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## INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE IN GUATEMALA

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“The concept of governance goes beyond institutional relations to encompass the integration and cohesion capacity of a particular political system. Hence, the effective functioning of the institutions of representative democracy is an important condition of governance, but it does not satisfy its broader implications”<sup>1</sup>. Governance entails a certain degree of citizen participation in the political processes not only as an element of legitimacy but of political viability as well.

This paper deals with the historical context and the systematic obstacles that hinder indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women, to participate at the different levels of the society, especially the political processes.

### The Guatemalan Historical Context

#### *The formation of a society-state*

For the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, particularly the Mayan people, the conquest and colonization were violent events, characterized by the unremitting resistance of a people to preserve and keep their millennial culture alive. Since colonial times until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions on the status of indigenous peoples was commonly known as “the Indian problem”. To date this question remains unresolved under the modern label of “the Indigenous issue”, which for the elites, then and now, implies that the indigenous peoples are the culprits of Guatemala’s underdevelopment. This vision has and still does justify racist practices against indigenous peoples, exploitation and denial of their human, social, political, economic and cultural rights.

#### *Democratic transition*

The democratic transition initiated in 1985 focused mainly on legal, formal and institutional aspects. It is then that Guatemala begins “constructing its own version of democracy”<sup>2</sup>, moving from military governments to civil, democratically elected governments and the creation of new

institutions<sup>3</sup> for the institutionalization of democracy in Guatemala. The new Political Constitution of the Republic formally grants indigenous peoples the status of citizens, both men and women, regardless of their level of instruction.

However, the expectations created by the democratic transition in the Guatemalan society were but an ideal, especially with regards to indigenous peoples. This can be explained by the organization of government institutions according to the *Montesquieu* principle of the separation of powers in three branches, legislative, judicial and executive, and their respective functions of setting up rules, interpretation and enforcement. The entire system is ruled by these principles totally divorced from the ethnic character of the country”<sup>4</sup>.

With the democratic transition, indigenous peoples begin to take part in electoral processes and engage in political parties activities. But political parties never saw indigenous peoples’ participation with a conviction that they are “subjects of political rights”. Rather, the nomination of indigenous candidates was seen as a way of gaining the support of indigenous peoples, hence the indigenous vote.

Discriminatory practices by political parties towards indigenous peoples are the premise on which Guatemala starts building its own version of democracy. Particularly Indigenous women were completely ignored during the first ten years (1985-1995) of democratic transition, though they are needed as voters.

*Social and political reconstruction since the Peace Accords*

The signing of the Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace opens a new chapter in the history of the country. The occasion was seized to turn the peace process and agreements into a national project aimed at rethinking the foundations of a new Nation-State.

This is a favourable environment for Indigenous peoples to engage in organizational strengthening and to institutionalize their participation at the local, regional and national levels as well as to participate freely in the decision-making processes at different levels.

The celebration of 500 years of “Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance” gave indigenous peoples a significant organizational boost. Indigenous women organizations begin to emerge more visibly, breaking thus the ideological, political and social isolation imposed by the system.

This visibilization, a product of the resolve, effort and determination of indigenous women openly challenging the political system and the male chauvinistic views and reality of Guatemalan society, is inspired and supported by the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (*Acuerdo de Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas*).

In the context of that agreement, indigenous women leaders from different communities pressed the government, after the signing of the Peace Accords, for the creation of an Indigenous Women Ombudsman funded by the government, which eventually was created in 1999 by Governmental Agreement 555 - 99.

During the peace negotiation process in 1995, indigenous women for the first time run for Congress, topping the names on the electoral

lists. Their election was recognition of their experience and leadership from within their communities.

Nowadays, there is recognition of indigenous women’s leadership at the professional level (just a few) as leaders of community organizations, particularly women organizations, in the rural sector. For example, the Political Movement of Mayan Women (*Movimiento Político de Mujeres Mayas – Moloj*) is an organization of indigenous women that brings together indigenous women leaders and members of political parties to promote and support young women’s participation and leadership.

**Complementarity in decision-making inside and outside the community**

*Complementarity and duality from the Mayan worldview*

In the Mayan philosophical conception, the “man-woman” relationship is based on the principles of duality and complementarity. This means that millennial history has been a process of construction by men and women, that is to say; the complementarity between men and women is the pillar that supports mutual help and the development of a life and history together. The *Popol Wuj*<sup>5</sup>, illustrates the role man and woman played in the creation of the world, “they consulted each other and pondered; came to an agreement, and joined their words and their thought together”. Duality and complementarity rest on equality and respect between men and women, not as simple rhetoric but the ideal to be pursued in the development of society, “may all arise and may no one stay behind”.

This philosophical conception of “being and doing” still persists as a way of life in many Mayan communities. For example, as part of the Mayan weddings rites, the council and the power of authority are vested in the elder couple. Similarly, the *mayordomía*<sup>6</sup> is an organizational structure for leadership instruction in which the position is granted to the couple.

Yet, the destruction of the social fabric of indigenous communities during colonization and the armed conflict, place these and other

practices at risk of disappearing. One of the main dangers is posed by the integration and assimilation policies that have pervaded the thinking of the newer generations; especially the efforts to fit in the mainstream *ladino* society has brought about the denial of cultural identity for a long time. However, the whole process of asserting cultural identity particularly strong in the 1990s, is a slow conscious recovery of many cultural traditions which could provide a sense and meaning to the social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual development of indigenous peoples.

#### *Putting it into practice in decision-making*

In the Mayan tradition both male and female deities took part in the creation of the universe, according to the Popol Wuj. Similarly, ancient art representations on wood carvings, stone, stelae, ceramic figurines and paintings found in different Mayan cities of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras depicted both men and women, meaning not only men governed, but there were also women rulers. Examples of this are “the Great Dame Ah-Po-Katun, sovereign of the City of Piedras Negras; Lady Ah-Po – Hel, sovereign of the City of Palenque and; the Sovereign Lady of the cities of Dos Pilas and Naranjo”<sup>7</sup>.

During colonial times many indigenous uprisings were organized and led by women, in some cases against actions that affected women exclusively, like the 1755 rebellion against the Mayor Governor of Comalapa<sup>8</sup> who demanded indigenous women to supply the Colonial Government increasingly larger quantities of blankets and fabrics as tax.

History also shows that indigenous peoples have not escaped the male chauvinist vision at the root of colonial and modern societies. This means that the principles of duality and complementarity in its strict sense no longer guide the relationships and behaviour between men and women in indigenous communities, albeit some exceptions.

Just like in mainstream society, within indigenous communities there is a belief that the man is the “boss, the head of the family”, hence the one who makes decisions whether at the family level or at the community level. This is the reason why often community

women leaders are seen advocating for “a change of this state of affairs for the sake of genuine complementarity; it is time to share our responsibilities and our work. Traditional hierarchies of power must be transformed into inclusive, representative and participatory structures for both men and women based on the cultural and philosophical principles of the Mayan worldview”.

#### *Tensions between the family life and the collective life*

Few women in indigenous communities have been able to reconcile their role in the family with the vision and practice of complementarity at the community level. This owes to the limited role assigned to women to family-specific responsibilities, like looking after the home, educating the children and taking care of domestic animals.

A woman involved in community activities is frowned upon not only by men but by other women as well, and the husband is thought of as lacking authority. When a woman takes on a leadership role and devotes herself to the organization of other women, it is seen by men in many communities like “she has nothing to do”. However, it must be noted that women’s determination and permanent struggle are helping to change attitudes and behaviour both of men and women.

Admittedly, the (elderly) grandmothers and midwives do have the support and respect of the communities, both of men and women, primarily for their strategic role in the life of the community with regard to the transmission of experiences and ancestral knowledge and in the care and health of women and children.

#### **Women’s participation in the management and control of the territory**

*“ To take the land away from me, they’ll first have to take my life, for the land is my life ” - Florinda Soriano<sup>9</sup>*

We know from history that “indigenous women played an active role in the war against the conquest”<sup>10</sup> and in the course of more than 500 years they have become true heroines and pillars of cultural and political resistance.

During colonial times, of the republic, and of 36 years of armed conflict in the country, women did not stop defending their rights, their life and land along with men. Contrary to western style, indigenous leadership “traditionally lie within the couple; it was the western vision that recognized only the males in positions of authority”<sup>11</sup>. After independence, one of the first measures taken by the new administration was the abolition of ethnic authorities, breaking up the joint leadership role played by men and women.

*Use and administration of the land - territories historically*

From the political theory standpoint, the territory is a key element underpinning the identity and the formation of a people; hence its political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual development. It is impossible to conceive the development of a People, of a Nation or of a State without territory. However, control over the territory has always been the means used to destroy, enslave and exploit peoples all over the world.

In the case of Guatemala, as a result of the colonization process until the late 1980s, the indigenous Mayan and Xincas peoples lost their community and historical property rights over their land and territories.

Until 1998, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INTA) was the instrument used by different governments to destroy the whole system of relation, vision, use and community administration of the land in the country's indigenous communities. The INTA may have legally recognized community lands; but it also broke them up into small plots and private units. Even worse, widows would lose the right over the land unless they had a son who could take over as head of the family.

According to the Human Development Report, Guatemala: Human Development, Women and Health, of the United Nations Development Program, “land concentration in Guatemala remains very high”, and its distribution according to ethnic groups and gender has intensified the socio-economic polarization of the Guatemalan society. The report also points out that only 23.6 % of farming lands is in indigenous hands, and women administer

about 6.5 %. “The percentage of land in indigenous hands is less than half in terms of its population, due to the history of expropriation to which these groups have been subjected”, adds the report. Moreover, it highlights that “the number of women, with less than 7% of the land, can be attributed to cultural patterns typical of patriarchal domination in the Guatemalan society”.

*Peace Accords, land, territories and indigenous women*

The signing of the Peace Accords created new opportunities for a solution to indigenous peoples' land rights issues.

The Agreement of Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognized that “the rights of indigenous peoples over the land include both communal or collective possession, as well as personal, property rights and other legal rights, as well as the use of the natural resources in them for the good of the communities, without detriment to their habitat”. Similarly, recognizing the particular vulnerability of indigenous communities, which have historically been the victims of dispossession, the government commits to putting instruments in place to respond to communal land claims by indigenous communities, and either return them or offer fair compensation.

Particularly in the case of women's right to land, it was established the elimination of any form of legal or de facto discrimination against woman in regards to access to land, housing, loans and participation in development projects.

In spite of some government efforts to fulfil indigenous peoples' rights to the land, ten years later there are no clear actions to solve the agrarian problem in Guatemala. On the other hand, with the creation of the National Land Fund (FONTIERRA) and the National Land Commission (CONTIERRA) the practices of colonization, dispossession, deceit and dismantling of the community social fabric carried out by the National Institute of Agrarian Reform have diminished. Nevertheless, eight years after the creation of these two institutions, they have similarly not demonstrated interest in ensuring that

indigenous peoples can actually enjoy their rights to the land. These institutions, like others, have been affected by the corruption of the political parties, rendering them inoperative; but especially, this prevents finding a solution to agrarian problems at the structural level in Guatemala.

### **Women and Indigenous Rights**

The advancement of indigenous peoples' rights at the international level has paved the way for actions at the national level. Indigenous peoples' rights include universally recognized human, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This progress is the result of a peoples' struggle—of men and women—since the times of the conquest and colonization to the present.

Even though the principle of complementarity between men and women is an integral part of the Mayan worldview, it has not been a cosmogonic element strong enough to articulate respectful and balanced relations between them.

The development of a male chauvinist society not only has invisibilized women, especially indigenous women, but it has fundamentally denied them the enjoyment of their human rights. Thus, it has created the notion of women as "objects instead of subjects", of "value as property" instead of as "human beings" deserving of dignity and rights.

#### *Identity and rights*

The issue of identity and indigenous peoples' rights, raised from within the structures of the States, has become an outcry that challenges the very social, economic and political structures of the States. And Guatemala is not the exception.

The demand of Indigenous Peoples' rights tends to question the very foundations on which human rights and their exercise have been laid. Hence, the rights of the indigenous peoples entail first of all the respect and recognition of identity, since the denial of that recognition has been the root of persistent negation of the full exercise of their political, economic and social rights as equals.

The issue of identity has become a juridical and political struggle of historical significance for the indigenous peoples in many countries where the States not only refuse to recognize it internally, but also at the international (United Nations) and regional level (Organization of American States).

In this struggle for the recognition of identity as a human right, indigenous women play a key role passing down customs and knowledge from generation to generation—a fundamental contribution for the preservation of indigenous peoples' social, cultural, economic and political traditions. This juridical and political demand was recognized in the Agreement on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, signed by the Government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) on March 31, 1995. The Agreement states: "this agreement seeks to create, expand and strengthen the structures, conditions, opportunities and guarantees of participation of the indigenous peoples, in full respect of their identity and the exercise of their rights" and as long as this problem remains unresolved in Guatemalan society, "their economic, political, social and cultural potential will never be fully realized, and take the place they deserve in the world for their millennial history and the spiritual nobility of their peoples". Yet, ten years after the signing of the Agreement, it remains an unfulfilled obligation of the State towards the indigenous peoples. Consequently, indigenous women are increasingly vulnerable as they are the victims of a double discrimination both as women and as indigenous people which add to a particularly difficult social situation of poverty and exploitation.

#### *Mobilizing pro rights*

After the 1986 democratic transition, indigenous peoples resumed the role of political actors, by creating and strengthening their own organizations within the limited scope of legality. This re-organizing process, known as "the Mayan movement"—aimed at reinforcing ethnic values—has little by little shaped a different perception of indigenous people and their role in Guatemala.

In the 1990s, indigenous organizations promoted a "new appreciation of *the Mayan*

virtues, which stirs pride, and stimulates a reconnect with the roots, mobilization, and the defence of their interests”<sup>12</sup>. Particularly, there is a strategic switch from cultural to political demands, aimed at a redefinition of the political and administrative workings of the State.

Since the Signing of the Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace in 1996 through this day, indigenous organizations have regrouped and given a new thrust to the political struggle to fulfil their rights as a people, especially as a Mayan people. At the same time, Mayan women groups also begin to play a more active role on behalf of indigenous women as they are the victims of a double discrimination both as women and indigenous. In addition to their specific struggle for the right to dignity and the creation of new spaces for them in the Guatemalan society as well as within indigenous communities, Mayan women also point to the need of eliminating the oppression, racism and discrimination of indigenous peoples and the widespread segregation that prevails in the Guatemalan society against women.

In the last few years, a number of Mayan women organizations have emerged which promote concrete actions, some more publicized than others, and whose mission can be defined in three general categories, a) the defence of indigenous peoples’ rights at the national and international levels, b) the attainment of social, economic and political spaces for women and, c) actions aimed at transforming harmful family and community practices to the dignity and rights of indigenous women in general.

### **Representation in Democratic Processes**

Historically, Guatemalan women, particularly Mayan, Garífuna and Xinca women, have been the most discriminated against, marginalized and excluded sector of society denied of the most basic human rights.

In Guatemala “literate women obtained the right to vote with the Political Constitution of 1945 and the Electoral Law of 1946, and illiterate women after the Political Constitution of the Republic of 1965”<sup>13</sup>. However, this right

was repealed in a new Constitution drafted by the subsequent military government.

It is not until the Constitution of 1985 that illiterate women regain their right to the vote. However, the knowledge and exercise of the civil and political rights of electing and being elected does not begin until the 1990s.

### *Community level*

At the community level there have always been indigenous women leaders who have contributed to the development of the communities, though this contribution always remained in obscurity. Fortunately, there have been gradual and significant changes with regard to indigenous women’s participation in the life of the community, especially in positions of authority and engaging in relations and dialogue with local, regional and national organizations, institutions and authorities.

#### a) Community Mayors

Created during colonial times, these positions were tasked with exercising control over the indigenous communities. However, after 1985 this institution undergoes some positive transformation.

Since then, the communities started choosing their mayor through a community assembly, thus eliminating external appointments that only responded to the interests of municipal authorities.

The year 2000 marks a historical milestone since for the first time a community woman leader in the municipality of San Juan Chamelco (department of Alta Verapaz) is elected mayor. Also, it is this municipality where for the first time an Office of the Women’s Advocate is created. These two events represent significant advances for indigenous women, considering that about 98 % of the population in that municipality are indigenous peoples (Mayan Q’eqchi’).

These historic events of community representation set a precedent for other municipalities and indigenous communities to do the same by electing women mayors—for centuries a privilege reserved for men.

b) Community Development Councils

The Community Development Councils were created by way of Decree 11-2002 of the reform of the Law on Urban and Rural Development Councils, as a permanent instrument for citizen participation and representation, including the indigenous and non-indigenous population.

In one of its provisions, the law established “gender equality, understood as the non discrimination against women and effective participation of both men and women”<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to that provision, many Mayan women leaders preside at the Community Councils. Having gained access to these positions has posed a challenge for women to prove both their capacities and commitment to community interests. Through hard work and dedication, indigenous women have been able to accede to these key representational institutions in order to promote community development (as presidents of Community Councils, and Mayors).

Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of indigenous women acting in those capacities, it can be said without a doubt that those institutions have served an enhanced role of women at community level and as instruments to show the many contributions they can make to the social, political and economic development of the communities. In the words of one Q'eqchi' indigenous leader, “the collective and/or community decisions have to come from the ideas and spirit of men and women”.

*Municipal level*

At the municipal level, there are both organizations and institutions legally sanctioned by the law as well as traditional indigenous peoples' institutions.

a) Indigenous Mayoralties

The Indigenous Mayoralties are a traditional political organizational system of the Mayan People that has managed to survive in only a few municipalities of the country. And only a few of those are recognized by indigenous communities; for example, in Chichicastenango, Sololá, Santiago Atitlán, and Totonicapán among others.

Representation and power functions are often exercised by men in the form of *Autoridad de Principales*, who only in exceptional circumstances are accompanied by their wives. The head of the *Consejo de los Principales* is the Indigenous Mayor.

In 2004 in Sololá, discrimination against women suffers a major blow when indigenous communities for the first time chose a woman leader for the position ***Indigenous Mayor***, based on her leadership skills and commitment. Indigenous mayors have always been ad honorem positions that demand accountability and integrity. This represents a turning point in the mindset and attitude in the communities with regards to the participation of women. It is a step forward against the discrimination towards women leaders in indigenous communities. It is also an encouraging example of how Mayan women's determination and capacity can break new grounds in the face of adversity.

b) Municipal Development Councils

According to the new Law on the Councils of Urban and Rural Development, the Municipal Development Councils are a mechanism for democratic participation where men and women plan and decide how to conduct development activities at the municipal level.

Although these Councils exist in most of the municipalities of the country, the law is not fully observed and enforced due to a lack of vision and organizational weaknesses of the population as well the absence of political will from municipal authorities.

Except for a few exceptions, most of these Councils are rather formal than functional mechanisms. Women in particular start facing not only increasing difficulties to participate but also their participation is reduced considerably.

c) Municipal Government (Municipal Council)

Indigenous peoples' participation in the political life of the country is really scarce, both at the local and the national level. The expression that “the municipality is the closest level of government to the citizens to exercise power”, is contingent on the opportunities and possibilities of the population to exercise their political rights.

In the case of Indigenous Peoples, the conditions for a meaningful participation in the political life of the country do not exist yet, especially in the electoral processes. The few Indigenous candidates that are allowed to run for mayors are an attempt to secure the indigenous vote in other elected positions. Also “the indigenous persons who run as candidates in the electoral processes, are not the most suitable either”<sup>15</sup> since they are handpicked by the political parties in an authoritarian way.

The political parties and the traditional sectors of power still consider indigenous peoples second-class citizens who are only good as voters. Particularly Indigenous women are the most systematically excluded and discriminated against sector of the Mayan people and of society in general. Since the democratic transition up to the last electoral process (2003), the figures show that political participation of women *to elect and be elected* is simply non-existent at the municipal level. This situation is not a result of women’s lack of interest or capacity, but of the attitude and practice of the political parties of refusing to allow women’s participation on equal terms and opportunities with men.

**Summary: Results of the last five municipal elections**

Year	No. of Municipalities	Indigenous Majors (men)	Indigenous Majors (women)
1985	325	59	0
1990	300	80	0
1995	300	62	0
1999	330	93	0
2003	331	111	1

Source: Reports by the Electoral Supreme Court and the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation’s monitoring of the 1999 and 2003 electoral processes.

Territorially and administratively, Guatemala is divided in 22 departments, “11 of which are mainly inhabited by indigenous peoples of Mayan descent for a total of 197 municipalities”<sup>16</sup>.

The above table shows that the political parties are not willing yet to allow indigenous peoples to have indigenous representatives in their respective municipalities.

In Guatemala, 52 % of the population are women<sup>17</sup>. However, this does not correlate with the number of indigenous women in power positions at the local level. Up to the general elections of November 9, 2003, only one indigenous woman has been elected<sup>18</sup> as Mayor. This took place in the municipality of Tactic, Alta Verapaz, her biggest credentials being the fact she was a member of parliament during the previous government. According to Sam Colop, this is the “mirror of exclusion”<sup>19</sup> not only against indigenous women but against indigenous peoples.

There is no information to date on the number of indigenous women who take part in municipal corporations. In most cases, indigenous women occupy labour union positions, which in real terms have little or no influence in decision-making.

*National level*

History has demonstrated that the political parties are not willing to cede opportunities to indigenous peoples in key decision-making positions nor to allow them to run as candidates for elected offices. In spite of the democratic transition and the Peace Accords, the economic oligarchy and the traditional political parties continue to exclude indigenous peoples from positions of power and representation.

Indigenous women’s participation in power positions at different levels of the State government remains a remote possibility.

a) Executive Branch

No indigenous woman currently holds any ministerial position in the government’s cabinet. Since the creation of the Guatemalan State in 1823 and its subsequent strengthening during the liberal period in 1871 up to the present, only one indigenous woman has filled a ministerial position—the Ministry of Culture and Sports, in 2000-2004.

The existing vacuum in key executive positions is an undeniable reality. Exceptions are Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Goodwill Ambassador for the Peace Accords; Norm Quixtan<sup>20</sup>, Peace Secretariat and; Rosalina Tuyuc, President of the National Compensation Program.

No indigenous person—man or woman—has ever been Governor of any of the 22 Departments in the country, even though indigenous people are a majority in 11 of these departments. The commitments contained in the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples of promoting the participation and representation of indigenous peoples in power positions has been ignored.

b) Congress of the Republic

The political parties are one of the main problems of democracy in Guatemala. They neither are genuine channels of civil participation, in particular of indigenous peoples, nor do they fulfill effectively their responsibilities as intermediaries between the public's demands and the State. Political parties in Guatemala suffer from a credibility crisis due to the way in which they operate. "They have become the exclusive property of the political elites and serve only their individualistic interests"<sup>21</sup>, alienating indigenous peoples even further.

It is recognized in political/academic circles that a broad citizen participation through the political parties system not only is desirable for democracy and its institutions but for democratic governance as well, in terms of ensuring representational and legitimate decision-making processes.

The information in the following table shows how much remains to be done with regards to the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the political life of the country. This is a reflection of a political, social and economic structural problem.

**Indigenous peoples representation in election results**

Year	Total Deputies	Total Indigenous Deputies (men)	Total Indigenous Deputies (women)
1985	100	8	0
1990	116	6	0
1995	80	7	4
1999	113	13	3
2003	158	14	1

Source: Reports by the Electoral Supreme Court and the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation's monitoring, 2003.

These figures are an objective reflection of how little has the attitude of the country's political elite changed with regards to the Indigenous Peoples after the democratic transition and the "development and application" of the Peace Accords. The political parties continue to maintain an alienating and racist attitude, especially against indigenous women's participation. The only indigenous woman deputy currently sitting in the Congress of the Republic has demonstrated a partisan discipline and is a faithful and strong supporter of the party's chief, which in addition to her competence, has earned her re-election.

Consequently, indigenous presence and role within Congress is small and very limited. As Gloria Tujab put it, "having indigenous deputies in Congress does not mean that indigenous peoples are actively involved (...) because this was brewed inside a party and does not reflect an indigenous ideology."

Of the 686 candidates for Congresses from the 11 mostly indigenous departments proposed by all the *political parties*<sup>22</sup>, only 216 were Mayan natives. Also, of 97 women candidates, only 37 were Mayan women. But the most important aspect is the place candidates get in the ballots. Of 216 indigenous candidates, only 39 were placed at the top three places of the electoral ballot. The most powerful political parties (GANA, UNE and the FRG), only placed 9 indigenous candidates on the first entry of the ballot.

"This historic reality has seriously affected and keeps on affecting the Indigenous Peoples, denying them the full exercise of their rights as citizens, and impeding the formation of a national unity that fully reflects the rich plural make-up of Guatemala"<sup>23</sup>.

## About the Author

Meeylyn Lorena Mejia Lopez has extensive research experience on indigenous rights. She helped streamline the operations of the Indigenous Women Ombudsman. Currently she is the head of the *Expresiones Socio-Culturales* Department, Ministry of Culture and Sports of Guatemala.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> ASIES, Poder Nacional – Poder Local. Guatemala, 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> Poitevin, René. Los Problemas de la Democracia. Guatemala, 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> La Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos, la Corte de Constitucionalidad y el Tribunal Supremo Electoral.
- <sup>4</sup> Solares, Jorge. Guatemala: Etnicidad y Democracia en Tierra Arrasada. 1997
- <sup>5</sup> Popol Wuj, sacred book of the Mayan people.
- <sup>6</sup> Organización religiosa integrada por siete parejas (en algunas regiones del país el número puede variar) para la organización de las fiestas comunitarias. Pero que representa una instancia de formación y aprendizaje en los ámbitos: religioso, social y político. Representa una instancia para la formación de liderazgos de hombres y mujeres.
- <sup>7</sup> Revalorizar la Cosmovisión y Cultura Maya. Majawil Q'ij, 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> Comalapa, actualmente es uno de los municipios del departamento de Chimaltenango.
- <sup>9</sup> Florinda Soriano – Mamá Tingó, productora y luchadora por la tierra en República Dominicana.
- <sup>10</sup> La Mujer Indígena Latinoamericana después de los 500 años. 1992
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, pág 33
- <sup>12</sup> FLACSO, ¿Qué sociedad queremos? Guatemala, 1997
- <sup>13</sup> Convergencia Cívico Político, 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> Artículo 2, inciso f de la Ley de Consejos de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural.
- <sup>15</sup> Moloj
- <sup>16</sup> Información del Área de Participación de la Fundación Rigoberta Menchú Tum. Los pueblos indígenas de ascendencia maya, xinca y garífuna se encuentran ubicados en 20 departamentos del país, en 9 de ellos son minorías con relación al total de la población. Los únicos dos departamentos en donde no existe comunidades indígenas son El Progreso y Zacapa.
- <sup>17</sup> Según información del Instituto Nacional de Estadística a partir del XI Censo Nacional de Población y VI Censo Nacional de Habitación 2002.
- <sup>18</sup> A nivel nacional de 331 municipios, únicamente 8 mujeres ganaron la alcaldía municipal, entre ellas una mujer indígena.
- <sup>19</sup> Boletín Chomanem, Guatemala Derrota al Miedo. Fundación Rigoberta Menchú Tum, 2003.
- <sup>20</sup> La Licda. Norma Quixtán durante el año 2004, fue gobernadora departamental de Quetzaltenango y a mediados del 2005 fue nombrada por el Presidente de la República para hacerse cargo de la Secretaria de la Paz.
- <sup>21</sup> Ideas y Aportes: La Democracia en América Latina. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2004.
- <sup>22</sup> En las elecciones generales realizadas el 9 de noviembre de 2003, participaron 13 partidos políticos.
- <sup>23</sup> Considerando el número 5 del Acuerdo de Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas, firmado en México, DF; el 31 en marzo de 1995.

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