



International Indian Treaty Council
Working for the Rights and Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios
Trabajando por el reconocimiento y los derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala succeed in temporarily suspending the approval of Bill 5923, "recovering pre-Hispanic cultural patrimony"



Mayan Authorities and Human Rights Defenders march to the Guatemala Congress in Guatemala City and meet with the Congressional Chairperson on May 11, 2022

May 18, 2022, Guatemala City, Guatemala, Paxil Kayala, 6 lx: In response to wide-spread, unified repudiation of Congressional Bill 5923 as racist and discriminatory by Mayan Authorities and human rights defenders, the Guatemalan National Congress decided to suspend the vote on this bill previously scheduled to take place on May 11th. The proposed legislation would usurp and privatize Mayan ceremonial centers and sacred locations throughout Guatemala, disenfranchising the Mayan Peoples from their spiritual practices and violating their right to freedom of religion.

As a result of the political pressure exerted by the Mayan Peoples. Congressional Chairperson, Shirley Joanna Rivera Zaldaña announced the suspension of Congressional deliberations and proposed a meeting with the Indigenous authorities on June 2, 2022, during which she agreed she would listen to their arguments.

On May 11, Mayan spiritual leaders held a ceremony in the early morning hours to invoke the ancestors and ask the grandfathers and grandmothers to make it possible for the Mayan authorities' to be heard by the National Government. Over 200 Mayan Indigenous leaders then marched to the Guatemalan Congressional facility. 20 Mayan authorities and other Indigenous



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representatives then entered to deliver a signed letter to the Congressional Chairperson affirming their united opposition to the bill and calling for it to be withdrawn.

The participants reported that during this meeting, the Congressional Chairperson treated the Mayan authorities in a humiliating, demeaning, and discriminatory manner. Rather than simply accepting that the Congress had been presented with a proposal, which contained charges that the rights of Indigenous Peoples were being violated, she accused the Mayan authorities of being manipulated, claiming that they were “bad Guatemalans” who sought to divide the country and provoke confrontations. They reported that her tone of voice was loaded with racist prejudice, and that she showed absolutely no respect for the Mayan authorities appearing before her. Nevertheless, at the end of this meeting she announced the decision to delay the Congressional vote until a later date and to organize the follow up meeting with the Mayan authorities on June 2nd.

IITC also expresses our profound concern because yesterday two Mayan spiritual leaders were detained, beaten, intimidated and accused of witchcraft by the Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo (Community Development Council - COCODE) and Guatemalan former military personal, in Chichipate, El Estor, Izabal. IITC is currently preparing an urgent communication requesting that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders call on Guatemala to ensure the safety of all the Indigenous leaders involved in this mobilization for the rights of the Mayan Peoples.

“We thank our ancestors for our success in delaying the vote, although we know it is still temporary at this point. We sincerely hope that the Guatemalan government will act in good faith and not resume their deliberations on this bill before their meeting with our Mayan authorities takes place on June 2nd” stated Juan Leon Alvarado, Mayan Kich’e human rights leader and coordinator of the International Indian Treaty Council’s office in Guatemala. “Meanwhile, IITC along with other Indigenous Peoples’ organizations in Guatemala will continue to follow up on our recent urgent action submissions to United Nations human rights mechanisms and Special Rapporteurs requesting international oversight and intervention to protect our rights and ensure the safety of Indigenous human rights defenders involved in this struggle.”

*For further information,
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The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) is an organization of Indigenous Peoples from North, Central, South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific working for the Sovereignty and Self Determination of Indigenous Peoples and the recognition and protection of Indigenous Rights, Treaties, Traditional Cultures and Sacred Lands.