

# AMAZON FRONTLINES

2023 Annual Report





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# LETTER FROM OUR CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: MITCH ANDERSON



Dear Friends,

**Can you imagine a world where people peacefully choose not to destroy the world? Can you imagine a future where people decide to protect the future? Can you imagine a present where we decide to leave the oil in the ground? Such a decision would not only allow life to continue to flourish, it would also create a precedent and an inspiration for others to make similar choices: to leave the gold dust inside the mountain, to leave the trees standing, to leave the rain in the aquifers and the rivers.**

These words were published in the Guardian by our co-founder Nemonte Nenquimo in August 2023 two days before a historic national referendum in Ecuador. On August 20th, Ecuadorians voted "yes" to keep all the oil under the Yasuní National Park—one of the most biodiverse forests on our planet—permanently beneath the soil. This was a landmark victory for the Amazon and global climate democracy. Our team partnered with the broad civil society movement Yasunidos, as well as numerous Indigenous federations, in the tireless decade-long grassroots organizing campaign that preceded the victory. The Yasuní win is not just a victory for Ecuador, but the successful referendum offers an organizing and legal model that could be replicated and adapted around the world. Amazon Frontlines is honored to be part of this monumental achievement for Yasuní and our planet.

**Our elders and our youth are so happy to finally return to our home, our spiritual heartland where our myths and the spirits from other dimensions await us. Although colonizers have tried to uproot us from this territory, they have failed. Now we have officially been able to recognize our land for the Siekopai, the Multi-Colored People.**

These are the words of the Siekopai leader Justino Piaguaje after winning a historic court ruling in November 2023 to reclaim their 42,000-hectare ancestral territory of Pë'këya. As with the Yasuní referendum, the Siekopai court victory was the result of years of strategic preparation and collaborative work including community organizing, Indigenous territorial mapping, gathering, transcribing and translating the testimonies of elders in addition to legal strategizing and finally litigation. Like Yasuní, this achievement does not stand alone, but sets a legal precedent for Indigenous communities across 1.5 million hectares of rainforest to recover ownership of their ancestral territories currently designated as National Parks in Ecuador. Our team immediately began working to further utilize this precedent with new legal action in partnership with our Indigenous allies.

2023 was a year of joyous, transformative victories like the above, but also of disturbing and unrelenting new threats. Fires continued to burn across the Amazon, particularly in Brazil. Violence raged in Colombia. Political crisis gripped Ecuador, with a new and inexperienced president declaring a state of emergency, refusing to comply with the Yasuni referendum, and planning to push forward with oil and mining across the country.

Our efforts and our collective action with our Indigenous allies and partners are needed now more than ever. To sustain and expand our victories for the planet, we must continue to fight for the land, for the Indigenous cultures that have cared for and protected the rainforest for millenia. Looking towards 2024, we are scaling our organization and partnerships to meet the challenges ahead. And there will be many.

**WE COULDN'T DO ANY OF THIS WITHOUT THE ONGOING TRUST AND SOLIDARITY OF OUR GLOBAL NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS! THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US AND BEING A PART OF THIS MOVEMENT TO SECURE INDIGENOUS GUARDIANSHIP OF THE AMAZON.**



# WHO WE ARE

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**WE ARE A GLOBALLY-BACKED,  
INDIGENOUS-LED PARTNERSHIP  
THAT BUILDS POWER WITH  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO  
PROTECT THEIR LANDS AND WAY  
OF LIFE IN THE AMAZON.**



## OUR MODEL IS SIMPLE: PARTNERSHIP

Indigenous leaders, communities and nations are fighting to protect their lands and their cultures. Together, Amazon Frontlines and the Ceibo Alliance ensure they have the tools, resources and networks needed to win these battles.



### CEIBO ALLIANCE

Ceibo Alliance is an unprecedented alliance of Indigenous nationalities working together to create strong leaders, strong communities and strong organizations.



### AMAZON FRONTLINES

Amazon Frontlines is an interdisciplinary team of human rights lawyers, journalists, filmmakers, scientists and activists who live and work in the Amazon rainforest alongside our Indigenous partners.



### INDIGENOUS NATIONS

We work in partnership with the Kofán, Kichwa, Siekopai, Shuar, Siona, and Waorani nations in the Upper Amazon in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia.

# 2023 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

**KICKING BIG OIL OUT OF THE YASUNI RAINFOREST:** We supported a national coalition campaign that brought together civil society, youth activists and the Indigenous movement from across Ecuador to protect the most biodiverse forest on the planet from further extraction and set a historic precedent for the democratization of climate politics. **Impact: A constitutional order to shutdown 12 oil platforms and 225 wells, keeping 726 million barrels of oil in the ground, 2 uncontacted tribes able to move more freely across their territory.**



**LAND BACK IN ECUADOR:** Secured title over 42,000 hectares of rainforest in the heart of Siekopai ancestral territory, establishing a landmark precedent for Indigenous land tenure; Launched a coalition effort alongside Indigenous organizations CONAIE and CONFENIE and the Tenure Facility to open pathways for titling Indigenous territories in National parks in Ecuador. **Impact: game changing opportunity established to title 1.5 million hectares of land and strengthen Indigenous protection of some of the most climate critical forests on Earth.**

**LAND BACK IN PERU:** We have expanded our frontlines legal & advocacy strategies with Indigenous partners in Peru to reclaim Indigenous ownership over ancestral territories and strengthen bi-national coalition-building in Peru and Ecuador for Land Back. **Impact: A roadmap to directly protect 600,000 hectares of biodiverse and threatened territories in the Peruvian Amazon and set legal precedents with the potential to ensure greater protections over 4 million hectares of Indigenous rainforest territories.**



**NEW LAND DEFENSE TRAINING NETWORK:** We collaborated with diverse Indigenous nations, communities and Indigenous political organizations to launch a novel training program for on-the-ground territorial defenders. **Impact: 43 defenders from 24 communities building the skills, tools and regional networks to protect 1,000,000 hectares of forest that house over 590 metric tons of carbon.**



**DECOLONIZING EDUCATION:** Broke ground on innovative intercultural education models with three Indigenous nations to counter racist and neocolonial schooling systems imposed for decades on Indigenous peoples. **Impact: 16 communities reimagining education for Indigenous youth that combines Western knowledge with Indigenous cultural practices, forest knowledge and learning systems, including: one curriculum piloted and two new curricula designed serving three Indigenous nations; 120 culturally-specific learning materials produced for use in the classroom; 29 local teachers trained in intercultural pedagogy; 2 traditional school houses built; and regular lobbying efforts with state authorities to demand increased investment in Indigenous education.**

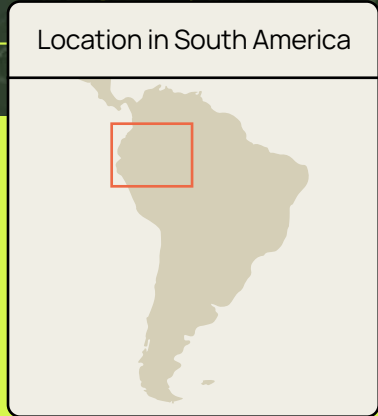
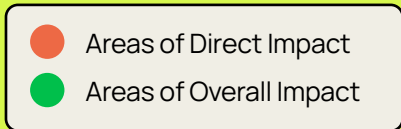
**ELEVATING AND CENTERING INDIGENOUS CLIMATE LEADERSHIP:** Leveraged global digital & media campaigns to win climate victories, resource frontline battles and provide a platform for Indigenous leadership. **Impact: More than 2 million impressions through social media, more than 200 articles published about our work, including 3 Op Eds by Indigenous partners, generated critical awareness and resources to support defenders threatened by armed conflict, Indigenous partners won the St Andrews Prize for the Environment, the Lush Spring Prize, and our co-founder was named on the TIME100 Climate List.**



**RESOURCING THE MOVEMENT:** Bridging gaps in the philanthropic sector by funding Indigenous-led strategies and solutions on the frontlines of the climate crisis. **Impact: \$2,146,236 channeled directly to Indigenous initiatives and organizations across the Upper Amazon.**



# AMAZON FRONTLINES' AREA OF IMPACT



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# LAND BACK IN THE AMAZON



TERRITORIO ANCESTRAL SIEKOPAMI

Indigenous peoples are the guardians of an estimated 40% to 50% of the remaining intact forests of the Amazon. Their knowledge, stewardship and life or death commitment to protecting their homes is keeping the forests standing. A 2021 FAO report found that rainforest territories protected by Indigenous peoples **experience 50% lower deforestation rates** compared to any other land, while also preventing the release of 42.8 to 59.7 million metric tons (MtC) of CO2 emissions annually. Yet across the region, tens of millions of hectares of Indigenous ancestral lands have been illegally claimed and left vulnerable to exploitation by state governments and extractive industries.

Amazon Frontlines sees Indigenous land tenure as one of the most effective and comprehensive tools to protect the remaining standing forest and begin to address the ongoing violence of colonization and genocide. Through innovative community-based mapping technologies and pioneering legal strategies, we help Indigenous communities file titling claims that secure Indigenous land tenure across hundreds of thousands of hectares of primary rainforest across the Upper Amazon, halting the expansion of resource extraction across these forests. In 2023, we made historic strides alongside Indigenous communities in Ecuador and Peru to secure collective land titles and get their Land Back.



# ECUADOR

Amazon Frontlines' work to secure land tenure for Indigenous communities in Ecuador involves challenging government practices that deny granting property titles to Indigenous lands within national parks. These territories span 1.5 million hectares of forests nationwide. Our goal is to secure Indigenous title over these lands that are rightfully theirs, thereby enforcing Indigenous rights, retaining protected status but with greater incentives for Indigenous use, management and protection of key wildlife corridors, climate-critical forests and watersheds.

## RECLAIMING PĒ'KĒYA, THE SIEKOPAI'S ANCESTRAL TERRITORY IN ECUADOR



With a population of 800 in Ecuador and 1,200 in Peru, the Siekopai are on the brink of cultural and physical extinction. Living on both sides of the border, the Siekopai are currently waging legal battles to recover more than 200,000 hectares of land that were stolen from their ancestors.

Alongside the Siekopai nation, we presented a landmark land titling demand in September 2022 to recover ownership of 42,000 hectares of Siekopai ancestral land in Ecuador illegally turned into a national park in the 1970s.

On May 30, 2023, Siekopai authorities received a three-judge panel for the first ever judicial hearing in Siekopai territory. In this appeals hearing, Siekopai community members presented oral testimony about the importance of the ancestral territory, and more than 20 amicus curiae briefs were presented by experts including a former judge from Ecuador's Constitutional Court, ethno-botanists, historians and other Indigenous communities including the Kofán and Waorani. State authorities from the Ministry of Environment and the General Prosecutor's Office participated virtually.

On November 24, 2023, the Constitutional court ruled in favor of the Siekopai's case, recognizing their traditional ownership and right to reclaim their 42,000-hectare ancestral territory of PĒ'kĒya. This truly historic victory opens a pathway for the Siekopai to restore their intergenerational relationship to their sacred homelands and marks a major stepping stone in the Siekopai's binational struggle for the reunification of their ancestral territory. As Siekopai leader Justino Piaguaje reflected after the court's decision:

**“Today we start a new chapter of Siekopai history. We will return to PĒ'kĒya, our life-sustaining center, to keep feeling and being Siekopai. We have recovered the house, now we need to rebuild it with the vision of our elders.”**

The Siekopai's court victory has set a landmark legal precedent for Indigenous communities across 1.5 million hectares of Ecuadorian rainforest that have been dispossessed and “parked out” of their ancestral lands, who now possess a potent tool to recover ownership of their rainforest territories through titling.

## RECLAIMING THE KOFÁN OF SINANGOE'S ANCESTRAL TERRITORY IN ECUADOR

We are also waging a case alongside the Kofán of Sinangoe over territory in another national park, supporting the community to file a titling claim originally submitted in October 2021 to recover 63,000 hectares of their ancestral land. In 2023, we focused on building external pressure on the Ministry of Environment to urgently advance Sinangoe's titling claim, which is currently under review. On October 31, 2023, a delegation of over 50 Kofán community members protested outside the Ministry of the Environment in Quito to urgently advance the case, with our lawyers requesting an immediate inspection, submitting various supporting legal documents, developing technical assessments and reports, and drafting a property agreement that was shared with the Ministry to speed up the process. 2024 will be critical as we seek to build on the recent titling victory of the Siekopai to achieve a favorable resolution for Sinangoe's case.



## IMPROVING ECUADORIAN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO FACILITATE INDIGENOUS TENURE

Amazon Frontlines is partnering with both Siekopai and Kofán plaintiffs and Ecuadorian Indigenous federations CONAIE and CONFENIAE to finalize a legislative proposal that aims to improve national frameworks in Ecuador to facilitate the granting of property titles for Indigenous people over their ancestral territories currently designated as national parks. The proposal draws from the successful Siekopai case and the ongoing Sinangoe claim, and is being developed in collaboration with the organization Tenure Facility. In 2024, assemblies will be convened across the Ecuadorian highlands and the Amazon to finalize the proposal, which will then be presented to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment to facilitate the return of government-owned lands to Indigenous nations throughout the country.



# PERU

In recent years, Amazon Frontlines has expanded its efforts beyond Ecuador, working closely with Siekopai communities in Peru to map and title their vast rainforest territories. This work is part of our broader mission to build bi-national coalitions for Land Back in Peru and Ecuador, aiming to reunify Indigenous nations like the Siekopai, who have been divided by modern state borders. To advance this work, we are expanding our partnerships with Peruvian nonprofits and Indigenous organizations, with the ultimate goal of removing administrative barriers to land titling and setting a precedent for Indigenous land rights across Peru.

In 2023, we have been building partnerships with the Amazonian Indigenous federation in Peru AIDSESP, with the regional Indigenous organization ORPIO, the Siekopai national organization OISPE, as well as nonprofits like Institute for Legal Defense and Rainforest Foundation US, in order to form a broad coalition effort that will ensure our success alongside the Siekopai, securing a national impact on policy that will benefit all Indigenous peoples in Peru and bolster the protection of their territories.

## RECLAIMING SIEKOPAI ANCESTRAL TERRITORY IN PERU:



In 2000, Peru's government ruled that all forests nationwide could be used for commercial exploitation, and began granting logging concessions over approximately 24.5 million hectares of Indigenous land in the Amazon watershed, permitting rights for commercial actors and thus essentially nullifying Indigenous legal claims to formal ownership or title. Amazon Frontlines has been working hand-in-hand with the Siekopai nation in Peru to upend existing laws that violate Indigenous people's right to their ancestral lands, in efforts to ensure Indigenous communities in the country are granted full rights to access, use and govern their ancestral territories.

In December 2021, in partnership with Peru-based Institute for Legal Defense, we supported three Siekopai communities in Peru – San Martin, Mashunta and Wajoya – to file a lawsuit against the Peruvian government to recover ownership over 120,000 hectares of Siekopai ancestral land, claiming that existing laws that establish government ownership over Indigenous territories violate the Indigenous internationally-recognized right to their ancestral lands. After a first dismissal of the lawsuit in 2022, we developed an appeal that was presented to the court to reopen the case, and successfully secured a hearing for April 2023.



30 Siekopai representatives and plaintiffs were at the hearing, along with Amazon Frontlines and Ceibo Alliance staff, and 7 state representatives. If successful, this case will set a historic legal precedent and clear obstacles in the efforts of Indigenous nations across Peru to secure legal recognition for their ancestral territories, with potential impact over more than 4 million hectares of Indigenous territories in Peru.

## REMOVING LOGGING ALLOCATIONS FROM INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES IN PERU:

As a complementary strategy, we are also working with the Siekopai nation to remove “Permanent Production Forest allocations” (BPPs) from their territories in Peru, which allow for rampant logging across Indigenous lands and hamper Indigenous peoples’ capacity to register title over extensions of their ancestral territories. In 2023, we applied consistent pressure on the relevant government agencies (including Peru’s forestry authority SERFOR, the regional government of the Loreto province, and the public registry SUNARP) to honor their commitment made in 2022 to remove BPPs from these territories. BPPs cover 30% of Siekopai land, thereby enabling Siekopai communities to reclaim ownership of 70,000 hectares of their ancestral territories. A successful outcome could establish a precedent for removing BPPs from other Indigenous territories in Peru.



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# SECURING COLLECTIVE RIGHTS THROUGH STRATEGIC LITIGATION







Guaranteeing the right of frontline Indigenous communities to decide what happens on their lands is a key strategy to halt the expansion of the extractive frontier in the Amazon. Despite the international recognition of Indigenous rights and their incorporation into constitutions of various South American governments, these rights are often trampled or go unenforced. At Amazon Frontlines, we wage hard-hitting legal battles and advocacy campaigns with our Indigenous partners that upend bad laws and close loopholes, jam destructive projects, and advance Indigenous rights, regionally and globally, through legal precedent and improved legal frameworks.

This year, a wave of political instability and organized crime rocked the region, posing an existential threat to Indigenous peoples and their rainforest territories. In Colombia, the reignition of armed conflict due to a territorial dispute between dissident guerilla groups over drug trafficking routes in the southern region of Putumayo, where our Siona partners live, has displaced and forced communities into a state of fear and confinement. In Ecuador, following a special election in October 2023, right wing president Daniel Noboa was elected on promises to combat crime and liberalize the economy. Since being in power, Noboa has continually affirmed his commitment to expand resource extraction to strengthen the Ecuadorian economy, especially oil and mining. This is all against the backdrop of rapidly intensifying criminal activity across Ecuador, with organized groups having strong ties to extractive industries.

In 2023, Amazon Frontlines doubled down on our strategies that combine litigation, advocacy and grassroots organizing to uphold Indigenous peoples' rights and counter emerging threats. Among our most significant achievements, we successfully organized and campaigned with Ecuadorian civil society to permanently ban oil drilling in the Yasuni rainforest in Eastern Ecuador and provided emergency relief and humanitarian aid to Siona communities in the midst of armed conflict.

## KICKING BIG OIL OUT OF THE YASUNI RAINFOREST

In a historic referendum on August 20, 2023, after a decades-long battle in courtrooms, on the streets, and in the forest, the Ecuadorian people voted to permanently ban oil drilling in the Yasuni rainforest, ancestral homeland of the Waorani people and home to the last remaining Indigenous people living in voluntary isolation in Ecuador, the Tagaeri and Taromenane. This represents a landmark victory for the Amazon rainforest, for Indigenous peoples, and for our global climate. Amazon Frontlines joined forces with the Ecuadorian civil society platform Yasunidos, youth climate activists, celebrities and Ecuador's Indigenous movement to wage a hard hitting campaign to educate Ecuadorians across the country about the importance of this forest, the Indigenous communities that call it home and its rich biodiversity. As a result, 60% of Ecuadorians voted to protect this life-giving forest.

The Yasuni sentence officially prohibits oil drilling in the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) oil project, keeping over 726 million barrels of oil underground and 345 million tons of carbon from releasing into the atmosphere. The outcome also protects over 200,000 hectares of some of the most biodiverse rainforests on Earth by blocking the growth of the ITT oil



block, which has been responsible for 23 petrochemical spills since 2015, as well as a marked expansion of the agricultural frontier and illegal hunting from the construction of new roads. The Ecuadorian government is now required to halt drilling and dismantle 12 oil platforms and 225 wells that are currently operational within one year, as well as carry out significant remediation and reforestation.

This victory holds immense significance for the Amazon rainforest, Indigenous communities, and global climate change efforts. The decision presents a profound challenge to Ecuador's extractive model, which has operated unchecked, polluting millions of hectares of Indigenous rainforest territories for over fifty years. It also fuels the ongoing debate about the nation's transition toward a fossil-fuel-free future, offering a hopeful illustration of what can be achieved in the battle against climate change. This also marks a historic milestone for climate democracy, with citizens directly voting to preserve a critically important region for our planet. It sets a compelling precedent that could inspire similar actions elsewhere, demonstrating the vulnerability of extractive industries and the power Indigenous people and all citizens across the world hold to keep oil in the ground.



Finally, this victory underscores the strength of coalition building: our movement has brought together a diverse array of groups in Ecuador around a shared purpose, fundamentally shifting public opinion about a fossil fuel-dependent economy and sparking a widespread movement against fossil fuels throughout the country. As Amazon Frontlines co-founder Nemonte Nenquimo stated:

**“Although Big Oil and politicians think that they can decide over our lives, we can defeat them through unity; they cannot dominate us when we act brave as a society, thinking about the future and our children. Ecuador said NO to the entire model of death and destruction of the oil companies. We will continue to be vigilant that they come out of our forest and territory. We will do this part of the fight with the joy of everything we won and all we said YES to.”**

The victory in Yasuni, while a major blow to the oil industry, also opens up monumental and urgent challenges ahead. In light of serious political instability and a crippled economy, the Ecuadorian government and its oil industry are now pivoting to target oil reserves in other areas of the rainforest. With 85% of remaining reserves in Indigenous territories, this marks an existential threat to Indigenous peoples and the last standing primary forests in the region. As we look ahead, we are working in tandem with the Indigenous movement to defend this victory by holding the government accountable to the sentence by ceasing extraction and removing all oil infrastructure from the ITT block within one year. We are also working with our Indigenous partners to use the precedent to boost efforts regionally for the permanent protection of the Amazon rainforest and climate-critical Indigenous territories, and advocate for a just transition away from fossil fuels.

## ENSURING ENFORCEMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS RIGHT TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT



Alongside the Waorani of Pastaza in 2019 and Kofán of Sinangoe in 2022, we secured precedent-setting victories in the Ecuadorian provincial and Constitutional courts that enshrine the Indigenous right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) - or the right of Indigenous peoples to decide the future of their territories - at the national level. Despite these rulings, rampant resource extraction is still taking place in both their territories without their consent. In September 2022, Amazon Frontlines lodged two enforcement cases that are still under review by the Constitutional Court, urging for comprehensive investigations into these ongoing rights violations and demanding compliance and effective remediation by State and private actors. Throughout 2023, we ramped up pressure for decisive resolution of these cases through combined legal, communication and advocacy strategies

involving the submission of key legal documents and evidence, as well as public information requests to reveal breaches of FPIC as inscribed in Ecuador's Constitution. Alongside this process, we advanced complementary litigation campaigns to uphold the Waorani and Kofan's rights collective rights as they struggle against destructive development projects in their respective territories:

- Road Construction Threat in Waorani Territory:** In 2022, the Ecuadorian government planned to build a major road through Waorani territory in Pastaza, threatening 375,000 hectares of primary rainforest. After ongoing legal action in 2023 alongside the Waorani Organization of Pastaza (OWAP), the representative organization of over 30 Waorani communities in the Ecuadorian province, the project was temporarily halted in June 2023 due to improper consultation. With our lawyers representing OWAP, we delivered testimonies from Waorani community members of rights violations directly to the judge responsible for the case with the goal of indefinitely putting an end to the project.



- Ecological Area Designation in Waorani Territory:** In 2016-2017, Pastaza's government started an ordinance process to designate the entire province as a conservation zone. In June 2023, we worked with OWAP to directly oppose this redesignation, advocating instead for their "Plan de Vida" (Life Plan): which is a collective visioning of Indigenous sovereignty and the ecological reparation of their territory. Amazon Frontlines' lawyers have requested public information regarding full compliance in the original consultation process. As of yet, the information has still not been released. We will use that evidence to enforce collective rights to FPIC and to block the redesignation of Waorani lands as conservation zones, which robs Indigenous people of their governance and decision-making over their territories.

- **Hydroelectric Project Affecting Kofán Territory:** Since the 2013 construction of the Hidroalto dam on the Due River in northern Ecuador, Kofán communities have been fighting for their rights to FPIC and the enforcement of government agreements. On September 21, 2023, analysis of newly obtained documents by our lawyers revealed that no prior consultation was conducted, and the Kofán community of Sinangoe was not recognized as adversely affected by the dam. Additionally, measures agreed upon in 2012 to protect fish populations were not upheld, leading to a decline in fish and a negative impact on local ecology. We launched a demand for more information from the Ministry of the Environment about the initial participatory process of the communities directly affected, and will formally challenge the lack of compliance with the measures to maintain the health and reproduction of fish populations throughout the watershed.



## A TRIBUTE TO KOFÁN LAND DEFENDER EDUARDO MENDUA

Indigenous leaders who stand up to resource extraction in their territories and threaten the economic interests of the state, corporations and organized criminal groups, face enormous risks to their safety and wellbeing.

On February 26, 2023, our friend Eduardo Mendua, Kofán Indigenous leader and anti-oil activist, was murdered by masked gunmen in his home community of Dureno. Mendua was the Director of International Relations at Ecuador's national Indigenous federation CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador). He led his community's resistance against the entry of state oil company Petroecuador into the last untouched part of Kofán territory, covering over 9,500 hectares of primary rainforest, where they attempted to drill 30 oil wells on three platforms without the consent of the community.

**'WE ARE NOT ABOUT TO CEDE AN INCH OF OUR TERRITORY SO THAT THE OIL COMPANIES DESTROY THE SPIRITUAL BEINGS AND INVISIBLE PEOPLE OF OUR FORESTS, RIVERS, LAGOONS, SACRED PLACES, RAVINES, MEDICINE AND TREES' - WROTE MENDUÁ, JUST HOURS BEFORE HIS KILLING.**

In partnership with our Kofán partners and the Indigenous movement in Ecuador, we are demanding justice for Eduardo Mendúa, his family and his people. Amazon Frontlines is committed to strengthening security measures and visibility strategies for Indigenous leaders, who are being targeted for holding governments and corporations accountable for rights violations and the systematic destruction of the Amazon rainforest.



## SIONA SURVIVAL IN PUTUMAYO, COLOMBIA

The Siona of Putumayo are located along the border between Ecuador and Colombia in an area beset by narco violence, organized criminal activities and resource extraction. Throughout the year, we continued our accompaniment of the Siona people of Putumayo in legal cases before Colombia's Land Restitution Court and Special Jurisdiction for Peace, to reassert control over their 58,000 hectare territory and advocate for reparations for crimes committed against their people and territory by the Colombian military and paramilitary groups.

- Armed Conflict & Emergency Response:** With changes in the exportation of drug routes switching from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean via the Amazon, the Colombian department of Putumayo is now seeing an explosion of hostilities as it finds itself in the middle of aggressions between two irregular armed groups. Since mid-September 2023, Siona communities have faced existential threats by the reignition and escalation of conflict in the region, which has resulted in the displacement of more than 1,100 families, including Siona communities of Buenavista and Piñuña Blanco, that are now confined without access to land, farming, fishing, foraging, transport or communication. This state of insecurity has severely impacted their livelihoods and overall wellness, as well as halting their education and cultural revitalization initiatives.



Amazon Frontlines worked directly with the Siona Indigenous councils to strategically address the humanitarian situation on the ground, with urgent alerts and SOS documents being sent out to the most relevant Colombian institutions demanding humanitarian aid, opening up of negotiation processes and the provision of education, healthcare and crucial supplies to the Siona communities under threat. In late September we coordinated a working meeting with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the entry of a United Nations mission to the Siona Reservation of Buenavista to make official reports on the unfolding situation and add significant pressure for national and international response.

We also provided on-the-ground humanitarian aid and financial resources, mobilizing significant emergency funds from international allies Rainforest Action Network, Land is Life and Avaaz, to continue ensuring the safety and support of Siona communities, including the evacuation of highly threatened families and unaccompanied minors, as well as the construction of community infrastructure and refugee shelters.

**We will continue to uphold our commitment to the physical and cultural survival of the Siona people, as well as their tireless struggle to recover their ancestral territory in the face of grave unfolding threats.**

## LEGISLATIVE VICTORY FOR THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

In a stunning victory in March 2023, after years of persistent organizing by communities in the Intag Valley in northwestern Ecuador, a provincial court ruled in favor of the Rights of Nature and local communities, who challenged mining concessions that threatened their health and an endangered ecosystem that provided water for the entire region. The Intag Valley contains 80,000 hectares of mega biodiverse cloud forest and 21 pristine rivers.



In the short term, this means that mining activities are suspended and the environmental license to mine in this area has been revoked. For the long term, this is a historic win for the Rights of Nature – a crucial recognition of that right in practice. This case establishes a precedent that can be used across the country to protect the rights of nature, and the right of communities to a healthy environment and proper environmental consultation. The case was filed by Ecuador's Human Rights Alliance (EHRA), with Amazon Frontlines' lawyers playing important roles as both plaintiffs and representatives of impacted communities. Our legal team traveled back and forth from the Intag Valley over months, where they worked closely with community members to prepare strategies and legal arguments, gather evidence and prepare community witnesses to testify in court. We were up against Ecuador's Ministry of Energy and Mines and Ministry of Environment, Ecuador's national mining company (ENAMI), and Chile's national mining company (CODELCO)—who fought hard to block this victory.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH ECUADOR'S HUMAN RIGHTS ALLIANCE (EHRA)

EHRA was established in 2019 with the initial goal to monitor and respond to human rights abuses during Ecuador's 2019 Indigenous strike, and is now made up of 15 organizations, jointly addressing emblematic human rights cases nationwide. Amazon Frontlines' role within the organization involves monitoring and responding to Indigenous rights violations across the Upper Amazon. This includes conducting investigations, filing reports to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), making public statements, and advancing court trials on identified cases, both nationally and internationally. Cases and reports in 2023 also included advancing the free right to abortion, the security of human rights defenders across the country, the shutting down of gas flares in the province of Sucumbios, as well as challenging a series of decrees that lower standards for consulting communities when proposing development projects, especially those that undermine the collective rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent.



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# DEFENDING INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES IN REAL TIME





Modern cartography tools including GPS, satellite imagery, and aerial drones allow Indigenous communities to demarcate their territories, and show historic battle sites, ancestral migration routes, ancient village grounds, current communities, gardens, orchards, creeks, and hunting trails deep within the rainforest. This process brings together elders and youth to walk their forest territories together, while elders share their knowledge of the territories and youth capture this knowledge using offline mapping tools and GPS, while developing a deeper understanding of the importance of their territories. In land tenure legal cases, this digital cartography has become an invaluable tool for demonstration of Indigenous claims to ancestral territories in the rainforests of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. When in the hands of trained Indigenous guards, these same technologies also allow communities to monitor vast territories and to identify and stop illegal incursions in real time, before irreparable environmental damage occurs. Territorial monitoring is also used to collect evidence to back legal cases against extraction.



Since 2015, Amazon Frontlines has supported Indigenous land patrols from the Kofán, Siona, Siekopai, and Waorani Indigenous nations to establish effective territorial monitoring and mapping strategies to protect over 700,000 hectares of primary rainforest in the Upper Amazon between Ecuador, Colombia and Peru. In 2023 alone, we supported 13 land patrols bringing together over 190 Indigenous land defenders to carry out more than 250 critical monitoring outings. Our team was on the ground, providing direct support on more than 40 of these outings. We also delivered 26 intensive workshops on Indigenous territorial rights, cutting-edge monitoring technologies, data management, field safety, and peaceful conflict resolution. But our impact goes beyond training—by supporting Indigenous mappers and monitors to take on stronger governance roles, we are helping them to reclaim their rightful place as enduring guardians of their forests and communities, standing resilient against all forms of threat.

## BECOMING INDIGENOUS GUARDS



Slowly over the last few years, and more markedly in 2023, we have been facilitating a regional process as community land patrols make a shift from their roles as territorial monitors and mappers to assuming the responsibility of becoming Indigenous guards: a more holistic position that situates them as political leaders and strategists that enforce the protection and health of their communities and territories. This means defending their people and land from external threats, such as the incursion of extractive industries into their lands, but also means addressing internal threats, such as gender-based violence and drug addiction.

As Indigenous guards, land patrol members are recognised as a governing arm of their communities, feeding vital updates and information back to general assemblies, and helping to spur collective action to establish effective plans for territorial management and defense rooted in their traditional governance processes and cultures. Their work involves the development of Indigenous laws and mandates for the peaceful expulsion of illegal actors, the enforcement of hunting and fishing regulations, and to uphold collective wellbeing through community-wide agreements on women's rights, substance abuse and preventing delinquency. This wider shift in responsibilities represents an important step in building robust governance processes towards effective territorial defense and Indigenous sovereignty across the Upper Amazon.

## TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LAND PATROLS

### KOFÁN OF SINANGOE:

52 Kofán families live in the community of Sinangoe, in a rainforest territory spanning nearly 64,000 hectares. Over the course of 2023, the Sinangoe patrol carried out over 120 monitoring outings. The focus of monitoring trips and training this year was on flying drones to investigate illegal mining operations and to collect evidence of environmental impacts from the Hidroalto hydroelectric project. Outings have also focused on clearly demarcating Kofán territorial boundaries. Amazon Frontlines is currently accompanying the Sinangoe Indigenous guard as they improve their territorial monitoring by creating a more systematized process of information gathering and reporting back to their communities, this allows for informed territorial defense plans to be created by local Kofán authorities.



### KOFÁN OF BERMEJO:

The Kofán people of Bermejo's vast territory spans 58,000 hectares. The land patrol in this community, newly formed in 2022, is focused on responding to an increase in mining in their territory by collecting evidence of illegal activities through GPS mapping and camera traps. Throughout 2023, the Bermejo land patrol conducted 9 monitoring trips of which 5 were accompanied by Amazon Frontlines staff. As a testament to their increasing capacity, the land patrol conducted its first solo monitoring trip in March 2023, which was an entire month in duration, followed up by 3 more autonomous outings where patrols detected 2 illegal camps and mining equipment along their territorial boundary. To strengthen their territorial defense efforts, the patrol is advocating for closer collaboration with community leaders to establish internal laws and regulations that validate their role.



## WAORANI OF PASTAZA:

Waorani territory in Pastaza province, Ecuador, is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth and a critical carbon sink spanning over 200,000 hectares. 800 Waorani people live in 22 communities within the Nushino, Curarary and Akaro river basins in Pastaza province, areas at highest risk from imminent and ongoing extractive operations. Throughout 2023, 17 monitoring outings were carried out, collecting data and evidence on the impacts of the road being built through Waorani territory. This year, land patrol outings were focused on river surveillance to halt illegal logging, hunting and fishing. Community assemblies were then held to present findings and discuss solutions to illegal incursions, spurring community decision making to develop a new Waorani community statute, or territorial law, which the Indigenous Guards will use for the peaceful expulsion of illegal actors from Waorani territory. As we shift towards 2024, the Waorani land patrol is undergoing its strategic division into four separate patrols responsible for distinct areas in Pastaza, corresponding to the watersheds they use to navigate their territory: Akaro, Curaray, and Nushino 1 and 2. This will allow for more effective monitoring of their vast territory by having focused patrols that can quickly respond to the mounting extractive threats they face.



## SIEKOPAI IN ECUADOR:

Approximately 700 Siekopai live in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon across 30,000 hectares of ancestral territory, long affected by illegal poaching and logging. Over the course of 2023, the Siekopai's 4 community land patrols carried out 115 outings. 75% of these outings contributed to our biodiversity baseline work described below, with the remaining outings carried out to detect evidence of territorial invasions and presence of illegal poachers. In September 2023, an important communal assembly was held between the Siekopai land patrol and their leadership council to recognize the graduation of 5 land patrol members from territorial monitors into Indigenous Guards. This was a crucial step in fortifying Siekopai governance processes, and was highly successful in bringing together Siekopai communities around their territorial defense strategies. In the coming months it is expected that over a dozen more members will become official Indigenous guards.



## SIEKOPAI IN PERU:

The Siekopai are a transborder nation, with 1200 Siekopai people living across the border in northern Peru, in various communities, including San Martín de Porres, Mashunta and Wajoya. Since 2021, we've supported the development of the Siekopai's digital map of Wajoya's 80,000-hectare ancestral territory to back their efforts to acquire legal title over their lands by demonstrating their historic presence in this territory. This year, the Wajoya land patrol carried out 9 mapping outings, with close accompaniment from Amazon Frontlines staff over 3 outings focused on collecting territorial data and interviewing elders and community members to evidence the Siekopai's deep historical relationship and stewardship of their Wajoya territory. We also provided 3 training sessions in data collection, systematization and management to build the territorial map, set to be released in mid-2024. This map is indispensable to the Siekopai's land titling claims to recover their ancestral territory in Peru, and will also be a powerful tool in educational materials, helping Wajoya youth grasp the significance of their territory and deepen their connection to it.



## LAUNCHED A REGIONAL LAND DEFENSE SCHOOL



In June 2023, we launched a new regional Land Defense School which is providing an 18-month intensive training program designed for Indigenous land patrol members from 24 communities representing 6 Indigenous nations across the Ecuadorian Amazon: Kofán, Kichwa, Shuar, Siekopai, Siona, Waorani.

The Land Defense School represents one of our central strategies going forward to build the political processes necessary to transition land patrols from territorial monitors and mappers into established Indigenous Guards, capable of leading their communities to ensure the external and internal protection of their ancestral lands which cover 960,000 hectares of primary rainforest, housing over 590 million metric tons of CO2.

Across 5 multi-day gatherings, each hosted in different Indigenous territories between June and November, over 43 Indigenous leaders joined together to share experiences and deepen their territorial defense strategies. This involved workshops on map making, identifying extractive threats, legal mechanisms and human rights, the impact of patriarchy and gender-based violence, as well as the history of Indigenous struggles in Ecuador and the spiritual context of ancestral territories. These informative sessions clarified the theoretical aspects of territorial defense, setting the stage for developing and implementing practical strategies to support and expand the work of Indigenous Guards across their territories in the Upper Amazon. Our plan is to finalize and put these strategies into action in 2024.



## CARTOGRAPHY SCHOOL



2023 was the third year of running our Cartography School, where we helped develop the skill-set of 20 Siona youth so they can join the Siona Indigenous Guard and contribute to ongoing efforts of territorial demarcation and mapping, applying the skills learned to support the creation of their territorial map to back a land restitution process for 58,000 hectares of Siona ancestral territory. In the first half of 2023, three 2-day training sessions focused on mobile mapping applications Mapeo Mobile and Avenza Maps and the use of QGIS for visualizing and analyzing field data and deforestation. Due to the escalating armed conflict in Siona territory, the school has had to pause in order to focus on immediate humanitarian needs and security measures. Alongside the Siona governing council, we are assessing if we can resume activities in 2024.

## DEVELOPING BIODIVERSITY BASELINES

In 2022, we began a process to establish biodiversity baselines in Siekopai and Kofán territories, where communities have identified a high risk of biodiversity loss due to expanding monocrop palm plantations, and where land patrols are well positioned to undertake these assessments. These baselines will allow communities to track both the loss of biodiversity across 80,000 hectares of threatened forests as well as measure the impact of land defense initiatives and make land management decisions internally to adapt hunting practices where species protection is needed. We worked closely with communities to establish a methodology for developing these baselines in partnership with Princeton University. As a first step, Amazon Frontlines provided training sessions on the use and installation of camera traps, and identification of fauna-critical trees, with land patrols installing more than 60 camera traps across the respective territories.



The second phase began in 2023, and involves walking the transects and analyzing biodiversity data collected to determine species richness (total list of species), occupancy (the probability that an animal is found in a specific area), and animal population density (the number of animals found). Interviews are also being conducted around sustainable hunting and fishing practices across stakeholder communities to gather information on existing practices and to help local leadership make conservation recommendations to mitigate any internal drivers of species loss and to create strategies to regenerate their territories in specific areas. More than half of all the biodiversity transects have been carried out this year for a total of 98 outings. This process will come to a conclusion mid next year, when the final analysis of the census, surveys and transect data will be carried out by external researchers from University of Florida, Colorado State University and Princeton University. The results will then inform Siekopai and Kofán decision-making in regards to territorial defense strategies to limit biodiversity loss and the expansion of illegal mining and palm plantations, as well as spur community action on land management practices through the development of new hunting and fishing regulations.

2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# REVITALIZING INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



The Amazon is indeed fast approaching an ecological tipping point driven by deforestation, toxic contamination and the loss of biodiversity at the hands of extractive industries. However, it is also racing towards a less well-known, yet equally devastating cultural tipping point. Environmental degradation, industrialization, forced assimilation into the capitalist economy and the influence of colonial education systems is jeopardizing Indigenous peoples' way of life and their ability to thrive off the abundance of their lands. Indigenous communities are being surrounded by destruction and it is taking a deadly toll on their communities, their cultures and their forests.

Strengthening Indigenous resilience by investing in traditional practices, knowledge, and livelihoods is essential to Indigenous cultural survival and their ability to continue protecting rainforest territories that are vital to our climate. This year, Amazon Frontlines incubated women-led enterprises, strengthened the resilience of ancestral cultures through intercultural education and supported communities to restore their connection to ancestral plants through food and medicine sovereignty programs.

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCHOOL

In efforts to uplift women as leaders in their communities and develop economic alternatives to fossil fuel extraction, we empower aspiring women entrepreneurs from across the region through our Women's Leadership and Entrepreneurship School, launched in 2021. We offer tailored training to 50 participants who are members of 5 women-led associations from across the Upper Amazon, supporting their capacity to lead economic initiatives and strengthening their role as leaders in their communities. Training focuses on business administration, communication strategies, accounting, sales, marketing, organizational management, gender, politics and teambuilding.



The school's third year was officially launched at the beginning of April 2023. Amazon Frontlines provided 12 multi-day workshops based around 9 modules, including leadership and organizational capacity building for women-led associations, introductions to basic IT, computer skills, accounting, finances, E-commerce and digital communications. This year, workshops took place between the capital Quito, the respective communities of each association, and Amisacho: our rainforest organizing center in Lago Agrio, Ecuador. Next year we will focus on having all the trainings take place in the respective territories of each association in order to involve a larger number of women. As we move forward, the emphasis is shifting towards strengthening the political leadership of women and the associations' role in supporting the self-determination of Indigenous communities through the creation of sustainable, women-led, non-extractive economies.



## DEVELOPING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES LED BY WOMEN

To deepen the School's impact on participant communities, we worked closely with the 5 women-led associations from the Kofán, Siona, Siekopai and Worani territories to improve their productivity, expand the commercialization of products, and develop business management skills to support their long-term growth.

### SHAME'CCO

Is made up of 30 women from the Kofán community of Sinangoe who produce and sell traditional Kofán clothing and jewelry. Under the leadership of Alexandra Narvaez, Goldman Prize winner and president of the association, Shame'cco implemented several actions to improve the organization's capacity and productivity.

- Shame'cco acquired new equipment, renovated its infrastructure, and set up a new carpentry workshop. Following training in product marketing, the association launched its first branded merchandise, including cloth bags and t-shirts featuring the Shame'cco logo. It also opened a new gastronomy center, where traditional Kofán foods and products are offered to both locals and tourists. Later this year, the association began developing plans for an ecotourism project in the Kofán community of Sinangoe.



[tiktok.com/@mujeres\\_shamecco](https://www.tiktok.com/@mujeres_shamecco)

### SUKÛ

Is run by 50 Indigenous women from the Kofán community of Dureno. Similar to Shame'cco, they sell handcrafted products. Sukû products range from jewelry to traditional tools, including blowguns and spears.

- Under the presidency of Kofán leader and Ceibo Alliance's director Gladys Vargas, Sukû increased capacity in multiple areas in 2023, selling products at six fairs in the Amazonian province of Sucumbios and in Quito, Ecuador's capital, increasing its client base and building commercial networks. It also inaugurated a new space to manufacture and sell traditional textile and jewelry products, coordinated efforts with regional supermarkets to open access to commercial opportunities. 25 women from the Shame'cco and Sukû associations participated in jewelry and fashion workshops with Lía Padilla, a fashion designer in Quito. Training involved the identification of ancestral materials of typical Kofán clothing, embroidery and printing techniques.



[instagram.com/artesuku/](https://www.instagram.com/artesuku/)

## SIEKONOMI

Is run by 13 women from the Siekopai communities of Wa'iya and San Pablo. They produce two ancestral Siekopai food products: neapia, a black chili sauce, and a type of bread called casabe, both derived from the Amazonian tuber yuca which is collected from traditional family gardens.

- Over the course of 2023, we supported this association to inaugurate a new processing plant in partnership with the Ceibo Alliance and the Raiz Foundation, allowing Siekonomi to improve fabrication of raw materials for the production of neapia and casabe, with the overall aim to increase the association's productive capacity and sales in the national market. We also helped make arrangements with local hotels and supermarkets to deliver and sell their products.



[instagram.com/siekonomi\\_productos/](https://www.instagram.com/siekonomi_productos/)

## THE ZIOMBAIN ROMI CUARO TAYË WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Is run by 10 Siona women from the transborder Buenavista territory in Ecuador and Colombia. The association produces raw sugar (panela) and syrup to provide income for families impacted by decades of armed conflict in Colombia.

- This year, Romi Cuaro established a clear mission and values statement, opened a new bank account and developed a barcode system for product sales. The association also received tailored training in business and organizational management, creating clear commercial plans which included assessment of costs of production of panela, links to national markets for sales and increased business profitability.



[instagram.com/romicuarotaye.ziobain](https://www.instagram.com/romicuarotaye.ziobain)

## THE ASSOCIATION OF WAORANI WOMEN FROM THE ECUADORIAN AMAZON (AMWAE)

Is made up of 160 Waorani women from three different provinces: Pastaza, Orellana and Napo. AMWAE employs traditional and agroecological methods to sustainably cultivate and process local cocoa from Yasuni territory, one of the most biodiverse regions in the Amazon rainforest, to produce organic chocolate bars. The association also produces traditional crafts, manufactured using local plants and products.

- Due to ongoing changes in their leadership, we focused our mentorship to strengthen AMWAE's organizational structure, providing support for the implementation of measures that 1) strengthen cohesion among its different departments, 2) expand their distribution points across the three provinces, and 3) increase production volume.



[facebook.com/AMWAE](https://www.facebook.com/AMWAE)

## ENSURING THE SURVIVAL OF ANCESTRAL CULTURES THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

In the same way that education can be a tool for repression, as it has been in Indigenous territories across the Americas, it can also be a tool for long term survival and liberation. Revitalization of Indigenous traditional education is a key strategy to provide Indigenous youth with the knowledge and cultural values critical for the long-term protection of the Amazon rainforest.

### → IMPLEMENTING A NEW INTERCULTURAL CURRICULUM WITH THE WAORANI

The development of a new educational model over the past two years was a highly participatory process that began with Waorani communities in the Pastaza province of Ecuador. As an initial step, in 2020–21 we carried out a robust participatory diagnostic alongside OWAP to identify the current state of Waorani education across more than 20 villages, and engaged more than 80 community members in the process. The result of this process was the development of a new intercultural curriculum that marries Western knowledge with Waorani worldviews and knowledge. A substantial part of the curriculum is taught in the Waorani language (Wao Terero) and applies traditional pedagogical methodologies with the active participation of community elders as teachers to transmit ancestral knowledge. Learning is framed in the meaningful context of the cycles of nature, economic and productive activities, sociocultural experiences, spiritual practices and the academic calendar. The above subjects are combined with standard Western curriculum elements, including Spanish, mathematics and science. The curriculum was originally piloted in 3 Waorani schools last year, and we greatly expand its scope and reach over the course of 2023:



- Intercultural curriculum is now being implemented in 3 more Waorani schools, for a total of 6 schools in 6 communities benefiting 140 children and youth ages 3-18. Half of the 24 teachers are Waorani with the goal of training and hiring more Waorani teachers in 2024.
- 5 community assemblies were conducted involving over 250 Waorani community members, to ensure intergenerational community and family participation in the refinement and validation of the curriculum's modules, as they gradually get implemented in beneficiary schools.
- 3 community work sessions (mingas) were held for school infrastructure improvements. Dozens of community members gathered to repair aging and insufficient government schoolhouses, creating more pleasant indoor and outdoor learning spaces in 3 of the schools.
- 6 Waorani teachers are in the process of getting fully certified as intercultural teachers by participating in a remote course run by the Ecuadorian University: Instituto Superior Universitario Compu Sur. This process is building the capacity and legitimacy of Waorani intercultural educators with the eventual aim of having the Waorani model officially certified and funded by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education.

## → EXPANSION OF THE MODEL TO KOFÁN AND SIEKOPAI NATIONS

The new intercultural education model led by the Waorani inspired the Kofán and Siekopai to develop similar education systems tailored to their own culture and languages. Amazon Frontlines supports Kofán and Siekopai communities as they create their own intercultural education programs and bring them to their next steps of implementation, the following are activities carried out with the two nations in 2023.

- Kofán:** In 2022, five Kofán communities completed a diagnostic to guide the creation of a new intercultural curriculum focused on cultural revitalization, territorial defense, food sovereignty, as well as combating substance abuse and intrafamilial violence. In February 2023, we also supported the formation of a new Kofán education commission which will be responsible for supervising the development of the new curriculum, and will work jointly with Amazon Frontlines to organize the training sessions for Kofán teachers. Over the course of 2023, 10 intercultural education trainings were held for these intercultural educators, 2 of which took place at an alternative education center in Quito called Achik Muyu, which involved 3-day workshops for 3 Kofán teachers focusing on Indigenous material culture, sustainability and autonomy. In the coming months, Kofán communities want to integrate the Indigenous guards of Sinangoe into their intercultural education processes, so that youth can learn directly from them regarding themes such as cultural identity, territorial management, Indigenous rights and community health.



- Siekopai:** In March 2023, a draft of the new Siekopai educational curriculum was completed, the result of 7 communal assemblies that engaged community members and Siekopai local and national authorities to co-create educational objectives for a new education system for the Siekopai nation. A Siekopai education commission was established and officially appointed with 46 core members across 7 educational centers with 13 Siekopai teachers actively being trained. Amazon Frontlines has been supporting the process of curriculum finalization now, which includes the definition of traditional pedagogical techniques to be incorporated in the new intercultural curriculum and the creation of educational materials in the Siekopai's traditional language. The aim is to conclude the development of the Siekopai intercultural curriculum by mid-2024 and establish a training program for Siekopai teachers focused on intercultural pedagogy to build their capacity to implement this new curriculum in 2 pilot communities next year.

## SUPPORTING THE FORMATION OF A REGIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION

Amazon Frontlines and OWAP supported our partner organization Ceibo Alliance to form a Regional Education Commission in 2022 made up of 30 Waorani, Siekopai and Kofán representatives to oversee all education initiatives across the 3 nations and guide the process of implementation of the new model, in efforts to unify and scale educational efforts to a regional level in Ecuador. In April, the Education Commission met together with the Ecuadorian Indigenous federations CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and CONFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) in the Waorani community of Daipare to present the current progress of each of the three nations' Intercultural education programs, and to strengthen their political decision-making as they establish this critical next stage in their governance processes and cultural survival. Across two exchanges over June and July in Siekopai and Waorani territory, the Education Commission met delegates from the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University (UAIIN), established in 2003 in Colombia, alongside its founders the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC). These meetings involved profound organizational exchanges regarding the implementation of regional communitarian pedagogies based in political movements and Indigenous spirituality across the Upper Amazon.



## COMMUNITY FOOD AND MEDICINE SOVEREIGNTY

Deforestation and contamination of soils and waterways from resource extraction are rapidly degrading the livelihoods of Indigenous families dependent on the forest and its resources for their physical and cultural survival. Compounding this, colonization and cultural assimilation have caused deep loss of traditional agrobiodiversity knowledge and cultivation practices, and ignited dependence on industrial foods, which has led to the spread of health issues linked to poor nutrition and decreased use of traditional medicines.

In 2021, alongside Ceibo Alliance and OWAP, we launched a novel initiative to strengthen food sovereignty in the Waorani territory of Pastaza. Between 2021 and 2022, we supported the Waorani in establishing 20 traditional gardens (comprising food producing plants and fruit trees) across 15 Waorani communities, benefitting 150 community members. As a core component of the project, we also trained 27 community members in agroforestry, traditional cropping practices and dietary health to lead the establishment of gardens and build community capacity to improve their productivity. This model provides a sustainable and diversified nutrition while revitalizing use of local products, all while building long-term capacity to maintain the gardens. Progress over the course of 2023, was as follows:





- We established 6 new gardens in 5 Waorani communities for a total of 26 community gardens. After listening to feedback from Waorani community members during assemblies, we noted a shift in priority towards the economic benefits that these gardens can carry. So rather than continuing to establish new gardens, we decided to focus on maximizing the productivity of existing gardens through intensified maintenance, as well as exploring avenues for income generation through the products that could be made from the plants (please see more info on this at the end of the section).

- 3 out of 6 gardens were established in 3 of the Waorani schools where the new intercultural education model is being implemented, as a means to educate Waorani youth about traditional medicinal plants for nutritional and curative purposes. Our intercultural education and food sovereignty programs are becoming more intertwined, as we expand our efforts to revitalize ancestral knowledge and practices crucial for Indigenous cultural survival and community livelihoods.
- 4 training sessions were provided to 27 Waorani community members in the process of becoming food sovereignty promoters: focused on agroforestry practices, dietary health, use of organic fertilizers and the creation of traditional products for personal use and sale, to promote both self-sustenance and local economies. These food sovereignty promoters are leading the establishment of the new gardens as well as the maintenance and improvement of the 20 traditional gardens previously established. Amazon Frontlines supported OWAP in hiring 3 Waorani technicians this year to conduct field monitoring of the gardens with monthly follow-up visits being conducted for each garden.
- As part of expanding our food and medicine sovereignty program with the Kofán and Siona nations, we partnered with the Ceibo Alliance and the Ecuadorian organization Yakum Foundation to establish 2 new traditional medicine gardens in the Kofán communities of Sinangoe and Dureno, and 1 new medicinal garden in the Siona community of Puerto Silencio. Garden maintenance was carried out on a monthly basis with stakeholder community members.

As we progress into 2024, we are working with OWAP to involve 30 Waorani high school graduates in conducting research on medicinal plants and producing health and hygiene products like soaps, tinctures, ointments, and syrups from the gardens as part of their graduation project. This initiative not only develops youth skills but also fosters intergenerational knowledge exchange, revitalizing essential sustenance practices and reinforcing food and medicine sovereignty in Waorani territory. Additionally, we anticipate the project contributing to sustainable income for 50 Waorani families through local product sales.



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# AMPLIFYING INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATIONS



Indigenous voices are systematically suppressed from public fora and media both regionally and globally, a consequence of the enduring legacies of colonization, marginalization and imposition of Western perspectives. Despite these challenges, Indigenous-led communications play a pivotal role in bringing visibility to the ongoing struggles and threats faced by Indigenous communities and their territories. By sharing an authentic portrayal of their experiences, not only are they able to counter prevailing stereotypes and misrepresentations, but also amplify their call for justice on a global scale, sharing crucial lessons with the world around the importance of safeguarding climate-critical ecosystems and garnering support for Indigenous causes. Additionally, Indigenous communications play a vital role in strengthening connections within and across Indigenous territories, facilitating coordination, information sharing, and documenting ancestral cultures — and ultimately, fostering unity in the collective fight to protect the Amazon rainforest from mounting threats.

Through Amazon Frontlines' Indigenous Communications School and Storytelling Lab, we train Indigenous youth to use multimedia technology and platforms essential to their efforts to protect their territories and way of life, allowing them to document Indigenous ancestral knowledge, organize resistance processes across remote territories, and raise awareness and build support globally. Below are more details about this work carried out in 2023.

## INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATIONS SCHOOL

Amazon Frontlines' Indigenous Communications School trains Indigenous youth to produce and share multimedia stories that capture their experiences, the issues Indigenous people face in the Amazon, and stories of hope and resilience in the Indigenous-led fight to protect the Amazon. The school is co-led by 3 experienced Indigenous communicators previously trained under our program and has provided training for 25 Indigenous youth (60% of whom are women) from across the Upper Amazon in photography, video-making, and digital media modalities. Over the course of 2023, we have held 9 training sessions, and provided 5 specialized tutorials focused on applied training to improve the communication projects made by students. As a result of this, 4 out of the 5 audiovisual projects finalized so far were presented at the end of August in Lago Agrio, Ecuador, at the Mocochoá House cultural center. We closed out the year by leading personalized tutorials, focused on advanced photography and video-making, script development, and film production and editing.





## INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING LAB

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We ran the second year of our Indigenous Storytelling Lab, which serves as a production company for Indigenous-made films and content. The lab is led by 3 Indigenous storytellers, who train other Indigenous communicators, while being responsible for editing and producing media material. Materials produced serve both to amplify Indigenous stories and perspectives internationally while strengthening grassroots communications across Indigenous communities. Amazon Frontlines worked with the 3 Indigenous communicators to edit two documentaries produced and co-directed by them in 2022. We recently finalized and presented one of the documentaries at EDOC, a prestigious documentary festival in Ecuador, with the other documentary now in the final stages of editing. We have also accompanied the development of two radio series with the Indigenous Storytelling Lab, which will feature the Kofán and Waorani peoples' efforts to prevent an uptick in mining in the two nations. September saw the release of a powerful short film '[Our Children's River](#)' produced together with the Honnold Foundation about the Kofán community of Sinangoe's Indigenous Guards. The film provided an important insight and platform for Kofán youth engaged in the land patrol to share their frontline story and lived experiences of territorial defense up against an invasion of gold miners across their ancestral lands.



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

# BUILDING AUTONOMY AND SCALING PARTNERSHIPS



## LAUNCHING A NEW PARTNERSHIP DEPARTMENT

We are in an exciting moment of growth and transition at Amazon Frontlines, where we have decided to expand our partnerships to achieve a much wider impact in protecting the Upper Amazon. As we scale our partnership model with new organizations across the region, it's critical that we stay true to our core priority: ensuring that our Indigenous partners are leading, learning, and owning the processes that directly respond to their own visions for the well-being of their communities and territories.

We are undertaking a holistic evaluation of our partnership model and how it can be improved and replicated across the Upper Amazon to stand up to the threats that are facing Indigenous communities and territories throughout the region. In order to create the conditions for the sustainable growth of our Indigenous partner organizations, we launched a new Partnerships Department, which is made up of the combined efforts of 13 staff whose work supports capacity building for Indigenous partners in areas ranging from program management and communications to accounting and fundraising. This team counts on years of experience working on the ground and developing lasting relationships with Indigenous communities based on mutual trust and shared learning. It is thus uniquely positioned to improve Amazon Frontlines' tailored support to existing partners and other Indigenous organizations with a need for increased organizational capacity, resources and access to global networks to strengthen their fight to protect their climate-critical territories. Below, we provide an overview of the organizational accompaniment processes with partners in 2023:

### → INDIGENOUS PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

**Ceibo Alliance:** Our primary and longest running partnership is with our sister organization: the Ceibo Alliance, co-founded in 2014. Together, we have achieved significant successes with the Kofán, Siona, Siekopai and Waorani communities in defending their territories and protecting their ways of life. Across 12 regular monthly meetings this year, we accompanied the Ceibo Alliance team as they built towards a thorough review and evaluation of their 2023 annual plan and supported them as they built out their organizational plan for 2024. We facilitated their biennial leadership election process in August 2023, when a new Leadership Council was chosen. Additionally, the Council welcomed a new member, Hurllem Payaguaje, who assumed the role of Secretary.

Ceibo Alliance maintains gender equity in its leadership, and equal representation of the four Indigenous nations that it works on behalf of. Finally, Hernán Payaguaje, a co-founder and the former Treasurer, assumed the role of Fundraising Coordinator. A regional assessment and action plan is currently being developed together with Hernán and Ceibo's Leadership Council to identify needs and gaps in the fundraising and grants management capacity of our allied and Indigenous partner organizations.



- In November 2023, the Ceibo Alliance was honored with the prestigious **St Andrews Prize for the Environment** which recognizes innovative responses to the most pressing environmental issues of our time. Amazon Frontlines accompanied the entire application and acceptance process, led by their Leadership Council member and Treasurer, Alicia Salazar. The \$100,000 award was an important international validation of the Ceibo Alliances' culturally-informed strategies and the vital roles that Indigenous play in defending climate-critical territories in the Amazon. November was also a big month for Amazon Frontlines and Ceibo Alliance co-founder Nemonte Nenquimo, who was recognized as one of **TIME100's: Most Influential Climate Leaders of 2023**.



**The Waorani Organization of Pastaza:** Amazon Frontlines also partners with the Waorani Organization of Pastaza (OWAP), representing 30 Waorani communities in the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza. Across monthly meetings with Amazon Frontlines' Partnership coordinators as well as Ceibo Alliance's finance teams, OWAP has been building the administrative capacity needed to establish planning and evaluation processes that allow for their long-term organizational growth and autonomy.

- In May 2023, OWAP was honored with the **Lush Spring Prize**, a prestigious award acknowledging grassroots organizations from across the world for their outstanding work to protect and regenerate the Earth's most threatened ecosystems. This recognition is a testament to OWAP's outstanding work protecting one of the most biodiverse ecosystems left on Earth, and a demonstration of the power of effective partnership models to boost Indigenous leadership and grassroots action to halt climate change and gain international visibility.

**\* Fundraising Accompaniment:** Indigenous organizations in the Amazon encounter a myriad of obstacles when it comes to fundraising, including limited fundraising experience and connections to global funding networks. In 2023, Amazon Frontlines helped secure over \$1,537,633 in grants for the Ceibo Alliance, including multi-year support. Simultaneously, we supported OWAP in securing \$419,000 in foundation revenue, reflecting our steadfast dedication to ensuring the sustainable growth of our partners.

**CONFENIAE & CONAIE:** Amazon Frontlines is also working in partnership with the two main Indigenous federations in Ecuador: the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), representing 11 Indigenous nations; and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), representing 14 Indigenous nations across the country. Our Partnership department has been accompanying their respective planning, monitoring and evaluation processes in order to fortify the organizational capacity of the two federations.

## → GRANTMAKING FACILITY

In early 2023, we launched our own grantmaking program to support local and national Indigenous organizations in the Upper Amazon, with the objective of providing Indigenous leaders and organizations with the resources, networks and institutional capacity necessary to increase their impact across their communities and to protect their territories threatened by resource extraction. Throughout the year, we awarded a total of \$130,600 in grants to different organizations, including NAWE, the representative organization of the Waorani nation; CONFENIAE; La Comuna: a Kichwa grassroots organization fighting against mining in the Napo province in the Ecuadorian Amazon; an Anti-Mining collective from the Ecuadorian Andean region; a Territorial Defense School in the Ecuadorian

Andean region; and the communications collective Sacha Manchi. These grants supported a wide array of activities led by these organizations, ranging from events and community assemblies crucial for organizational strengthening and community cohesion, to the construction of schools in Indigenous communities and the development of communication materials and territorial defense training programs.

Amazon Frontlines will also continue making grants for humanitarian aid in response to regional conflicts and environmental crises. For example, we have been able to rapidly regrant emergency funds to Indigenous Siona communities from donors including Land is Life, Avaaz and Amazon Watch, in response to the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia's Putumayo province which is currently displacing and threatening the lives of Siona communities. Grants have also provided humanitarian aid for climate emergencies, such as the devastation caused by storms in the village of Kiwaro in Waorani territory. We will continue providing grants for Indigenous partner organizations based on their needs and requests, extending this support to new organizations as we expand our partnerships in Ecuador, Colombia and Peru.

**→ NEW REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

- **The Shuar People of Arutam (PSHA):** the representative organization of 47 Shuar communities in the mega-biodiverse Cordillera del Condor in the Ecuadorian Amazon, threatened by the dramatic expansion of Chinese mining projects. PSHA's leadership and firm commitment to resist mining operations makes them a key ally in our strategy to protect Indigenous rights and the Amazon rainforest.
- **The Kichwa Organization of Pastaza Province (PAKKIRU):** represents 16 Kichwa communities in the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza. We are beginning to work with PAKKIRU to strengthen their territorial defense strategies through the Land Defense School.
- **The Secoya Indigenous Organization of Peru (OISPE):** representing Siekopai (Secoya) communities in Peru, making OISPE a crucial partner in our growing field of work supporting the land-titling of Siekopai ancestral territories.
- **The Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESP):** the national Peruvian Indigenous federation representing over 2439 Indigenous communities throughout the country, is becoming a key regional partner in expanding our work in support of Peruvian Indigenous communities.
- **The Indigenous Council of the Cauca (CRIC):** Latin America's oldest Indigenous organization, representing 11 Indigenous communities in Colombia's Cauca valley. We are deepening our partnership with the CRIC on many fronts including training Indigenous guards through our Land Defense School, and collaborating on expanding intercultural education initiatives, of which the CRIC have been at the forefront for over four decades.



These new organizational alliances are forming an exciting new stage in the development of Amazon Frontlines, as we broaden and strengthen our network of relationships to involve new Indigenous communities, nationalities and federations across the region in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia.

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January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023



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- Amazon Watch
- Azimuth World Foundation
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## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

REVENUE		
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS	\$843,757	21,9%
FOUNDATIONS	\$2,978,807	77,5%
OTHER INCOME	\$22,922.81	0,6%
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$7,035,559</b>	<b>100%</b>

EXPENSES		
PROGRAM SERVICES	\$3,761,626	86,9%
MANAGEMENT & GENERAL	\$299,944	6,9%
FUNDRAISING	\$266,614	6,2%
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$4,328,184</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>NET ASSETS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2023</b>	<b>\$5,608,215.98</b>
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For a complete financial reporting by **McDonald Jacobs, P.C.** please contact Amazon Frontlines at [info@amazonfrontlines.org](mailto:info@amazonfrontlines.org)



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