the intention of defending themselves, suggested undertaking self-defense, which means to defend oneself.

Because we have authorities to defend us. But we were kind of abandoned, so the communities as a whole got together.

They armed themselves with what they could and dedicated themselves to defending their land, to patrol the mountains that belonged to the communities. And so a mini-war arose in which there were deaths....

TcS: How many dead on the side of...?

Silvio: In the community there were two dead in the community of La Esperanza. There were five dead, six dead...

TcS: And how many mestizos died?

Silvio: We don't have the count because during the confrontations we didn't have time to count bodies.

TcS: But on their side there were dead?

Silvio: There were also, because they came to attack us here and we, since there is a God who protects us, we were informed of the enemy's movements, so we prepared ourselves, we made trenches.

We set up a circular defense in the community with what we had and when they came in to attack us, we defended ourselves with what little we had. A judge from the community and a young community member died.

TcS: In 2015?

Silvio: Then that continued until 2019. The problem continued, because the outsider settlers were much better organized, with much more armed force.

They continue to harass us, taking our land piece by piece, and so far, just ten, fifteen minutes from here they have everything that is our land, everything that we have worked for, they have it.

TcS: And what do you expect from our authorities, from the government?

Silvio: We ask them, we beg them to pay heed us, to look at our problem. There are children suffering from hunger because their parents cannot go to bring food from the forest. They have to go looking for food near the community.

TcS: What is your name?

José Kevin: José Kevin

TcS: Yes, José, what do you want to say?

José: I want to explain about this situation that is going on with the settlers...

TcS: Yes...

José: Right now they are always present. So, I'm going to tell you about how I work on the Wawa but they always come. They grabbed me and captured me, well, there were eleven of them and they all had weapons.

So when... they told me that they were looking for land to sell or rent here. So, at about this time of day they captured me, at about five o'clock, over there. So I told them, when they had already captured me, I couldn't say anything.

So I told them, I just told them I was going to sell and I was going to give them. Instead of running, I ran. So that's how it happened in my case. That is what I have to explain.

TcS: When was that José?

José: It was this... about two years ago, one year passed... it was a year ago...

TcS: And from then it has been...

José: From there, that's on the other side, but they're always there on the river banks, yes... that's my word...

TcS: May I have your name, sir?



Camilo Arauz: Camilo Arauz. I am the pastor of the church here. We used to work very calmly on another side of the Wawa River. We had a plantation there, we planted plantain, banana, guineo, quequisque, square plantain... we abandoned everything there on the other side of the Wawa River.

There we had coconut, cocoa, coffee, avocado, pijibaya, we abandoned everything. The settlers collected it for themselves. That is the problem we have in the community. Also, the settlers cleared boundaries very close, just over there.

TcS: What do you mean by boundaries?



Camilo: Cleared boundary limits... they cleared their limits, right close by the community. Nearby, no more than fifteen minutes away we could get there to the settlers' boundary clearances.

So, the settlers have their objective, they seek to get all this community within their power. They want to remove us. And now for the people who are wise, that thinking they realize is big problem.

TcS: And before you got along well with the mestizos?

Camilo: Before, before we used to cross to the other side of the river, we are like... I am a hunter, we would go to hunt animals, from there we bring back wild boar meat, monkey, fish, guinea fowl, turkeys... now there are no more because they cleared everything, the forest clearance, by the settlers, some settlers have about sixteen hundred head of cattle. ... each hectare, one head of cattle eats one hectare.

How many hectares are they clearing to sow pasture and now they want to take away all we have, they think, with their power, but we aren't letting them do it. And now, what ways have we explored? My own opinion, my objective is not to move so as to take human life. Better that one sets about looking for how we solve this problem...

Lenston Espinoza: Well, my name is Lenston Espinoza. I am the teacher here in Santa Clara. I teach high school classes. Yes, we have lived here for many years, haven't we, and we have come to be familiar with some problematic issues that appear here on the Atlantic Coast and also in the community of Santa Clara, it's on the other side of the river, that there is a problem, right? There are times when we, the people of the community wanted to go there to do things... to look after their plantations, but with these problems we cannot tend to them.



We cannot go there peacefully, walk along the river and we cannot go peacefully because there are problems because the mestizos, they... they are there and all the land or all along the river banks they totally control there, they have their homes there and they have their houses et cetera. But we are looking for a way, but we are looking for a way, right, of how we might solve this problem.

TcS: What has been the response of the authorities, of your territorial authorities and of the State?

Lenston: The State authorities, right? That they become conscious that these people, are forcing people out.... But also that there's an awareness that they have the facility to reach an understanding between the State and the people as well.

TcS: With the community?

Lenston: With the community... But also that we think... or we sometimes feel, don't we? that these people, they don't want to have solutions with us...

TcS: The mestizos?

Lenston: The mestizos... But it's just that they are there. So, every time when people from the village go to the other side, for example to fish, to hunt for some small animals... that is to say, some game or other animals to eat... then they don't give them permission. And we are telling the president of the territory to support us. And we asked him to reach an agreement between the mestizos and ourselves, because we have community leaders here too, right? So we want the territorial, state and community leaders to work together.

TcS: And what do you think about the development of the remediation process?

Lenston: For my part, we have already heard that word many times... of course, with the process that has been going on, right, which are the five stages, I think all the stages have already taken place and have finished, right? But the last stage of remediation remains there. But I believe that all the people of the community want... all the people here want the remediation stage to be done and if the government does that remediation stage, I believe that the people will be satisfied and they will feel happy and the people will feel very satisfied with all the works that the government wants to do for them.

Yes, and the people are asking for help more than anything else, right, to carry out the last stage of remediation. It is important to clear the boundaries because I say that as soon as we clear the boundaries, we know or we are going to know, right? who the people are on our lands, and who are the people who are involved in those lands. The important thing is to know what territory belongs to this community of Santa Clara.

TcS: And compañero, when was the last incident of violence that affected you in this community?

Lenston: The last violence that took place? The most intense that I saw that was....

Other compañero: In 2013

Lenston: Yes, yes, yes, ...in the year....

Other: 2013

Lenston: 2013, the third of September when we saw that, right? That there was fighting, shootings, bullets flying here in this community of Santa Clara...

TcS: I'm a little confused because someone wrote a report recently that came out overseas stating that here this year or last year you were attacked by 200 armed settlers and many people were killed. That's what I read...

Lenston: No, no, no...that's not the case, but what I explained was that there were two dead here and that is why we buried them inside the village, only them but no more dead.

TcS: But that was in two thousand and.... in what year...?

Lenston: In 2015

Other: 2015

(several speak in Miskito)

TcS: But since then 2015 you haven't had violence? Or have you?

Lenston: From 2015 onward they also had problems...right? Not only that from 2015. But from 2015 when it happened the settlers also came to fight with the young people and sometimes they even carried off the children or the young people, right? They took them across to the other side and kidnapped more than anything else and they were prosecuted. But I think they are also afraid because one day they had to let the children return, yes....

Interview with Deputy Commissioner Ramon Zavala Olivas, in Alamikamba, Prinzapolka municipality

November 16th 2020

TcS: This interview we recorded in Alamikamba on the morning of the day Hurricane Iota struck Nicaragua's Northern Caribbean Coast. That day, Deputy Commissioner Zavala Olivas was in charge of the organization of his officers in support of the Municipal Commission for Disaster Prevention and Mitigation in the municipality of Prinzapolka. Nonetheless he made time to offer us this interview.

Deputy Commissioner Zavala Olivas is one of two officers who survived an attack by a heavily armed gang on June 11th 2018 on their police station in the community of Sislao Paraska, near the village of Pueblo Nuevo in the municipality of Mulukuku. Officers Carlos José Zamora Martínez and Dixon Bismarck Soza Enríquez were murdered during the attack. Sub officer Martín Sánchez Gutiérrez was abducted, tortured and murdered some time later. The attack was organized by a local opposition politician with the help of local criminals.

Although the attack occurred during the failed coup attempt of 2018, in effect the incident was a continuation of a violent campaign by organized crime groups that have been active in the Mining Triangle for more than 20 years. Since 2007 their crimes against the local population have had an explicitly political character with a persistent pattern of attacks and murders targeting supporters of the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

The Resources section of this document contains the testimonies of [Carmen Hernández Jarquín](#) and [Alejandra Sánchez Zeledón](#). Both are the widows of sandinista supporters murdered by the self-styled Armed Group in Opposition to the Government which is the most recent manifestation of organized crime in the Mining Triangle. As Deputy Commissioner Zavala Olivas explains, this criminal activity has been supported and encouraged by activists of the local Liberal parties.

Tortilla con Sal: We're here in the town of Alamikamba, in the municipality of Prinzapolka. We're interviewing Deputy Commissioner Ramón Saturnino Zavala Olivas.

Could you tell us a little bit about what happened in the attack in 2018, against the police station in the community of Pueblo Nuevo in the municipality of Mulukukú?

Deputy Commissioner Ramón Zavala Olivas: Yes, that's correct. Actually we were fulfilling an objective there precisely on the orders of the departmental police command to safeguard order and the tranquility of citizens in those communities.



It turned out that on June 11th 2018, at about five in the morning, a criminal group, organized by Apollonio Vargas the mayor of Mulukukú, which had blockaded the road where they were not allowing producers through to sell their produce. So most of the producers lost their produce there because the roadblock would not let them pass and those who passed were charged a large amount of money.

Well, it turns out that we were in the village maintaining order and public safety for the producers, and people were grateful. They felt confident having the police station in that area. We were not harming the population in any way, rather we were guaranteeing public safety. The producers felt very safe with the police there. They were satisfied with the police presence at that station there.

On June 11, 2018, at about 5 in the morning, a criminal group of approximately 18, 19 armed elements arrived, with weapons of war and hunting weapons. And we were attacked. We were attacked in our police station where Lieutenant Ezequiel Sanchez Enrique, Lieutenant Dixo Enrique Sosa and Lieutenant Carlos José Zamora Rodríguez were killed. We were responsible for security at that station.

There were a total of five comrades, of those the ones who survived the attack, the attack imposed by those terrorist coup criminals, I myself survived.... I was the head of the post and Sub Inspector Leonardo Castillo, who also survived the attack.

I can tell you that in fact these individuals claimed to operate a peaceful roadblock, so we never expected that these individuals were going to organize an attack. They got together all the anti-social delinquents to go and attack the police post.

At no time did we imagine that these people, since they were really supposed to have a peaceful road block, were going to carry out this type of action against security, against the national police, above all the station located there.

The majority of the population of that sector is very clear about the situation and more than anyone else they are witnesses that we did no harm to the population there. We protected them and acted in accordance with the law, capturing some criminals who were harming some producers there.

But nevertheless they were against the security that we were providing to the population. And that is what happened that day, on June 11, 2018.

TcS: And did that Sub Commissioner take you and your colleagues by surprise or did you already know something... that something was going to happen?

Ramón: We even maintained coordination with the communities nearby from which we were informed that there was nothing going on there. The situation there was peaceful because the population and the communities did not really want to be involved in this type of activity that they were carrying out. And therefore the people nearby were calm.

We did not have any information. We were caught by surprise. Because this was organized from the urban center of Mulukukú. They organized it just to go and attack the comrades who were located in our police station.

TcS: So the attackers didn't come from the communities there, they came from further away, from other areas?

Ramón: They were not organized from the community. They were organized from the wider area, not from there near the police station. Of course they were clearly linked to the group of Rigoberto, some members of Rigoberto's group, Rigoberto... I don't know the last name, only Rigoberto. So part of that gang also participated in the aggression because they are a nexus of the criminal gang, plus the gang organized by Apollonio Vargas who at that time was the mayor of Mulukukú.

TcS: Can you explain to people that... because many people don't understand why they attacked you, why did they...? ?

Ramón: Well actually that criminal group is always against the good work that the government does. They don't agree with the Sandinista Front. The Sandinista Front is a government with many projects to support rural families, to support the people who are most impoverished. It helps those sectors. So, these groups do not agree with the help the government gives to various people of scarce resources.

So they want to create pressures so as to reach power through pressure, through a coup. But really the people are clear about the situation. Especially the people in those communities where we were attacked, the people are very clear and even more, they clearly know who were the ones that came to do us harm where we were.

TcS: Yes, and Deputy Commissioner, can you tell me a little bit about... because... about the context of this situation because there in Siuna they explained to me a little bit about the history of this so-called Armed Group Opposing the Government which is led by this guy Rigoberto and he was explaining to me that it has a criminal dimension, clearly criminal, but it also has a political aspect. Could you explain a little bit to us about that?

Ramón: Well, it's a group that moves around really in what is practically also a zone of.... part of the area of Jinotega and part of the area of the municipality of Siuna, Mulukukú and another municipality.

TcS: Here?

Ramón: Here very little, very little, but yes, it did have influence for a while, in the southern part of the municipality. Actually these people are guided by some leaders against the government.

TcS: Political leaders?

Ramón: Political leaders. Because these people in practice are really harming rural families . Those comrades who work with the Sandinista Front and are in the communities out there, they are in effect setting out to harm them, to hurt them.

TcS: Sandinista comrades?

Ramón: Sandinista comrades, comrade in the CLS*, in different communities. And in effect, according to them, they were putting pressure on the government by making their actions known to the population, their crimes, and much the same with those people who support the Sandinista Front, creating fear in the communities.

But these are really criminal actions that they are engaged in. With this they are not going to win people over, rather what they are doing is turning the peasant population against them. Because no one is not going to be against the criminal actions that these individuals are carrying out.

TcS: I've been working trying to learn more about the issue of invasions of indigenous territories by people from outside, people who come from people call them colonists. Do you think there is any relation between these armed criminal gangs and the invasions of indigenous lands?

Ramón: Well, I think maybe the invasion of indigenous lands is by people who come from another area, from the Pacific, who sell their properties there and then, in order to buy land more favorably, they enter the indigenous territories.

And since there are people who engage in doing underhand deals in the case of indigenous lands, then they buy up land, even more so knowing they are evading Law 445, right? And for that reason, I don't consider they have much influence with those groups.

TcS: With the criminal groups?

Ramón: Yes, they don't have much influence. These are in fact more personal matters. As soon as the opportunity arises they buy and.... Some indigenous leaders, there are some indigenous leaders who have taken it upon themselves to make underhand, illegal land sales.

TcS: Maybe you have something to add?

Ramón: Thank you for the interview People are clear now about our project, about our government and I don't think that people are going to get things wrong. Everyone is clear that the project of the Sandinista Front is to support the most unprotected in the communities. In this specific case, what we are seeing right now in the situation since the hurricane, we have been working together with the civil authorities, so we are trying to avoid any victims, as far as flooding is concerned.

TcS: And what support have you made available for the communities after Eta and now with this other hurricane? What measures have been taken?

Ramón: We took measures together with the community, that is to say with the municipal authorities, to evacuate. To evacuate the entire population along the banks of the Prinzapolka River, both downstream and upstream. We are bringing them to shelter here in the urban center for the communities that are closer. And the communities that are further away from here, we are re-grouping them in safe places, in safe shelters, in higher areas of the communities.

So that way we do not allow, that is our objective, we do not permit having victims to lament. And thank God that we have come out of the hurricane that just passed. We hope that this one that is entering now, that we will get through it well too. That is our great struggle and we hope that God allows us to come out of it safely.