

# Indigenous Peoples' Struggles for Autonomy: The Case of the U'wa People

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*Latin American indigenous peoples are demanding recognition of their collective rights to self-determination on their territories. Conflicts over the past two decades have centred on land and autonomy. Indigenous peoples' history and sense of identity are contained in their territories, which also ensure their economic viability as independent peoples. In the fight for their cultural survival, they are finding new means of asserting their collective rights in the face of threats posed by neoliberal globalization. This article explores the negative and positive effects that neoliberal globalization has had on indigenous peoples. The article applies Santos's sociology of absences and sociology of emergences to explain the emergence of indigenous peoples' social movements in Latin America. The U'wa people's struggle for autonomy in Colombia is used as a case study.*

## Introduction

*"We are seeking an explanation for this 'progress' that goes against life. We are demanding that this kind of progress stop. That oil exploration in the heart of the Earth is halted, that the deliberate bleeding of the Earth stops."*

*—Statement of the U'wa people, August 1998 (Reinsborough 2002)*

Indigenous groups around the world face increasing political, economic, and social discrimination from the dominant societies in which they live. No communities have been impacted more negatively by the current global economic system than the world's remaining 370 million indigenous peoples (Mander 2005, 3). Those in Latin America are among the most disadvantaged and discriminated communities in that region. As Latin American economies continue to grow, more natural resources are needed to fuel economic growth, which threatens these peoples' livelihoods since most of the region's remaining resources are found on these peoples' lands (*ibid.*, 3). Indigenous peoples' territories contain their history and sense of identity and ensure their economic viability as independent peoples (Burger 1987, 14). For many groups, their territories, including everything on them and beneath them, have sacred value. For the U'wa people of Colombia, oil (*ruiría*) means the blood of Mother Earth and to extract it violates their most sacred beliefs

(Reinsborough 2002). For multinational corporations, oil is a commodity that generates lucrative profits. These epistemological differences have led indigenous groups to demand respect for their cultures through recognition of their collective rights to self-determination on their territories. To forcibly relocate these groups is to separate them from their histories. If such separation occurs, they “will either perish in body or . . . mind and [their] spirits will be altered so that [they] end up mimicking foreign ways” (Burger 1987, 4). Self-determination is necessary for them to ensure cultural survival. Notably, Latin American indigenous peoples are finding new ways of asserting their collective rights in the face of threats posed by neoliberal globalization.

This article explores the negative and positive effects that globalization has had on indigenous peoples in Latin America. It builds on the academic globalization literature and applies Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s theories of the sociology of absences and sociology of emergences to explain the emergence of indigenous peoples’ movements demanding autonomy. First, it assesses the effects of neoliberal globalization on Latin American indigenous peoples. It then explains the emergence of these peoples’ movements. The case of the U’wa people is then presented. This article concludes with recommendations for how governments should approach their indigenous populations to address demands for autonomy and recognition of rights and traditional territories.

## **Globalization and Its Effects on Indigenous Peoples**

There is little consensus among academics on globalization’s contemporary effects because of differences in interpretations of globalization. According to Jan Aart Scholte (2000, 41), “debates on this subject are littered with all manner of definitions, chronologies, explanations and evaluations.” Indeed, no definition of globalization can be completely unambiguous, objective, fixed, and final (*ibid.*, 42). Moreover, the term may be misleading if taken literally because some of the processes that it purports to describe may not be new at all (Dirlik 2006). Scholte (2000, 41) argues that contemporary globalization can best be described as “deterritorialization,” or as the growth of “supraterritorial relations” among people. This reconfiguration of time and space is unprecedented. The growing extensiveness and intensity of global interconnectedness is the result of the continued increase and speeding up of global interactions and processes. The evolution of worldwide transportation systems and information and communications technologies (ICTs) has increased the velocity of the diffusion of information, ideas, goods, people, and technological innovations. Although these changes have benefited many, they have had negative implications for others, such as indigenous peoples who rarely benefit from global processes or participate in global interactions.

In Latin America, the integration of global economic forces increased with the spread of neoliberal reforms during the 1980s and the implementation of the Washington Consensus throughout the 1990s. In the 1980s, indebted developing countries were offered loans by the International Monetary Fund

and the World Bank on the condition that they follow these institutions' Structural Adjustment Programs, which included neoliberal policies such as trade liberalization, financial deregulation, and privatization of public enterprises. In 1989, John Williamson listed 10 reforms that many policy-makers in Washington thought were needed in Latin America at that time. This set of reforms, known as the Washington Consensus, included fiscal discipline, reordering public expenditure priorities, tax reform, liberalizing interest rates, a competitive exchange rate, trade liberalization, liberalizing foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation, and provision of secure property rights (Williamson 2006). These reforms were intended to address the macroeconomic deficiencies and debt problems that many developing countries were facing. However, their results were not as planned. Paul Cooney (2006) indicates that during the last two decades, "the neoliberal model has dominated economic policies in Latin America and in general, has produced lower wages, an increase in unemployment and poverty for the majority of Latin Americans, as well as financial crises and depressions." The overall level of poverty in Latin America increased from 40.5 per cent in 1980 to 48.3 per cent in 1990, while in rural areas poverty levels increased from 59.9 per cent in 1980 to 65.4 per cent a decade later. The overall level of extreme poverty rose from 18.6 per cent in 1980 to 22.5 per cent in 1990 (*ibid.*).

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin America experienced a period of globalization, which Cooney understands was in fact a period of neoliberal globalization. He (*ibid.*) describes neoliberal globalization as the "renovation of economic liberalism" in response to the global economic crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It not only changed the structure of the international system but also the lives of people all over the world. Neoliberal globalization introduced "the privatization of public enterprises; the liberalization of trade and financial flows; the deregulation of product, capital and labor markets; and the downsizing of the state, particularly with regards to economic and social programming" (Veltmeyer 2005, 6). It cannot, however, be reduced to its economic aspect. It must be understood to include ecological, political, social, and cultural aspects as well. The growth and reach of these aspects is a consequence of the growing extensiveness and intensity of global interactions and processes, that is, a consequence of the deterritorialization of time and space, as Scholte has it.

Scholte (2000, 9) explains that supraterritorial relations between people have had negative consequences such as ecological degradation, persistent poverty, worsened working conditions, arbitrary inequalities, democratic deficits, and cultural destruction. Similarly, some observers see neoliberal globalization as responsible for the loss of cultural diversity and autonomy. Globalization being the development of a single global culture follows from the argument that since globalization began in the West, it mainly encourages the diffusion of Western ideas, values, lifestyles, technologies, and epistemologies. Proponents of this argument contend that globalization's epistemologies are informed by hegemonic Americentric and Eurocentric knowledge and ideologies that are naturalized and universalized (Seabrook 2004; Santos

2003). They also argue that Western knowledge discredits other knowledges by portraying them as incoherent and inefficient compared to the scientific method prominent in Western thinking. For Santos, this stigmatization of non-Western knowledges is the sociology of absences. He (*ibid.*, 238) explains that the sociology of absences consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that which does not exist; things that cannot be proven through the application of the scientific method are considered to be non-existent or non-credible alternatives to what exists. An example is how the Western ideals of modernity and globalization deny the sophistication and rationality of indigenous worlds by categorizing bodies of indigenous knowledge as beliefs or superstitions based on myths (Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2008). Such categorization of non-Western knowledges further marginalizes indigenous peoples.

Neoliberal globalization also threatens to accelerate processes of recolonization in Latin America. Debates on globalization have rarely considered indigenous peoples' knowledges and experiences when discussing the nature of change and related experiences in a globalized world. Resources found on or beneath these peoples' territories are often appropriated without compensation or even consultation. Indigenous peoples' reluctance to sacrifice their traditional lands and cultures as governments and multinational corporations appropriate their territories and resources in the name of development projects from which they will not benefit exposes them to further oppression (Beauclerk and Narby with Townsend 1988, 6). As a result, when these peoples describe their experiences in a globalized world and conceptualize their understandings of globalization, they emphasize a continuation of the exercise of power and subjugation that extends over many centuries (Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2008). They talk about globalization with a sense of apathy, from a perspective of having seen the physical, psychological, and spiritual damage it has brought, and with fears that domination will continue undermining their cultures (*ibid.*). As such, globalization has encouraged the growth of loci of governance besides the state, the spread of forms of community other than the nation, and the development of knowledges besides modern rationality (Scholte 2000, 8). The Zapatista movement in the Mexican state of Chiapas since 1994 is an example. The Zapatistas do not seek to seize state power. Rather, they want to build a different, non-hierarchical world based on the rotation of representatives by emphasizing the importance of building communities from the bottom up (Zibechi 2010, 3).

## **The Emergence of Indigenous Peoples' Movements**

Indigenous peoples' movements emerged according to what Santos (2003, 238) calls the sociology of emergences, which aims "to identify and enlarge the signs of possible future experiences" that are actively ignored by hegemonic knowledge and rationality. As the sociology of absences explains why indigenous peoples' experiences, knowledges, and realities have been largely non-existent in the past, the sociology of emergences illustrates how these experiences, knowledges, and realities are now emerging as counter-

hegemonic forces against Western knowledge and rationality. The rise of these peoples' movements is a response to the expansion of globalization's frontiers into their territories (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005, 242). According to César Rodríguez-Garavito and Luis Carlos Arenas (*ibid.*), indigenous groups' struggles against global economic forces have been shaped by three related core demands: self-determination, land rights, and cultural survival. Their movements are repudiating the Westernized mapping of the world as a single economic entity and resisting the erasures of the past and assimilations of the present.

As the frontiers of globalization expand, indigenous peoples and their demands are becoming more visible. Anthony Giddens (2000, 31) argues that globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world. Instead of facilitating cultural assimilation, globalization is intensifying cultural attitudes and reinforcing differences. Indigenous peoples in Latin America are resisting global economic forces and demanding autonomy and recognition of their collective rights to self-determination on their territories. The peasant identity is losing its political traction and being gradually supplanted by political organization around indigenous identity (Jung 2008, 147). This is a result of governments' failed recolonization and assimilation policies. Indigenous peoples' resistance movements rest upon "the recapturing of their self-concepts and their cultural roots to re/create spaces of consciousness, possibility, and presence through the re/construction and mobilization of indigenous discourses, identities, and claims in a variety of social, legal and political arenas" (Feldman 2002, 34). The most prominent example of success is the new Bolivian constitution, which was approved in a constitutional referendum in 2009. It seeks to end the oppression of indigenous communities which has been going on for centuries. The constitution grants 36 previously marginalized groups rights to territory, language, and their own community justice systems and declares coca a part of the nation's heritage. Upon signing the new constitution, Bolivian President Evo Morales said: "This is the second independence, the true liberation of Bolivia" (Al Jazeera 2009).

Latin American indigenous peoples' movements have gained prominence because of globalization. The dependence of worldwide economic growth on a continuous resource supply causes natural resources to become scarcer. Exploration for new resources includes surveying unexplored and still-pristine lands, many of which belong to indigenous peoples. Consequently, indigenous peoples, governments, and multinational corporations are clashing in what Jerry Mander (2005, 4) alternatively calls "resource wars," "worldview wars," or "*paradigm wars*" . . . deeply based in opposite understandings of how human beings should live on the earth." In Latin America, the globalization of the region's economies has provoked active resistance from peasant populations and indigenous communities who see their survival being threatened by the economic, political, and cultural effects of neoliberal globalization (Harris 2002, 142). For Roberto Perez, president of the U'wa governing council and *de facto* leader of the U'wa people, neoliberal policies introduced in the 1980s and 1990s were Western ways of thinking and

a politic of the government and multinational corporations that was imposed on the U'wa on their own territories. The resources that have been exploited have benefited a few groups that hold economic power (Cox 2002). Indigenous peoples in Latin America have emerged from their shared experiences of marginalization to combat the forces of neoliberal globalization (Niezen 2003, 9). Their movements are often vigorous and effective. The Zapatistas in Mexico, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, and the Aymara in Bolivia are among the most active opponents of neoliberal reforms and their consequences (Korten 1995, 295).

These movements involve ongoing engagement strategies to create new relations with broader publics and institutions and new practices. Dorothy Hodgson (2002, 1040) argues that the formation of visible and effective movements has been facilitated by an array of transnational connections. Coalitions between indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have enabled the international promotion of indigenous peoples' demands for self-determination.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, human rights, legal developments, and peace commissions have played a significant role in the consolidation of these peoples' rights. Notably, improvements in ICTs have allowed indigenous peoples to mobilize beyond the local level and build strong sub-national, national, regional, and international alliances with other indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Using ICTs, these peoples are establishing and maintaining international connections that strengthen their political voice locally, nationally, and internationally. Alliances are becoming increasingly important in achieving recognition of indigenous peoples' rights at both the national and international levels.

Until recently, most indigenous peoples had no legal protection against multinational corporations that enter their traditional territories to gain access to resources. Over the past two decades, international organizations, especially the United Nations (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO), have become gradually more interested in protecting indigenous peoples' rights. One of the main outcomes of this interest was the inclusion of Article 14 in ILO Convention No. 169, which obligates signatory countries to recognize indigenous peoples' property rights (Silva 2011, 2). Colombia's indigenous peoples have been very successful in protesting against local governments and multinational corporations by utilizing Article 14 (Ulloa 2005, 47).

More and more, indigenous peoples are shifting their focus to the international arena, striving to be involved at the highest level possible. International law now accepts that these peoples enjoy collective rights to ownership and control of their territories, to exercise their customary laws, and to represent themselves through their own representative institutions. In this context, indigenous peoples' movements have become a form of empowerment that allows groups to freely establish relations with international agencies as equal, autonomous social agents that have control over their territories and resources (Ulloa 2003).

One of indigenous peoples' main demands is the preservation of their ability to make all decisions about their ancestral lands. Their goals are to

defend their traditional territories and, in many cases, the historical beliefs and customs associated with their ways of living. They are effectively seeking to retain their autonomy. Autonomy refers to the capacity of individuals and groups to shape the conditions under which they live. Regarding groups, autonomy usually means something closer to the Greek roots *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law)—the capacity to give oneself laws (Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2008).

As indigenous peoples demand autonomy and respect for local forms of governance, they challenge the historical racist and stereotypical representation of the “Native” as backwards and primitive. These peoples’ movements have embraced indigenous epistemologies when challenging Western ideals and beliefs (Yashar 1998, 23). The concerns of contemporary movements extend beyond the material concern for land as a productive resource. Land is central to the definition of self and crucial for the survival of indigenous identities. The potential and real loss of land affects indigenous peoples’ autonomy and viability as well as their histories, cultures, and spiritual lives. When non-indigenous people assume that indigenous peoples’ demands for land primarily reflect economic or political interests and secondarily reflect spiritual and emotional concerns, they fail to recognize the application of Western epistemologies that indigenous peoples’ movements try to resist (Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2008). These movements are effectively resisting global economic forces by challenging Western epistemologies, demanding respect, and claiming autonomy over their lands and lives. Santos’s sociology of emergences explains the emergence of indigenous peoples’ movements as a counter-hegemonic force opposing neoliberal globalization. One thriving group is the U’wa, who for more than two decades have asserted their claims for ownership and control over their territories.

## The Case of the U’wa People

The U’wa, a name that means “people who think, people who know how to speak,” are a community of approximately 8,000 indigenous people who live in the forests of northeastern Colombia in the departments of Arauca, Boyacá, Santander, and North Santander (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005; Mander and Tauli-Corpuz 2003; Niezen 2003). The original territories of the U’wa, once a tribe of 20,000, stretched from southern Venezuela into northeastern Colombia. The U’wa have no written language and their culture is preserved through songs. Their existence throughout the centuries has depended on their ancestral lands, resources, and religious practices, all of which are inextricably intertwined elements of their culture (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005, 245). Their religion dictates that they maintain harmony among all the layers of creation: earth, water, oil, mountains, and sky (ibid.). The U’wa believe that they are the sole guardians of the forests and species on their traditional territories. In fact, they prohibit human access, including their own, in some areas. Many outsiders marvel at the ability of the U’wa to sustain themselves without scarring their lands.

Having survived periods of invasion, conquest, and colonization,

the U'wa are now again struggling against incursions and subsequent militarization of their territories related to oil exploration and drilling (ibid., 243). While oil installations attract armed conflict between guerillas and Colombian government forces, the main concern of the U'wa is that oil exploration on their territories will lead to environmental disasters and the demise of their culture, which will threaten the existence of the tribe as a cohesive group (Ulloa 2005, 52). One cultural belief of the U'wa is that Mother Earth, which has sustained them for centuries, is sacred. They believe that Earth is a living organism and, just as blood runs through the human body to keep it alive, oil is Earth's blood that keeps her alive. Their myths of origin tell that oil must not be extracted since the extraction of oil will only result in greediness, disorder, and illness, and subsequently the destruction of the environment and humankind. For the U'wa, "oil is the blood of Mother Earth . . . [T]o take the oil is, for [them], worse than killing your own mother. If you kill the Earth, then no one will live" (ibid., 53). They understand that if oil exploration is allowed on their lands, the balance of their entire world will be disturbed. As such, the value of economic projects does not exceed the value of humankind and planet Earth. They believe that pumping oil will lead to deforestation and oil spills, as well as ecological degradation, which accompanies the laying of roads in virgin forests. For these reasons, the U'wa oppose oil exploration on their territories (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005, 250). They informed the Colombian government of the significance of oil in their culture and the ecological consequences that they expect oil exploration to bring to their lands. Regardless, the Colombian government granted Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy) a license in 1992 to drill for oil on U'wa territories.

To defend their property rights, the U'wa turned to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, which guards the integrity and supremacy of the constitution and rules on the constitutionality of laws, amendments to the constitution, and international treaties. They claimed that a royal warrant granted by the Spanish Crown to the Tuneba Nation, ancestors of the U'wa people, in 1802 ratified and delimited the jurisdiction of their territories and gave them the absolute right to all soil and subsoil on their territories in present-day Arauca, Boyacá, Casanare, Santander, North Santander, and a part of southwestern Venezuela. These rights were ratified in Colombian Law 153 of 1887 and Article 332 of the 1991 constitution. In 1997 the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the U'wa, invoking the 1991 constitution and ILO Convention No. 169. The court concluded that indigenous collective rights stand on a par with individual human rights (ibid., 252). However, the more powerful Council of State of Colombia, the highest court of administrative law, overthrew the Constitutional Court's ruling. The council focused on national law rather than constitutional or international law on indigenous rights. It found that the Colombian government was not legally obligated to consult indigenous communities before granting licenses for oil drilling. Informing the affected groups about extraction plans and eliciting feedback, as the government had done, satisfied the standards set by national law, according to the council (ibid.).



The U'wa were baffled that both the Constitutional Court and Council of State had focused on their rights to participate in the consultation process rather than on the substance of their opposition to oil drilling on principled, as opposed to procedural, grounds, which they considered to be non-negotiable (*ibid.*). The decisions demonstrated that neither the court nor the council understood the opposition of the U'wa to the drilling of oil. In this case, the views of the U'wa were not taken into account in the decision-making process for granting licenses for oil drilling, effectively making their epistemologies non-existent, according to Santos's theory of absences.

Nevertheless, the U'wa have continued to denounce oil exploration on their traditional territories at the national and international levels. The first U'wa protest against Oxy was launched in March 1993 with a non-violent campaign involving rallies (*ibid.*, 257). The rallies did not affect the Colombian government's stance or stop Oxy's oil exploration, however. The U'wa then called three general peasant strikes, which saw approximately 5,000 people from 48 indigenous groups join together to support their cause (Ulloa 2005, 47). To press the Colombian government to revoke Oxy's drilling license, the mobilization effort involved road blockades, which brought the local economy to a halt, and hunger strikes by indigenous members of Colombia's Congress during legislative periods (*ibid.*, 53). The opposition of the U'wa was so strong that their protest strategy included a pact among themselves to commit mass suicide<sup>2</sup> by jumping off a cliff if Oxy's exploration plans were not halted (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005; Tebtebba Foundation and International Forum on Globalization 2005; Ulloa 2005; Niezen 2003). For the U'wa, suicide is preferable to the desecration of their ancestral lands. In the words of Berito Kuwaru'wa, an influential U'wa leader who played an instrumental role in an international campaign to stop oil drilling: "We would rather die, protecting everything that we hold sacred, than lose everything that makes us U'wa" (Ulloa 2005, 47). The threat of mass suicide has made the U'wa a symbol of worldwide resistance to neoliberal globalization by indigenous peoples (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005, 251).

U'wa leaders assert that their people want to continue their way of life on their own territories. Such a view does not apply only in situations such as incursions and oil exploration—it is also being adapted as the foundation of a different development model that responds to environmental crises caused by resource extraction. The U'wa are just one indigenous group among many that wants to preserve the planet for future generations. In accordance with Santos's sociology of emergences, such signs of possible future experiences ignored by the current global economic model are beginning to emerge as alternatives to the current hegemonic system.

What is more, the U'wa have earned the support of many NGOs such as Rainforest Action Network, Amazon Defense Coalition, and Oilwatch, which have helped them campaign against Oxy. The case of the U'wa people has been prominently featured at several events, in particular the protests against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington, DC, in 2000, the 2004 Social Forum of the Americas held in Quito, and the annual World

Social Forum (ibid., 255). The U'wa movement is evidently growing through strategies of engagement with broader publics and institutions, giving rise to new relations with supporters and new practices. The extensive and speedy capabilities of ICTs have allowed the movement to go global. For instance, the U'wa and their supporters have initiated negative publicity campaigns through mass media and protests in front of Oxy's headquarters in Los Angeles, which turned the Colombian project into a public relations nightmare for the company. The actions of the U'wa and their supporters forced Oxy to leave the traditional territories of the U'wa in 2002 and return its oil concession to the Colombian government (Tebtebba Foundation and International Forum on Globalization 2005, 164). Nonetheless, Ecopetrol, a Colombian state-owned enterprise, started drilling oil on U'wa lands in 2003, forcing the U'wa people to again resist (ibid.). Their resistance continues until today.

The U'wa want to retain control over their traditional territories and ensure cultural survival. As Perez asserts: "[W]hat we're saying is respect our territory" (Semple 2002). The U'wa are demanding not only respect for their rights, as stipulated in the 1991 constitution and ILO Convention No. 169, but their autonomy. In response to the decision by the Council of State, the U'wa have gone to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) to present their grievances. At the time of writing, the case is still in process.

## Conclusion

The U'wa people's actions against Oxy and the Colombian government illustrate that resistance against multinational corporations and national governments is possible. Their relative success is a result of the combination of grassroots mobilization at the local level with national and international support, and the simultaneous pursuit of political and legal strategies both nationally and internationally. In many instances, actions by Latin American indigenous peoples are being legitimized throughout the region. The U'wa movement has been effective insofar as it has managed to: (1) bring the issue of indigenous rights *vis-à-vis* resource extraction in Colombia to the fore; (2) influence discourses on indigenous cultural significance; and (3) change target actors' policies (Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas 2005, 261). However, the key issue is control, whether over land, knowledge, the past, the present, or the future.

Through resistance, indigenous peoples vindicate their right to exist and remain distinct from the dominant societies in which they live. The U'wa resist the Colombian government, which remains committed to the neoliberal model and characterized by exclusions and inequalities. Throughout Latin America, indigenous peoples' resistance movements and ways of life will continue to demonstrate that there exist contemporary economic, political, and social alternatives to the commodification of all resources (Harry 2005, 76). The U'wa have interpreted appropriate and often necessary modes of economic behaviour through songs, myths, and beliefs, which affirm and reinforce their

relationship with the Earth. The U'wa cosmogony goes beyond its locality—it is part of the reframing of the relations between society and nature imposed by the Western world. The slogan of the World Social Forum is “Another world is possible.” To achieve another world, this world needs to imagine both “other worlds” and “worlds otherwise”; that is, “worlds that are more just and sustainable and, at the same time, worlds that are defined through principles other than those of Eurocentric modernity” (Escobar 2004, 220). Resistance to neoliberal globalization is not just an ecological and political necessity, but a cultural necessity as well.

Latin American governments are encountering resistance from their indigenous populations, who are demanding recognition of their collective rights to self-determination on their territories. State recognition of these populations' rights to land and resources is one approach to rebalancing the distribution of property rights and implementing certain self-government forms of territorial jurisdiction that retain or restore indigenous peoples' control over their traditional territories. It is crucial that indigenous peoples' rights, as enshrined in national laws and international agreements, are implemented and not merely paid lip service. In this regard, signatory countries of ILO Convention No. 169<sup>3</sup> and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>4</sup> must fulfill their obligations outlined in these documents. It is likely that Latin American governments will only fully embrace their obligations if they are pressured to do so by their own populations, other governments, and international actors such as NGOs. Therefore, mutual co-operation between indigenous peoples around the world and international organizations, such as the UN, ILO, OAS, and specialized NGOs, and integrated capacities enabled by ICTs are needed to help shape global public opinion, which can support indigenous peoples in realizing their aspirations.

## Notes

1. NGOs such as Amazon Watch, Oxfam International, and Cultural Survival have been strong supporters of Latin American indigenous peoples.
2. Some U'wa communities committed mass suicide several centuries earlier to avoid being enslaved by Spanish conquistadors.
3. Fourteen out of the 22 signatory countries to ILO Convention No. 169 are from Latin America.
4. Bolivia was the first country to approve the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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