

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Seventeenth Session. New York, NY

Thank you, Madam Chair:

My name is Nilo Cayuqueo; I am a member of the Mapuche People and I come from Los Toldos, a community in Buenos Aires Province, in the Atlantic Coast region, in the center of the country.

I am here representing the Azotea Mapuche Community and the Parliament of the Original Peoples of the Central Zone.

The Mapuche People inhabit what is today Argentina and Chile.

I belong to the first generation of indigenous delegates participating in a UN meeting, in 1977.

With 2,800,000 km² and 43 million inhabitants, Argentina is a huge country. The indigenous population amounts to 2.5 million, belonging to 34 different peoples.

Currently, we have in Argentina a government that, although elected democratically, has a far-right approach and with no political will to respect national and international laws.

For this Government, in Argentina “everyone is a European descendent”, which completely ignores the indigenous peoples and, what is worse, violates the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as ILO Convention 169, the Convention on Biodiversity, UNESCO’s Declaration on Cultural Diversity, and even the very Constitution of Argentina.

At the moment, the Government has organized a stigmatization campaign against indigenous peoples and the Mapuche People in particular.

The main media outlets, at the service of the elites of this Conservative Government, are involved in this campaign. A false idea about the “danger” of indigenous peoples is being built, even accusing us of being “terrorists”, and this violates all of the above-mentioned accords. The Government has made discriminatory agreements with the Chilean Government to repress those who are fighting for their rights.

Ultimately, it is about preventing the mobilized peoples from claiming the usurped territories and challenging the extractive industries and the operations of multinational corporations by persecuting the peoples in the media and through legal actions and repressive measures.

In August 2017, the gendarmerie repressed a community and caused the disappearance of Santiago Maldonado, a young man who was supporting one community’s struggles. 40 days later, Santiago was found drowned in the river that flows through the community.

Last November, Rafael Nahuel, an unarmed young Mapuche who was taking part in a protest, was murdered from behind by the Naval Prefecture.

While the officials involved in the murder have been identified, the so-called justice system—linked to major political and economic powers—has done nothing to prosecute and condemn the murderers.

In the last 11 years, 18 indigenous persons have been murdered in Argentina by different security forces and landholders; to date no responsible party has been prosecuted.

Madam Chair, we ask that the Permanent Forum recommend that the United Nations bodies and the General Assembly urge the Argentine Government to comply with the laws and that they request reports and an investigation of this serious situation that the indigenous peoples of Argentina are suffering.

Thank you very much.