

Guatemala Election Watch #43

Challenges facing indigenous peoples of Guatemala going forward

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/guatemala-election-watch-43>

Below: Edgar Esquit writes of challenges facing Indigenous peoples in Guatemala going forward, if President-elect Bernardo Arevalo & VP-elect Karin Herrera are able to assume power on January 14, 2024.

The *Pacto de Corruptos* ('Covenant of the Corrupt') government and traditional elites of Guatemala – longtime “democratic allies” of the U.S., Canada, E.U., World Bank and transnational corporations – continue to try and block or overthrow the August 20, 2023 elections, won by President-elect Bernardo Arevalo & VP-elect Karin Herrera of the Semilla Party.

1 month, 15 days until Jan.14, 2024 transfer of power
Stay tuned ... This is not over

Ancestral authorities facing challenges in the political struggle for democracy

By Edgar Esquit, November 24, 2023

(Translation by Rights Action)

<https://prensacomunitaria.org/2023/11/autoridades-ancestrales-ante-los-desafios-de-la-lucha-politica-por-la-democracia/>

On November 4th of this year, while thousands of Guatemalans and indigenous authorities continued with protests in defense of democracy in the so-called Plaza de la Constitución, all those present saw President-elect Bernardo Arévalo arrive to join the protests.

The ancestral authorities received Arévalo with great interest and, face to face, they talked about the reasons for the struggle and about the history of the peoples.

They talked about the struggle for democracy and the ancestral authorities. They emphasized that the indigenous peoples need a national government that listens to them, that does not make them invisible and that defines specific spaces for dialogue. The authorities affirmed that the communities are grateful to their rulers, but that these must demonstrate their interest in the people.

That day on stage, Bernardo Arévalo spoke about the character of his next government saying that the only ones who will not have spaces will be the corrupt. Several times he repeated that his government will dialogue with all sectors, but emphasized that there was a special commitment to work with those who have been "abandoned, marginalized and discriminated against" in Guatemala's history.

Arevalo said that his government will be attentive to dialogue with all sectors, but especially with the indigenous peoples, in order to build paths towards "development" understood as education, health, infrastructure. He stated that it was important to work together seeking solutions in a joint manner, while defending democracy.

In recent weeks it has also been reported that the indigenous authorities have been in dialogue with various sectors of the country and with the president-elect. In this process, the space called Action for Democracy has been implemented, which aims to become a broad forum where indigenous peoples have their own voice.

In spite of the threats made by the corrupt government, desperate to carry out the coup d'état, both the indigenous authorities and the president-elect are working to establish the basis for dialogue between sectors and the authorities. In this process, the authorities of the indigenous communities maintain the hope that the next government will be the beginning of a new era in the history of the communities or for the native peoples.

Significant challenges going forward

However, in this struggle for the transformation of the country, the ancestral authorities will face significant challenges.

One of the first challenges will be to confront the position assumed by the *elq'om*, the corrupt elite that have ruled until now. Likewise, they will have to challenge the great distrust of the economic elites that, as is well known, have maintained control over politics in this country.

Furthermore, the daily and structural racism in the midst of which indigenous peoples have struggled throughout their history must be addressed.

And it is important to understand the links between this movement and the international arena, since indigenous peoples face similar challenges throughout the continent, as a result of their shared colonial history.

The control imposed by the *Elq'om* or "Pact of Corrupts" over the State and the electoral system is the first challenge, since the elites want block the new government that is to be led by Bernardo Arevalo. The ancestral authorities focus their hopes that the administration that begins next January will be truly sensitive to the history of the peoples.

In this sense, the possibilities of deepening a democracy that is not controlled in a co-opted electoral system, but that opens spaces for real dialogue, passes through its defense in the streets and squares, given that the laws are under the almost total control of the corrupt elites.

In this process of peaceful struggle, the ancestral authorities are playing for everything. If they manage to overcome the obstacles through to January 14, when the new government takes office, they will be important actors in the future of the country's politics.

Dialogue with the economic elites

Once the new government is established, another challenge for the ancestral authorities will be to dialogue with the business elites that control the economy in Guatemala.

In this process they will need to establish that the communities' struggles are not threatening to the interests of this economic sector, but are struggles in the defense of life, territory, resources and local government.

Throughout the centuries, the large landowners have wanted, through the State, to control and have the communities at their service, and at times they have even tried to destroy them through violence.

The history and vision of community up to this point, as in Totonicapán and many other places, implies a strong control over resources such as water, forests, biodiversity and the local economy.

Indigenous authorities will have to be wise in the construction of paths that make these and other community interests possible, without the business elites feeling threatened.

At the heart of this discussion is the need to emphasize that the struggle in defense of communities is linked to the reproduction of life and not to capitalist accumulation. The existence of community well-being depends on control over and reproduction of life's resources in their territories.

A third challenge for the communities and ancestral authorities will be to transcend the racism of the political and business elites and that of the ladinos in general. The protest actions in the streets of the capital and the solidarity shown by some ladino families, organizations or individuals with the indigenous demonstrators, are indications of the new forms of relationships that emerge in the contexts of this defense of democracy struggle.

Historically, the points of contact between indigenous and ladinos have been the farm, the market, and work in private homes. In these places, the indigenous are seen as servants, as backward people and/or as exotic objects.

The political struggle of the communities today shows another face of the Mayas and Xinkas, one that had been hidden for many generations. In this sense, one of the ways to destroy daily and structural racism is the recognition of the history of the native peoples.

Ancestral authorities and communities have the challenge of showing that the country is in fact a diverse world, not only in cultural terms but also in terms of organization and political identities.

Finally, the ancestral authorities should consider the experience accumulated since the indigenous struggles in the continent. Indigenous peoples have an extensive history of struggle for the reproduction of life and for communal politics. There is a lot of accumulated knowledge and memory about the different ways of defining actions in the defense of the communities, as well as in the struggle at the state level. The challenge is to find ways to achieve viable political and social goals in a diverse world.

Future relations with the United States

At the same time, it will be necessary to be tactful in the relationship with the United States as a country always interested in maintaining influence and control over the peoples of Latin America and the rest of the world.

Concerned about its internal stability, in the face of migration and other political processes at the international level, the United States is showing interest today in supporting democratic processes and criticizing groups that seek to undermine the weak democratic system in Guatemala.

However, if the people's struggle going forward were to be considered "threatening" to the economic and military interests of the U.S., there are no lengths the U.S. would not go to, to control it.

The current moment in the country is challenging for the indigenous peoples and for the rest of Guatemalans. The implications of a dictatorship of the *Pacto de Corruptos* are frightening, the possibility of establishing a government open to dialogue with the peoples and communities is hopeful.

Thus, the struggles undertaken by the ancestral authorities and communities for many months, in defense of democracy, bring with them great challenges, some of them raised in this writing.

Up to this moment, the ancestral authorities have shown fortitude and a deep ethic towards the struggle for democracy, the valorization of the human, the respect towards the material goods of the State. All this denotes a strong interest not only in the communities and indigenous peoples, but in the life of all men and women who inhabit this country.

(Edgar Esquit, Kaqchikel, lives in the community of Patzicía, Guatemala. Researcher at IDEIPI-USAC. PhD in social anthropology. Research on community history has been his most general line of work although he has also written on the Mayan movement. He has done field and archival work in the municipalities of the central highlands and western Guatemala. His research interests are focused on defining other readings of the memory and history of the Kaqchikel communities and on recognizing the mechanisms through which colonial relations are structured over different groups, in different places, spaces and times.)

Coup d'état: 'Death by a 1000 cuts'

It is impossible to keep up with the 'death by a 1000 cuts' attacks being carried out by the 'covenant of the corrupt' government and traditional elites against the victory of President-elect Bernardo Arevalo and VP-elect Karin Herrera of the Semilla Party.

- Rights Action's "Guatemala Election Watch" alerts (www.rightsaction.org/emails).

Rights Action calls for Americans and Canadians to keep sharing these informations widely (including media outlets), and to contact your Senators, Members of Congress and Parliamentarian, urge them to publicly support the Semilla Party and President-elect Bernardo Arevalo and VP-elect Karin Herrera, and to support calls for the main coup plotters to resign: Attorney General Consuelo Porras, special prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, Judge Fredy Orellana.

- U.S. Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- U.S. House: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Canadian Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

More information

- Festivales Solidarios @festivalesgt
- Prensa Comunitaria @PrensaComunitaria; <https://prensacomunitaria.org/>
- NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): www.nisgua.org; https://twitter.com/NISGUA_Guate
- GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): www.ghrc-usa.org; <https://twitter.com/GHRCUSA>
- Breaking the Silence: www.breakingthesilenceblog.com, https://twitter.com/BTS_MG

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