

STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY WITH AMAZONIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FACING THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

In solidarity with indigenous organizations, federations and nationalities at the Amazon regional level coordinated by COICA and its members AIDSESEP, APA, CIDOB, COIAB, CONFENIAE, FOAG, OPIAC, OIS, and ORPIA; at the national level including APIB, CONAIE, ONIC, as well as other organizations, federations and communities¹, who have expressed deep concern about the impending threat of COVID-19 in their ancestral territories and communities, we demand integrated, effective, and culturally adequate state responses to this crisis. This begins with an immediate moratorium on any activity that includes the entering of foreign persons into indigenous territories, the development of mining activities, logging, oil exploration and extraction, industrial agriculture, religious proselytization, or increased militarization, especially in transborder territories under pressure from armed actors and organized crime.

For over 500 years, indigenous peoples of the Amazon and across the Americas have faced invasions and loss of their ancestral territories, ethnic and socioeconomic discrimination, and the constant threat of physical and cultural extermination resulting in displacement, disease, and genocide. Now, indigenous peoples – particularly those living in voluntary isolation – are gravely threatened by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health of many indigenous peoples is already precarious due to the prevalence of externally-introduced contagious diseases and chronic illnesses throughout the population. The COVID-19 crisis further exposes the insufficiency of healthcare services and a lack of effective, linguistically relevant and culturally appropriate government policies.

Indigenous peoples throughout the region lack access to adequate sanitary facilities, many of which have entirely collapsed or can no longer be repaired. They do not have secure access to potable water sources or proper sanitation infrastructure. Indigenous peoples have also been denied access to timely and accurate information in their own languages, which would facilitate an understanding of the current pandemic and inform decisions on how to best defend and protect themselves accordingly. Extractive activities are an additional threat in a large number of indigenous territories, where they have not been halted by the various governments of the region because they are considered economically strategic.

¹ The Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) includes: Interethnic Association of Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSESEP), Association of Amerindian Peoples of Guyana (APA), Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB), Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), Federation of Amerindian Organizations of Guyana (FOAG), Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS), National Organization of the Indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC) Regional Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon (ORPIA). The other national organizations mentioned include: Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC).

The continued negligence of governments, extractive industries, and financial institutions in the face of the novel coronavirus could result in the ethnocide of the very peoples safeguarding rainforests, and who provide expansive knowledge and solutions to the other existential crisis we face: the global climate emergency.

Multilateral international organizations have failed to address and recommend actions to prevent the arrival of the novel coronavirus into indigenous territories, and must take a more active role in the various countries of the region to promote, defend and closely monitor the rights of indigenous peoples.

Without guidance or support from public health agencies, many indigenous organizations and peoples are taking preventative measures on their own to stop the coronavirus from entering their communities: by voluntary social distancing, using proactive hygiene practices, suspending major protests, events, and travel, closing traffic between villages and controlling the entry or exit of both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples into territories, and by producing public health communications materials in their own languages. Indigenous peoples across the region explicitly demand that any and all outsiders refrain from traveling to indigenous territories until further notice, due to the current threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Numerous indigenous organizations that represent hundreds of towns, thousands of communities and millions of people across the Amazon have issued statements directed both internally to their communities and externally to governments and other actors. We join them in calling on government authorities, multilateral organizations, religious proselytizers, executives of extractive corporations, and finance industry leaders to:

- Immediately cease extractive mining, oil, and logging activity, industrial agriculture, and all religious proselytization within or on the border of any indigenous territories;
- Respond to calls by the indigenous organizations of their countries for adequate preventative measures and their proper implementation; such measures should consider the geographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental realities of indigenous peoples, recognizing them as populations particularly vulnerable to the pandemic;
- Respect and promote the rights to self-determination, self-protection and governance that various indigenous peoples practice in their territories, including systems of government and guardianship that aim to physically protect indigenous territories by controlling the entry or exit of non-indigenous peoples into or out of them;
- Guarantee access to adequate and culturally-appropriate public health services to indigenous peoples, including proper interpretation during consultations and in communicating information to the public, and sufficient access to testing and treatment protocols for COVID-19;
- Ensure rigorous governance and law enforcement on organized crime in and around indigenous territories;

- Establish virtual coordination and urgent action working groups for indigenous peoples among States, Indigenous Organizations, the International Health Organization (WHO) and other rights organizations in each country to deal with issues of health emergency, food security and the murders of indigenous leaders.

Finally, we urge the international community to develop and carry out humanitarian action in **direct coordination** with Indigenous Peoples' organizations.