

KAWSAK SACHA–THE LIVING FOREST
A LIVING AND CONSCIOUS BEING:
THE SUBJECT OF RIGHTS

Adopted in the General Meeting of the Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku, in December, 2012 and updated in May 2018.

1. BACKGROUND:

We, the People of Sarayaku, have for generations fought for freedom and resisted against external aggression, invasion, and colonization. We are the *Sarayaku runa*, descendants of the jaguar. We are the original inhabitants of the Bobonaza, Pastaza and Marañón watersheds, along whose rivers the Tayaks, bearers of a millennial wisdom, navigated –naming all the places they found along the way.

Sarayaku received legal recognition in 1979. Under the name “Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku” (Indigenous Kichwa People of Sarayaku), its charter was revised and approved on June 10, 2004 by the Council for the Development of the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CODENPE). Today Sarayaku is legally registered with the National Secretariat of Policy Management (Secretaría Nacional de Gestión de la Política).

Article 71 of the Ecuadorian constitution states that “Nature or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution,” and that, “every person, people, community or nationality, will be able to demand the recognition of rights for nature before the public organisms.”

In addition, Articles 25, 26 and 29 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples establish that, “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, [and] waters,” and that indigenous peoples further have, “the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources” that they have traditionally possessed.

We, the People of Sarayaku, fully exercising our right to self-determination as an Indigenous People, and buttressed by our own worldview, our innate rights, our governing statutes, and in agreement with the Ecuadorian constitution, as well as the legal instruments offered by the international recognition of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognize that *Kawsak Sacha* –The Living Forest, and the Forest of Beings (*la Selva de los Seres*) have intrinsic and binding rights.

WE THEREFORE DECLARE THAT:

Sarayaku territory is KAWSAK SACHA–THE LIVING FOREST, A LIVING AND CONSCIOUS BEING: THE SUBJECT OF RIGHTS. This is something that we, an ancestral nation, have recognized since time immemorial.

2. THE CONCEPT:

KAWSAK SACHA is a living conscious being made up of all the other beings of the rainforest, from the smallest ones to those supreme ones –the Guardians– that protect the forest. It includes within it beings from the animal, vegetal, mineral, as well as spiritual and cosmic realms. The ongoing communication these beings maintain with us revitalizes us emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually, and, more generally, it helps reestablish the energy and equilibrium of indigenous peoples.

The Guardians of the Living Forest make their homes in the waterfalls, lagoons, swamps, mountains, rivers and trees, and carry out their lives in a manner similar to human beings. The Living Forest transmits its knowledge to the Yachaks (shamans) who interact with the Guardians with the goal of maintaining Pachamama's equilibrium, and healing individuals and society. This knowledge is methodically maintained and transmitted to every new generation.

The natural equilibrium of the universe, the harmony of life, our cultural survival, the ongoing existence of living beings, and the Living Forest itself, all depend on the persistent power of the Guardians of the Forest and their ability to continue to transmit it. It also depends on the possibility that these beings and our Yachaks can maintain a respectful relationship that seeks equilibrium between human beings and the beings of the forest.

3. OBJECTIVES:

The *Kawsak Sacha* declaration has as its objective the sustainable preservation and conservation of our territory. This includes the material and spiritual relations that we establish in the Living Forest with the other beings that inhabit it. Our living territory is and will continue to be free of any kind of extractive activities such as oil exploitation, mining, logging, and bio-piracy. What we are proposing is a way of life based on criteria that come from the immaterial wealth that surrounds us, namely: the existence in our territories of clean rivers with abundant fish; the ability to live well with our many relations (*ayllu*); and the ongoing strength of our political organization.

4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Bolstered by the constitutional recognition of the intrinsic plurinationality of the Ecuadorian state, the Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku proposes to the Ecuadorian state as well as to the wider international community, the adoption of a new conservation category for Amazonian indigenous peoples' territories – a category that originates in the worldview of these very peoples. This category would include *Kawsak Sacha*, as living being, and subject of rights.

Protecting life and the environmental integrity of our territories is a non-negotiable right and responsibility of indigenous peoples and states alike. We are therefore calling to the indigenous nations and peoples in Ecuador and beyond to unite in the struggle to protect and guarantee in an unflinching manner this *Kawsak Sacha* –Living Forest declaration.

Kawsak Sacha is the place where our kallari rukukuna (ancestors), apayayas (grandfathers) and apamamas (grandmothers), and fathers and mothers lived. Kawsak Sacha is where we continue to live and where our future generations will go on living. It is the place where the Guardians –of the forest and of all the indigenous peoples who live there– will continue to live.