

YATAMA
PEACE
INITIATIVE



YATAMA
REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA
February 1989

Yapti Tasba Masraka nani Aslatakanka

BACKGROUND

Toward the end of 1984, peace talks opened between the MISURASATA Organization and the government of Nicaragua. These were the first peace talks between Managua and any organization engaged in armed struggle in the country. The process included four rounds of negotiation over a period of eight months in Bogata and Mexico City. Present at the peace talks as guarantor observers were representatives of Canada, Colombia, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

The agenda of the negotiations was based on the causes of the conflict: systematic repression and the denial of the historical rights to land and autonomy. Although no agreement was made on these fundamental issues, the government initiated a unilateral autonomy process in the country and established a technical cease fire with a small group of MISURA combatants who later became known as KISAN for peace. Also, the majority of the Indians displaced to the Tasba Pri camps were allowed to return to their traditional communities along the Wangi (Rio Coco).

On the 7th of August 1987 the five presidents of the Central American countries signed the Esquipulas II accord manifesting an historical commitment to establishing peace in the region. The accord establishes the mechanisms for pacification, democratization and national reconciliation in the countries of the area. In Nicaragua the Esquipulas process has led to cessation in the killing among brothers and at the same time has opened real possibilities for national reconciliation.

In September and October of the same year (1987) various sectors of the indigenous movement of Yapti Tasba met in assembly and decided to promote their peace initiative as an effort complimentary to the Esquipulas process. Thus, toward the end of January an indigenous delegation traveled to Managua and reinitiated the peace talks with the government which had been at an impasse since June of 1985. At the close of the first round of talks the parties entered into a preliminary basic accord which contained the principles of the indigenous demands and the peace process, and included a military truce in Yapti Tasba.

In the second round of talks, although additional accords were not achieved, there was further discussion concerning the fundamental issues, and the indigenous delegation conducted a successful tour of the region. But the negotiations came to an impasse at the third round as a result of the government's inflexibility. As of last June, when Managua unilaterally cancelled the fourth round of talks, the peace process in Yapti Tasba has been paralyzed.

It should be mentioned that certain armed indigenous groups have engaged in peace talks with the government in the field, although without separating themselves or their political positions from YATAMA. It should also be recognized that the peace efforts between the indigenous and creole peoples and the Sandinista government initiated in 1984 have evolved with mutual awareness of each side's realities and interests. This has been manifest by the formal proposals the parties have made defining their respective positions on the indigenous demands and national interests.

On one hand YATAMA has developed a "Proposal for a treaty of peace between the Republic of Nicaragua and the Indian nations of Yapti Tasba," which it submitted to the Nicaraguan delegation during the second round of talks in March 1988 and has proceeded to use as a position document in the negotiations. For its part the government has developed its "autonomy statute for the atlantic coast regions of Nicaragua," which was decreed as law and signed by the executive on September 7, 1987.

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INDIGENOUS INITIATIVE FOR RECONCILIATION **IN YAPTI TASBA**

I. INTRODUCTION

Given the continuous destruction of the indigenous nations and societies of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua resulting from the extended conflict with the Sandinista Government, the YATAMA leadership, in the course of the indigenous struggle for the defense of life and the collective interests of our communities, has determined in the spirit of patriotism to promote this "indigenous initiative for reconciliation in Yapti Tasba" with the goal of a solution of peace with justice for our peoples.

Thus determined in its struggle for peace with historical justice, YATAMA promotes this reconciliation effort within the framework of the Central American peace process and the basic accords entered into between the Organization and the Government of Nicaragua during the first round of talks ending on February 2, 1988. Accordingly, the content of the initiative is based on principles already accepted by both sides, principles that were presented in a simple, realistic and viable manner and whose immediate objective is to forge a genuine process of reconciliation.

Undoubtedly this initiative represents an indigenous call for the compliance in Nicaragua with the regional peace plan. For that we confide in the stimulus and support on the part of the signatory governments of Esquipulas II and of the international community in general.

YATAMA will organize an international solidarity network as a mechanism of financial and political support which will serve to guarantee the success of this indigenous initiative.

II. THE BASIS FOR RECONCILIATION

True peace in Yapti Tasba must be founded on the elimination of the causes of the conflict through a genuine and just process of reconciliation. Within this process the historical rights of the indigenous and creole peoples to their traditional territories, natural resources and self-determination should be secured.

The basic preliminary accords between the Government and YATAMA signed on February 2, 1988 include the principles that address the historical claims and serve as the basis for the process of reconciliation between the peoples of Yapti Tasba and the Government of Nicaragua. Furthermore, the specific contributions of both parties related to the indigenous demands and

the national interests should be taken as important elements within the process.

Therefore, once the YATAMA leaders are present in the country the indigenous organization and the Nicaraguan Government should continue in their efforts of dialogue with the end of entering into bilateral accords concerning the fundamental matters of indigenous demands which likewise are the basis for a solution of peace with justice within the Yapti Tasba. These fundamental issues are:

2.1 The traditional territory of Yapti Tasba with the recognition of the historic rights of its peoples over the conglomerate of their communal lands.

2.2 The indigenous autonomy of Yapti Tasba based on the recognition of the exercise of the right of internal self-determination of its peoples.

2.3 The natural resources of Yapti Tasba through the recognition of the collective property right over the forests and waters as well as the usufructuary rights over the subsoil and sea resources.

2.4 The organization of the Peoples of Yapti Tasba, with guarantees for its complete liberty of movement, organization and operation inside and outside of the country.

2.5 The indigenous self-defense of the peoples of Yapti Tasba whereby the indigenous troops shall resume responsibility over the internal order and security of their communities and traditional areas in the region.

III. PROCEDURE FOR THE RECONCILIATION

Within this genuine process of reconciliation which shall be initiated in Yapti Tasba in order to advance a solution of peace with justice to the conflicts, YATAMA hereby proposes the following procedure:

3.1 With the necessary physical and political guarantees in place, the indigenous and creole leaders and cadres shall return to Nicaragua in order to begin the process of reconciliation in Yapti Tasba.

3.2 With the presences of the leaders inside the country, YATAMA shall proceed to achieve an accord with the government concerning an end to the armed conflict in Yapti Tasba through:

3.2.1 A definitive cease fire between the armed forces of the government and self-defense troops of YATAMA.

3.2.2 The demilitarization of the indigenous and creole communities on the part of the forces of the government.

3.2.3 The suspension of the Compulsory Military Service in regards to the population of Yapti Tasba.

3.2.4 The integration of all the YATAMA self-defense combatants into their respective communities.

3.2.5 The establishment of mechanisms for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the YATAMA combatants.

3.2.6 Negotiations concerning the future of the YATAMA self-defense troops.

3.3 With the consummation of a definitive cease fire, YATAMA and its current leaders shall reincorporate themselves into the civil and political life of the country with legal guarantees of full liberty of organization, thus fulfilling point 1.2 of the basic accords.

3.4 YATAMA shall fulfill point 1.3 of the basic accords and hold a General Congress of its communities to promote full participation among the people of Yapti Tasba in the reconciliation process.

3.5 In accordance with the parties' commitment stated in the basic accords to advance peace and a solution to the conflict, YATAMA and the Government shall proceed to resume the negotiations on:

3.5.1 The demarcation of the traditional territory of Yapti Tasba. according to the concepts agreed upon in points 2.1 and 2.2 of the basic accords and according to the indications of point VI. The demarcation proposal presented by YATAMA shall serve as a basis of discussion and action.

3.5.2 The mechanisms for the Yapti Tasba autonomy project. which shall include the concepts established in point 1.1 of the basic accords pursuant to the directive of point VI of the same. YATAMA's proposed treaty of peace as well as the Government's autonomy statute shall be used as bases for the project.

3.5.3 The establishment of additional accords and policies concerning the rights of collective property of the peoples of Yapti Tashba over the subsurface and sea resources within the traditional territory, according to the agreement made by point 2.2 of the basic accords.

3.6 YATAMA proposes to promote the implementation of the other measures agreed upon by the February 2, 1988 accords. These measures include:

3.6.1 Freedom for the political prisoners of Yapti Tasba who are still jailed in the various detention facilities of the country.

3.6.2 Indemnification for the communal goods destroyed in the war since 1981 (point 3.2).

3.6.3 The voluntary return and resettlement of the internally and

externally displaced persons in their communities or origin and traditional areas (point 3.4).

3.6.4 The lifting of the restrictions of movement and free access to Yapti Tasba for the international community.

3.6.5 The reconstruction of the traditional communities destroyed during the conflict and the hurricane (point 3.2).

3.6.6 The securing of external financial, material and technical resources for the emergency situation and for reconstruction (points 2.3 and 3.3).

3.6.7 Facility for the activities of the humanitarian organizations (Red Cross, UNHCR and others) in Yapti Tasba (point 3.4).

3.6.8 Freedom for collecting and disseminating information concerning Yapti Tasba among the indigenous communities as well as at the international and national levels.

IV. SCHEDULE

YATAMA proposes the following schedule for implementing the above procedures:

As of April 15, 1989:

4.1 Return of the YATAMA leaders and cadres to the country.

4.2 The opening of dialogue with the government.

As of April 30, 1989:

4.3 The establishment of mechanisms to bring in external resources.

4.4 Compliance with the agreement on liberty for the political prisoners.

4.5 Annulment of the restrictions and guarantees of free access to Yapti Tasba.

4.6 Establishment of conditions to facilitate the activities on the part of humanitarian organizations.

4.7 Consummation of the definitive cease fire.

4.8 Formation of the Commission of refugees.

4.9 Compliance with guarantees for YATAMA's full freedom of movement and organization in the country.

4.10 Establishment of freedoms for collecting and disseminating information in and of Yapti Tasba.

As of May 15, 1989:

4.11 Demilitarization of the communities.

4.12 Establishment of mechanisms for the delivery of humanitarian aid to combatants.

4.13 Integration of the troops into their respective communities.

4.14 Realization of the new initiative for the return of the displaced persons.

4.15 Establishment of the mechanisms for the indemnification of the communal goods.

As of June 15, 1989:

4.16 Celebration of the YATAMA General Congress

4.17 Suspension of the Compulsory Military Service.

As of June 30, 1989:

Continuation of negotiations on:

4.18 The demarcation of traditional territory.

4.19 Mechanisms for the autonomy project.

4.20 Agreements and policies concerning natural resources.

4.21 The future of the self-defense troops.

As of September 30, 1989:

4.22 Accords concerning the fundamental issues contained in point 3.5, including indigenous participation in the electoral process of 1990.

V. GUARANTEES AND VERIFICATION

On the basis of the agreement for the creation and functioning of the Conciliation Commission composed of the Moravian Church and CEPAD, and on the basis of point V of the basic

accords concerning the same, YATAMA hereby ratifies the mandate of the Commission for the reconciliation process.

Likewise, YATAMA ratifies the participation of the countries acting as guarantors for the negotiations (Canada, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden), according to the same point V of the basic accords.

At the same time YATAMA invites these witness countries to serve as guarantors for the reconciliation process in Yapti Tasba and to solicit physical guarantees for the YATAMA leaders and to otherwise provide economic and political support for the implementation of this initiative.

Finally, YATAMA proposes to make possible that representatives of indigenous organizations and peoples, church groups, humanitarian organizations and peace groups maintain a permanent presence in Yapti Tasba in order to observe and support directly the reconciliation process.

VI. CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

We urge active solidarity on the part of our brethren indigenous peoples and nations, the friendly governments, the church organizations, and the other peace loving sectors and personalities of the international community interested in the indigenous cause. This solidarity must be expressed by moral, political and economic support in concrete ways which serve to guarantee the realization of this transcendental initiative. Without a doubt, general support on the part of the international community will be crucial to the success of the reconciliation effort in Yapti Tasba.

BRIEF PROFILE OF THE PEOPLES OF YAPTI TASBA

The eastern part of Nicaragua along the Caribbean, which is commonly known as the Atlantic Coast, is inhabited by various native peoples and other populations of the country. The Miskito, Sumo and Rama are the three indigenous peoples found on the Atlantic Coast. Others in the region include the creoles, garifunas and ladinos. The peoples of the Atlantic coast, each of which has its own culture, language and traditions, live in harmony. Their traditional territory is Yapti Tasba (Mother Earth), which was passed to them over millennia from their ancestors.

Yapti Tasba makes up approximately 38% of Nicaragua's territory and is inhabited by around 10% of the country's population. The indigenous peoples of the region comprise a population of some 145,000 people who live primarily in their traditional communities along the rivers, lagoons and coastal areas of the region. The creole population is around 40,000 Caribbean-English speaking people who live primarily in the urban centers in the southern part of the region.

The Garifuna (caribe) live in four communities located near Pearl Lagoon and are estimated at around 1,500 people. The ladino population totals some 80,000 inhabitants, is part of the Nicaraguan Mestizo majority and is concentrated primarily in the mining areas and in Bluefields.

Yapti Tasba has had an historical development entirely different from that of the rest of Nicaragua, a factor which today is manifest by its own cultural, social, economic and ideological reality. The territory and the indigenous peoples were not submitted to European colonization during the 16th through 19th centuries. Instead, the indigenous peoples enjoyed their self-determination until 1860, when external forces arbitrarily reduced their territory to a reserve with political and economic autonomous status. But even that status was abolished entirely as a result of military intervention on the part of forces from Managua in 1894.

From that time on, the indigenous peoples and the creoles have been subjected to a long period of marginalization, ethnocide and internal colonization by the liberal-conservative governments and the Somocista dictatorship. Furthermore, the natural resources of the Yapti Tasba were pillaged during the irrational exploitation by North American transnational companies acting in concert with Managua governments.

Nonetheless, our peoples always have resisted all colonial or neocolonial domination or submission, thus preserving their survival and historical continuity as the original peoples of the region. In 1973, ALPROMISU was founded as the first ethno-political movement for the defense and the promotion of the indigenous rights of the Miskito and Sumo to their lands and resources.

With the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, the peoples of the Yapti Tasba enthusiastically and with great expectation participated in the new national process, promoting their collective aspirations. In November of the same year, ALPROMSIU became MISURASATA with the inclusion of the Rama and the Sandinista term within the name of the organization. Although at the beginning it appeared to tolerate MISURASATA, the Sandinista Front from the start was in fact intent on substituting itself through mass organizations.

Similarly, Sandinistas were not sensitive to the aspirations of our people nor to the nature of our society. Instead, they reacted violently against the just claims of the indigenous peoples in Yapti Tasba. Nonetheless, during the first eighteen months the Sandinista government was in power the native peoples participated in various aspects of the revolutionary process of the country.

However, in February 1981, the Sandinista Front began to militarize the Yapti Tasba with the intention of submitting the indigenous peoples to their political-ideological system. But our Indian peoples by tradition have been independent of any government system; this is the essence of their millennial existence.

The indigenous participation in the revolution was based on its own perspective and interests, as an ally, with an autonomous character. But the Sandinista Front proceeded to impose by force its revolution on the Indians, even at the cost of destroying them as peoples. Thus for several years the peoples of Yapti Tasba have suffered at the hands of the Sandinista government the worst aggression in all their history.

As a result of the Sandinista aggression, the heroic Indian self-defense arose as a mechanism for the survival and dignity of the peoples of Yapti Tasba. This has been an indigenous struggle, by and for the peoples of Yapti Tasba. It has been an imposed and unbalanced war, without the effective understanding and solidarity of the international and national communities. In its origins, nature and objectives, it is a struggle different from any other armed resistance in Nicaragua. It is an independent struggle, carried on exclusively within the indigenous territories for the defense of the life and of the collective interest of the communities of Yapti Tasba.

Since 1984, given the failure of the military alternative and international pressure, the Sandinista Front has varied the form of its treatment and politics toward the peoples of Yapti Tasba. It is here that it admits its supposed errors and abuses against the indigenous peoples and proclaims a so-called amnesty by which it has freed from jail several hundred political prisoners from Yapti Tasba. Even though it does not entirely renounce its military option, it places greater emphasis on politics, using more sophisticated methods of aggression. The Sandinistas' politics of denial toward the historical indigenous aspirations remain at the core as they promote their so-called "Autonomy Statute," which really is more for international consumption.

Without a doubt this war has been very cruel and with a very high cost to the human and natural resources of the region. The seven years of armed confrontation have produced dramatic and unprecedented results in Yapti Tasba. Several thousand dead, over a hundred communities leveled, several thousand displaced Indians and refugees, a stream of cultural death, hunger and general misery-- these are just some of the immediate consequences of this imposed war.

The government likewise has lost many soldiers, resources and much of its infrastructure in these years of conflict caused by its own actions. Managua has gained nothing from its efforts to combat a people resolved in its legitimate defense of its territory and freedom.

Toward the end of 1984 a process of peace talks between high level representatives of MISURASATA and the Nicaragua government began. Four rounds of negotiation took place over eight months in Bogota and Mexico City. At the same time this process was ongoing, the government implemented its own unilateral effort under the banner of the so-called "Autonomy Statute." Regardless of its rhetoric, the Sandinista Front continued to demonstrate a lack of political will to recognize the historical rights of the indigenous peoples. Thus, in May of 1985, when the government thought it had gained the internal political space necessary for its unilateral actions, it proceeded to force an impasse in the peace talks.

In the beginning of 1988 a new round of talks began, this time between YATAMA and the government. This process was in the framework of the Esquipulas II peace effort. The indigenous peoples and the creoles had been forced to continue another three years in their struggle of self-defense in order to reinitiate the talks that had been at an impasse since 1985. This second period of negotiation, whose characteristics were much like those of the first, took place within the country over another five months. Once more the government demonstrated marked inflexibility and refused to assume the commitment necessary for a peace with justice with the peoples of Yapti Tasba. After three rounds of talks and with a basic accord, the government unilaterally has left suspended since June 1988 the negotiation effort.

CURRENT SITUATION

It is apparent that the internal situation in Yapti Tasba has been changing as a result of the peace efforts that have occurred since 1984. Each of these efforts has generated its own dynamic and opened better conditions for peace. Our communities and their self-defense troops always have responded favorably to these efforts through direct support of the search for peace with justice.

Those externally displaced (the refugees) have returned to the country in great numbers in support of their leaders and the organization. But there still are over forty thousand Indian refugees in Honduras, Costa Rica and various other countries. Also, many of the internally displaced have returned to their traditional communities, although several others still remain displaced in other parts of the country.

It is worth noting that because of the high cost of their historical struggle, the peoples of Yapti Tasba are exhausted and greatly impoverished. The majority of the self-defense troops of YATAMA, although without having changed their political position in favor of the indigenous cause, currently are operating under an in situ cease fire with the government armed forces. These Indian combatants, with their arms still in hand, subsist from the communities and with expectations for greater advances toward peace. Other indigenous armed groups also seek better conditions for their participation in the process.

But a simple cease fire in the Indian conflict has not created substantial advances in the reconciliation process in the region. We see that, although a de facto cessation in the armed conflicts between the Indian self-defense troops and the government armed forces has been observed in 1988, there have not been fundamental changes in the internal situation; instead, Indian suffering tending toward cultural death has been prolonged and has deepened even more.

With the impasse in the negotiations with YATAMA last June, the social dynamic has digressed. The Indian refugees have ceased their massive return and even many of the returned have again fled to Honduras. The other groups of Indian combatants have halted their participation in the search for peace in the region. The internal situation of the communities is characterized by greater suffering, hunger and destruction, with a tendency towards dangerous worsening of conditions as time goes on.

All the unilateral attempts by the government to impose its arbitrary "solution" have been unfruitful; instead they have been counterproductive in Yapti Tasba. The Sandinista front should give a real opportunity for peace with justice by facilitating openness and interaction among all of the sectors-- communities, combatants, the displaced, leaders and national authorities-- willing to forge a new relationship between Managua and the peoples of the region. Necessarily this relationship should be based on a new policy toward indigenous nations and other coastal sectors whose basic human rights and historical rights to land and self government should be recognized.

At the national level, a devastating social-economic crisis has the country in its grip even though the Esquipulas accords have dampened the military confrontation. The internal situation in the country has not made for improvements for the Nicaraguan people. Instead, the national situation dangerously and ever increasingly deteriorates. Frustration, desperation and

anguish mount day-by-day among Nicaraguan families as they struggle for mere subsistence. The government should allow a real opening and liberty for the people to save the country.

At the international level we see that the Central American peace process has achieved detaining the Nicaraguan war and with this there has been an opening in the road toward democracy and national reconciliation. At the same time all indicates that the insurgent groups do not dispose of the conditions necessary to reinstate their armed resistance. The international support for peace in Nicaragua and in Central America is real and complete. Furthermore, the Nicaraguan people themselves demand peace with liberty and effective democracy. The opportunity for the much wanted peace in Nicaragua is apparent.

YATAMA now promotes an indigenous initiative as a legitimate and imperative effort for the process of reconciliation in Yapti Tasba. The recent natural disaster-- Hurricane Joan-- which assaulted the Central American Isthmus and devastated in particular southern Yapti Tasba, has come to manifest the urgency for the reconciliation of this initiative. Our communities, which have been subjected to continuous destruction by the war, on top of the recent natural disaster, perceive their very survival as native peoples to be dangerously threatened.

It is imperative that a greater effort be promoted on the part of the indigenous movement, with international support, to relieve the current suffering and stop the extensive destruction. The concrete necessities that derive from this initiative include:

(1) Guarantees for the physical security of the indigenous and creole leaders and cadres for their return to the country

(2) Political guarantees for the reincorporation of YATAMA in the political life of the country

(3) Financial guarantees for the emergency situation and reconstruction of Yapti Tasba

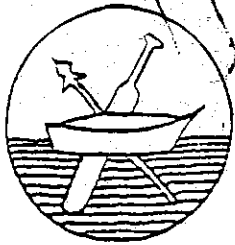
We thus urge our brethren indigenous nations and peoples, the friendly and guarantor governments, organizations and churches, and the international human rights and humanitarian organizations to effectively participate in promoting and providing concrete moral, political and economic support for the implementation of this reconciliation effort in Yapti Tasba.

San Jose, Costa Rica
February 1989

YATAMA PRESS AND INFORMATION

For more information, write to: YATAMA, Apto. 437, Pavas 1200, Costa Rica, Central America.

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Yapti Tasba Masraka nani Aslatakanka

February 28, 1989

YATAMA
REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA

Rudy Ryser
728-20012 P.L.S.W.
Lynnwood, WA.
USA 98036

Dear Brother Rudy:

Greetings from your indian brothers and sisters in Nicaragua.

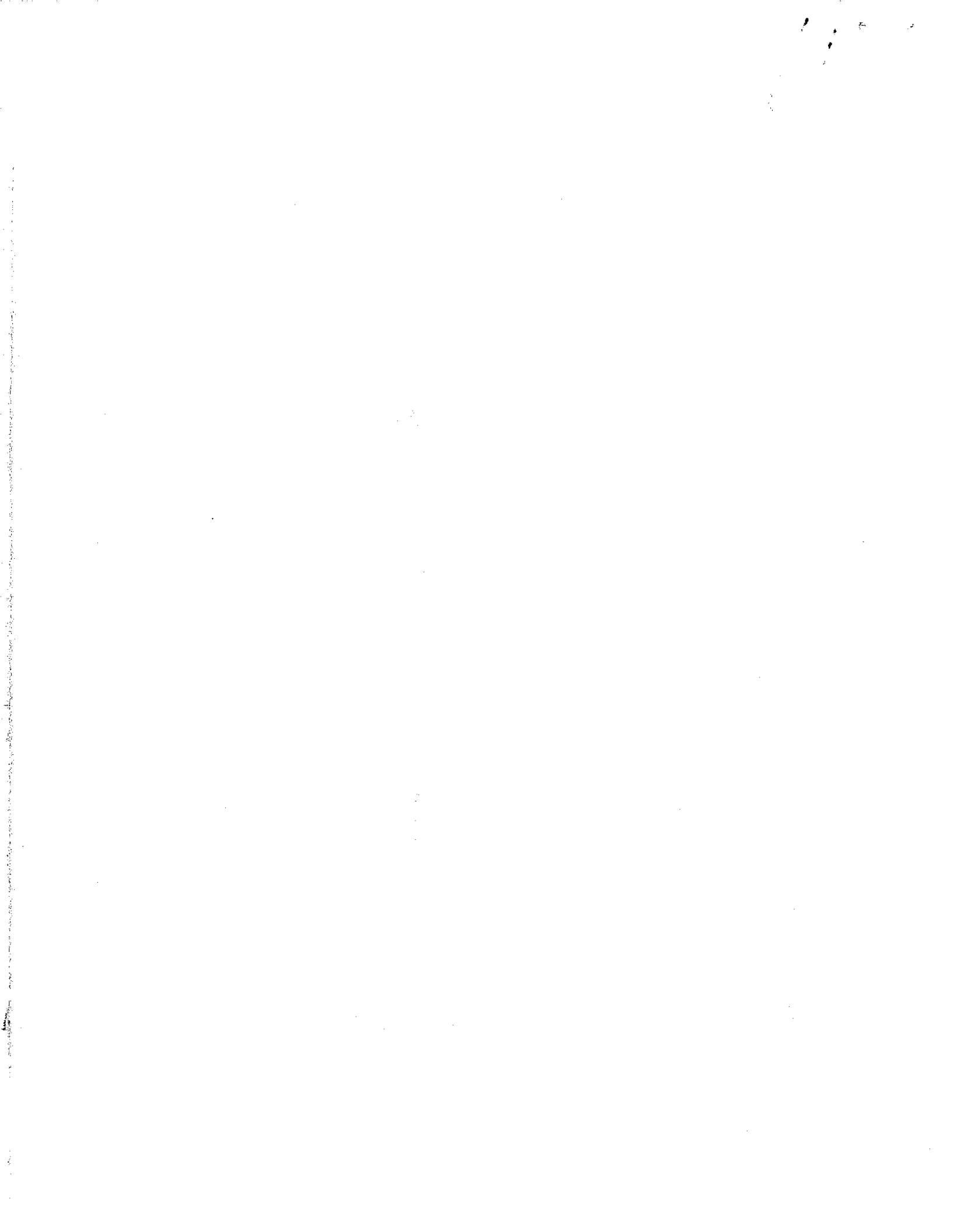
Enclosed is the text of our Organization's "Indigenous Initiative for Reconciliation in Yapti Tasba". This initiative is within the framework of the Central American peace process promoted by the presidents of the region. Furthermore, our effort is founded on the basic accords entered into with the Nicaraguan Government on 2 February 1988. We also enclose a copy of our 'Brief Profile of the Peoples of Yapti Tasba' in which you find information on the current situation of the indians in Nicaragua.

We have delivered this initiative to the five Central American presidents prior to their summit in El Salvador. Thus, we consider that the result of this meeting in principle created an interesting context for the implementation of our peace proposal.

The thrust of our peace initiative is to open and consolidate a process of reconciliation based on the return of the Indian leadership to Nicaragua. Of course this effort includes reassuming negotiations with the Government on the fundamental issues of land, resources and self-government.

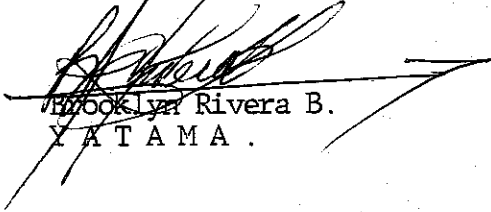
An essential element for the implementation of the indigenous initiative is that YATAMA secure active moral, political and material support on the part of the indigenous peoples and organizations worldwide. To that end, we appeal to your community or organization to:

1. Send letters of militant support for the Indigenous Initiative to the Nicaraguan Government, urging it to respect the integrity of YATAMA and the physical security of the indian leaders.
2. Send representatives to accompany the YATAMA leaders in their return trip to Nicaragua.
3. Continue to send representatives to conduct periodic visits of our territory, Yapti Tasba, in order to monitor and assist in the reconciliation process.
4. Help establish and become part of an international network of permanent solidarity for the Indigenous Initiative.
5. Contribute material and financial support for the reincorporation of YATAMA and the reconstruction of Yapti Tasba.



We thank you in advance for your support in our common cause of peace with justice for all indigenous peoples .

In Indian solidarity and unity.



Brooklyn Rivera B.
YATAMA .

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