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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From May 5 to 9, 2025, more than 140 people from 13 countries across the Americas gathered in Panajachel, Guatemala, to participate in the meeting "Democracies Under Attack: From Crisis to Strategy." Activists, academics, journalists, Indigenous leaders, representatives of civil society organizations, and human rights defenders came together to reflect on the grave situation facing democracies, share experiences of resistance, and develop joint strategies for action.

An unsettling trend toward authoritarianism is emerging across the region. The causes are diverse, ranging from structural corruption and social inequality to media manipulation, the use of the judicial system as a weapon of repression, the criminalization of protests, and the spread of populist and extremist rhetoric. During the first day, participants delved into these issues, highlighting how authoritarian leaders have capitalized on citizen frustration and the weaknesses of democratic institutions to consolidate their power.

The initial discussions addressed topics such as the United States' influence on regional politics, the rise of extractive models that violate territorial rights, and the use of lawfare to persecute opponents. Voices such as those of Nancy Okail, Daniel Valencia, and Raúl Zibechi exposed how liberal democracies are threatened by states, economic elites, and the media that promote disinformation and social division.

One of the most debated issues was the need to critically examine and expand our understanding of democracy. For many participants, liberal democracy is not only in crisis but has historically failed to represent the needs of Indigenous peoples, women, youth, and the most vulnerable communities. It was therefore proposed that we rethink democracy in the plural in order to accommodate different models and experiences, including community self-governance, ancestral decision-making practices, and horizontal organizational systems as viable and legitimate alternatives.

The second day was dedicated to sharing alternatives and strategies. Numerous experiences in community organizing, grassroots communication, and political education were highlighted, demonstrating that resistance is possible, even in the most adverse contexts. From the indigenous public community service systems in Guatemala to transnational networks for peace and justice in North America, the meeting served as an opportunity to showcase bottom-up democratic proposals, deeply rooted in cultural and territorial identity.

The role of the media was also discussed. Journalists from different countries denounced the systematic attacks they suffer for the independence of their reporting. They also informed the meeting about journalism's economic precariousness, state persecution, and the censorship of critical voices, especially in authoritarian contexts. In response, they called for community journalism to be strengthened, independent media support networks to be created, and for the development of narratives that connect with ordinary people using simple, accessible, and culturally relevant language.



INFORMATION WARFARE

One of the most urgent challenges identified in Panajachel was the battle for information and the construction of narratives.

Disinformation is spreading rapidly thanks to the economic interests that control large digital platforms, the lack of regulation of artificial intelligence, and the intentional use of hate speech to divide societies.



NEW WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

In response, participants proposed new forms of communication based on oral tradition, memory, creativity, and popular culture, as well as training in fact-checking and critical media analysis.



STRENGTHENING MOVEMENTS

Another key issue was the need to renew and strengthen social movements. Discussions included the importance of self-criticism or self-awareness, the inclusion of women and youth, and the need to rethink organizational structures from a more horizontal and participatory perspective.

The third and final day focused on developing concrete courses of action. From individual reflections and collective deliberations, proposals emerged around the need for social mobilization, communication, regional coordination, and political education. Participants emphasized the importance of returning to the streets, forging alliances between movements and organizations, promoting laws that protect journalists and human rights defenders, and strengthening ties between peoples of the northern and southern regions of the hemisphere.



There was consensus that this kind of gathering is vital for renewing energy, sharing lessons, and building common visions. The atmosphere was one of hope and commitment. Participants acknowledged that, despite the many challenges, **collective struggles for life, dignity, and democracy remain alive in every corner of the Americas.** Love for communities, ancestral roots, and the desire for a more just future animated every conversation, every dynamic, and every shared strategy.

Finally, recommendations emerged on how to continue the process. These included establishing partnerships in order to continue sharing lessons learned and the development of a practical guide to replicate the meeting experience in different territories. A regional communications network was also proposed to amplify the voices of social movements and serve as an early warning system for threats.

"Democracies under Attack" was not only a meeting to analyze the current crisis, but also a platform to imagine other possibilities, to chart shared horizons based on pluralism and collective action. In times when authoritarianism masquerades as legality, fueled by apathy and populist rhetoric, this kind of gathering is a beacon of resistance and the opportunity to seed new forms of democracy: more accessible, diverse, participatory, and humane.

DEMOCRACIAS
BAJO ATAQUE



INTRODUCTION

The continental meeting "Democracies Under Attack: From Crisis to Strategy" arose from concern about the historic crossroads in which we find ourselves. Democracies in the Americas are experiencing one of their most critical moments due to the rise of authoritarian regimes, the weakening of institutions, and the criminalization of civil society.

With Lake Atitlán as a backdrop, **from May 5th to 9th, 2025, 143 people from more than 100 organizations in 13 countries gathered in Panajachel, Guatemala.** The event included activists, members of civil society and social movements, authorities and representatives of indigenous peoples, academia, alternative media, political influencers, practitioners of deliberative democracies, public officials, and political allies.

GATHERING OBJECTIVES

- Generate opportunities for discussion on the regional political context
- Establish strategies to strengthen democracies and counter the rise of authoritarianism
- Analyze the challenges facing democracies in the hemisphere
- Learn about citizen and community organization experiences that enable more effective participation in the defense of democracy

With these objectives in mind, the organizing committee developed a methodology to generate ideas through group discussions that could reach consensus, understand disagreements, exchange experiences, and forge new networks that would facilitate more effective action. The challenge was to move beyond traditional dynamics in which only strong leaders prevail in discussions and set the agenda. Given the complexity of the hemisphere's social and political context, the focus was on collective intelligence in order to build consensus from diverse perspectives.

EVENT STRUCTURE

The meeting took place over three days. Each day began with a Mayan ceremony that fostered a sense of mutual connection amongst the participants, followed by panels that introduced the topics to be discussed. Afterwards, there was a moment for individual reflection in which the main ideas were captured on "expression walls." Finally, the main activity for the rest of each day was collective deliberation.



The objective of the methodology was to guide participants from a critical context analysis to proposals for joint action, assigning a specific topic for each day:

DAY 1

Context and challenges to democracies

DAY 2

The search for alternatives and strategies

DAY 3

Action road maps

This exchange enabled the reflections collected in this document.

DAY 1: STATE OF AFFAIRS AND CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACIES

EXPRESSION WALL 1: WHAT ELEMENTS ARE CAUSING AUTHORITARIANISM TO (RE)EMERGE IN THE REGION?

The responses to the expression wall fell into four categories:

STRUCTURAL CAUSES

Corruption, inequality, poverty, plundering of natural resources, and institutional crisis.

MEANS OF CONTROL

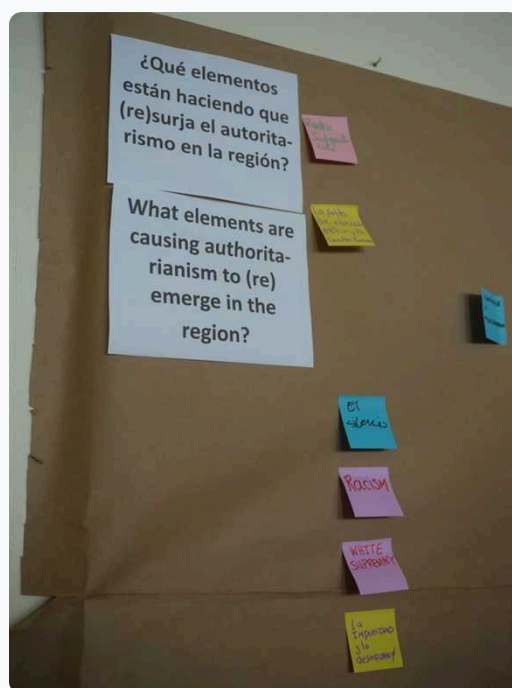
Disinformation, media manipulation, co-optation of the judicial system, criminalization of protest, and use of social media as propaganda.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Culture of submission, populist leadership, frustration with liberal democracy, polarization, and the rise of religious/sexist/racist discourse.

THREATS IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The influence of neo-fascism, transnational economic interests, and human rights setbacks.



PANEL 1 - CURRENT POLITICAL CONTEXT

[Link to watch the panel](#)



NANCY OKAIL

President of the Center for International Policy (CIP), argued that U.S. policy (domestic and foreign) has been based on militarization, transactional democracy, and economic policies that foster poverty around the world. Trump has accentuated this paradigm by adopting simultaneous actions to distract and keep the opposition on the defensive, employing false narratives, and entrenching corruption while empowering oligarchies.

To counter these strategies, we need to: define where to focus our energies; establish a clear and inclusive progressive agenda focused on providing people with what they need; consolidate social movements in political actions rather than competition; and adopt new narratives. The world is changing, and activism and movements are evolving with it. The main discussions of our times are not about capitalism or communism. The question to be answered is what we will choose: integrity or corruption; accountability or complicity; impunity or the rule of law.



DANIEL VALENCIA

Director of “Redacción Regional” of El Salvador, spoke about the persecution and violence at the hands of states and organized crime that journalists in Latin America are experiencing. This violence—which affects all of society—has historical roots: armed conflicts along with military governments that punished dissent; the emigration of impoverished masses to the United States, where they formed gangs and were deported back to their countries; democratic transitions distorted by corruption, amongst other factors.

Latin American journalism did predict that organized crime would become one of the region's main problems, but it found it harder to foresee the problems for democracy and the rise of authoritarianism. One of the biggest challenges facing independent media is narrative control. Large corporations allied with the elites tell half-truths or false truths, while on social media, narrative control is exercised by those who wield economic power. It is therefore important for independent media to form alliances, keep exposing authoritarian issues, and continue to strategize about how to disrupt populist media bubbles.



RAÚL ZIBECCHI

Activist and researcher from Uruguay, spoke about the Americas’ social movements, which find themselves in retreat as we face a transition to dispossession-based capitalism over the past thirty years, which has manifested in multiple forms such as gentrification processes, mining, hydroelectric dams, and large-scale infrastructure projects. A militarization-extractivism complex has emerged, bringing violence against communities from three sources: the state, organized crime, and neo-Pentecostal evangelical churches.

Some social movements have weakened in the face of repression and because they have not found effective ways to engage younger generations. Others have become institutionalized, becoming dependent on states and international cooperation, hampering their capacity to mobilize. A third transformation, minor but not marginal, has been toward territorial autonomy and self-government. This growing trend invites us to rethink old strategies of demanding rights from the state, which is increasingly controlled by big business interests. These strategies should not be abandoned altogether, but balanced with the promotion of identities rooted in spirituality, women, and youth.

PANEL 2 - PRACTICES THAT UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY

[Link to watch the panel](#)



TED LEWIS

Ted Lewis of the United States, co-director of Global Exchange, described the fascist actions taken by the Trump administration. Trump did not have complete free rein during his first term (2016–2020) due to opposition from within his own cabinet, members of Congress from the Republican party, the courts, the FBI, and social media platforms that shut down his accounts. However, much of that opposition has disappeared. Trump has installed loyalists in key positions, his critics within the Republican Party have been expelled, and he now has more conservative judges willing to rule in his favor. Thanks to this greater freedom, Trump is pushing for much more authoritarian measures.

Given this context, we must resist strategically, by learning to recognize what we are actually able to deal with. Furthermore, we must take into account that Trump is causing the collapse of the American empire. He is doing so in a way that's not very healthy and will cause a lot of damage, but in the long run will present opportunities for other social forms to emerge. It is therefore very important to build coalitions, even with people who do not fully share our perspectives, in order to confront current threats and develop a vision for the future together.



MARÍA CAMILA CASTELLANOS

Colombian human rights activist, spoke about the repression experienced by social movements since the 2019 social unrest, when the Colombian state used various methods to suppress protesters across the country, including violent attacks against protesters, media manipulation to spread fear and false accusations of vandalism, imprisonment, and denial of primary health care. They were later excluded from the roundtable discussions, leading young protesters to call themselves "the nobodies" because they were not included in any project or political party.

Given this context, social movements must radicalize their causes by: not allowing corruption within the movements; not giving in to the fear of organizing in conflict areas; and not allowing systemic violence to take root. The current leftist government has failed to represent the resistance, silencing it either with bullets or with employment contracts. In response, María Camila proposed that we become more radical, organize from within our own political arenas, and continue to resist by offering our solidarity to the young people who bear the brunt of the strongest repression.



JUAN PABLO MUÑOZ

Technical coordinator of "Alliance for Reform" and legal researcher, spoke about lawfare, a term derived from the words: "law" and "warfare". This term refers to the use of the law to produce similar effects to those of conventional military action, with the aim of legally weakening or destroying an adversary. It has three characteristics: the consolidation of a massive multi-perpetrator structure, the takeover of institutions in the legal system, and, fundamentally, military-style assessment in tactical and strategic decisions.

Lawfare also unfolds in the three dimensions of a war: the battlefield (which involves maneuvering within the rules of jurisdiction to obtain a favorable judge); weaponry (the use of ambiguous laws such as those about terrorism/gangs, unjustified lawsuits, pre-trial detention, use of "criminal law of the enemy" to create ad hoc norms and other practices); and propaganda (manipulation of information to promote an environment favorable to the use of lawfare, which includes generating suspicion, demonizing the enemy, distorting reality by altering images, and giving prosecutors space in private media to present cases). Intelligence gathering and psychological warfare are also central to lawfare.



GROUP DYNAMICS: CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACIES

The first day's discussions began with individual reflection on the challenges to democracies, moving into deliberation in small and then progressively larger groups to synthesize a collective reflection. The challenges identified by the groups fell into the following categories:

A) DEMOCRACY AS A CONCEPT AND MODEL

The crisis faced by democracy has many elements. One is that the type of democracy established in most countries, **"liberal democracy," is a fundamentally exclusionary model.** It is based on a kind of state and government that are imposed from outside, with colonialist roots, and that does not recognize plurinationalities or Indigenous peoples. It is an elitist hierarchy, controlled by big business, far removed from the needs of civil society, resulting in a veneer of democracy in which we can observe:

- An electoral process in which participation is limited to voting.
- A political party system dominated by financing and clientelism.
- A legislative apparatus bogged down in bureaucratic processes.
- A judicial system instrumentalized against the citizenry.
- A dependence on foreign powers that limit sovereignty and dictate internal policy.

This highlights the need to rethink this model from the bottom up.

We must think in terms of "democracies" rather than a single democratic model. The idea of a single, rigid democracy does not recognize the alternatives or the richness of community-based democracies, based on ancestral and popular knowledge. These exemplify practices based on caring, listening, reciprocity, and truly collective participation; they teach us that representation must be consistent with the knowledge, experiences, and realities of each community. These and other democracies invite us to engage in new debates about the concept of democracy, to question the hegemony of technical and academic knowledge, and to understand that democracies have been under constant attack throughout history.

Democracy is increasingly adopting authoritarian traits, often disguised as populism. When the superficial liberal democracy begins to fail even in countries with progressive governments struggling to achieve real change, populist leaders emerge by promising to "truly" represent the people and solve their problems. They exploit the weaknesses of the democratic system to seize and then maintain power. This is a symptom of the model itself, given that authoritarianism and populism exist on both the right and the left of the political spectrum.

The fulfillment of irrevocable rights is not guaranteed. We are forced to choose between several equally important rights: the right to life, to a healthy environment, to a dignified life without exploitation, to justice, to diversity, to freedom of expression, to accountability, and to live in equitable societies. The current system only allows progress on a few of these fronts at a time.

B) THREATS FROM THE STATE

States that confront civil society create tensions that endanger democracy, manifesting themselves through the following:



CORRUPTION AND CO-OPTATION OF THE STATE

Driven by the influence of drug trafficking and organized crime and/or by oligarchies, multi-billion-dollar corporations, and financial elites. This leads to the breakdown of checks and balances and the loss of independence for the different branches of government.

CRIMINALIZATION, POLITICAL PERSECUTION, AND REPRESSION

Of activists, journalists, and social movements. This includes the use of institutional violence (police and military) and the instrumentalization of the justice system through lawfare. It is essentially the implementation of a policy of terror and exemplary violence.

DISPOSSESSION OF THE TERRITORIES

Of Indigenous and native peoples, which in turn causes migration, the loss of young people and leaders.

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

And civil liberties: life, education, freedom of expression, etc.

ELECTORAL MANIPULATION

To stay in power.

C) ENVIRONMENT OF FEAR

The policies of terror that accompany the rise of authoritarianism create an atmosphere of fear and fatigue. In this context, several factors limit democratic defense:

- **Demobilization** and reduced participation due to fear of reprisals. Fear causes people to participate less and self-censor their opinions due to potentially dire consequences. This generates a culture of silence, allowing authoritarian practices to continue to grow.
- **Pessimism and hopelessness**, which leads to the belief that nothing can be done about authoritarianism or other phenomena such as climate change. It is expressed as resignation to settling for little and accepting violence and hardship as normal.
- **Political apathy**, disinterest, and fatigue which affect both citizens and activists in the social movements themselves, especially when they face authoritarian attacks.
- **Weakening of social ties.** Persecution and dispossession lead to migration and exile, while distrust and individualism grow. This makes it difficult to build a common collective project and increases polarization, leading us to see each other as enemies.
- **Citizenship without agency.** Many people feel they no longer have a voice or real power, becoming more like subjects than active citizens with the ability to participate and influence the decisions that affect them.



D) INFORMATION, TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION

We are losing the battle over ideas—across education, media, and public discourse. The following are among the most critical issues:



PROMOTION OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVES

Disinformation spreads through corporate media which perpetuates private interests, hides corruption, and stigmatizes those who fight for information, freedom, and collective rights. Cyberbullying and the dissemination of hate speech through trolls, bots, and influencers on social media is increasing. Both conventional and new forms of media are used to foster fear, division, and advance authoritarian agendas. Another important front is religion, especially neo-Pentecostalism, as a means of ideological control by elites to suppress citizen mobilization and organization.



DIFFICULTIES IN PROMOTING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

That counter misinformation and promote our own narratives. Messages do not reach people because we use a complicated vocabulary or do not speak the communities' languages. Furthermore, the attack on independent media gives conservative outlets more space to spread their messages, making it even more difficult for our voices to be heard.



INSUFFICIENT EDUCATIONAL SPACES

There is a lack of knowledge about democracies, authoritarian practices, human rights, gender, interculturality, and ethics. Political education must emerge from communities, not just from academia. We need spaces for conversations at different levels about the future we want beyond liberal democracy. The education system must be rescued; it does not prepare young people to be critical and active citizens. The emergence of artificial intelligence facilitates access to information to some degree, but it generates complacency and leaves no room for questioning.



LACK OF ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Governments often prevent and hinder the transfer of information useful to organizations and communities. Despite the ease of communication today, we are not informed. Information does not reach the territories due to distance or language barriers.

EJ HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES

Centuries old inequalities and forms of discrimination have hindered proper democratic functioning. In addition to promoting intolerance, hatred, and division, they have not adequately recognized diversity, tending instead to legitimize the political exclusion of many identities (pluralities). The most important of these inequalities are as follows:



ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Creates extreme wealth and poverty. Elites have perfected a system that benefits themselves, maintaining the status quo and their political hegemony. The fight against poverty is used to attract votes without actually affecting big business interests. Poverty keeps us in survival mode, imposing socioeconomic limitations on participating in and strengthening democracies.



RACISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM DERIVED FROM COLONIALISM

There are deep-rooted discriminatory practices that limit the participation of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. The very designation of citizens as "people," "commune," "neighborhood," or "collective" is stigmatizing, reducing autonomy to organizational manifestations of representation. If a degree of participation is achieved and some demands met, it is only after decades of struggle.



EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

Women's participation is particularly threatened by sexism, patriarchy, and the widespread use of violence.



ADULT-CENTRISM

- Young people are ignored because they are considered inexperienced. Intergenerational dynamics are neglected.

F) CHALLENGES WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The problems identified within social movements that hinder democratic defense are as follows:

- **Lack of coordination between organizations.** There is no solidarity between communities facing the advance of authoritarianism. There is no common agenda or agreed-upon proposal that allows for political maneuvering without imposing restrictions. Struggles are split into sectors, with many conflicts within each sector. There is competition for resources.
- **Internal divisions.** There is a lack of a unified vision and dialogue within organizations. There are problems with hierarchies, verticality, mutual distrust, lack of empathy, and centralized leadership. There are no conflict management protocols, processes for generational renewal or the documentation of institutional memory.
- **Reproduction of systemic inequalities within movements.** We seek to bring about change in power relationships, but we do not question our own organizational practices such as: sexism, misogyny, and racism; patriarchal and colonial dynamics; and the exclusion of young people, women, and indigenous communities from decision-making processes.
- **Lack of clarity in objectives and context.** There is a lack of clarity about what people really want or what we should defend, as evidenced by the activist demobilization that takes place during progressive governments. We also have not identified what we are fighting against. In most liberal democratic societies, these deep political conversations are not taking place. It is therefore important to create forms of participation that respect the diversity of each context.
- **Economic dependence on international cooperation.** In many cases, organizations' operational capacity depends on external funding, which can derail institutional objectives. The fact that civil society's criticism, resistance, and alternative journalism depend on international cooperation is a source of vulnerability as organizations can be controlled by blocking their funding sources. This raises the challenge of how to make social organizations more sustainable.
- **The takeover of movements, organizations, and leaders** by powerful groups in order to demobilize them. The infiltration of civil society groups is dismantling community processes and struggles. The influence of political parties is also felt at all times, undermining and limiting a more genuinely autonomous participation.



DAY 2: SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES AND STRATEGIES

EXPRESSION WALL 2:

WHAT HAVE WE DONE OR ARE WE DOING TO FACE AN AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT?

The responses to the expression wall fell into three categories:

COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Community organization, food sovereignty, territorial defense, denouncing criminalization, network integration, and strategic alliances.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

Political training, community radio stations, combating misinformation, creating hopeful alternative narratives and opening spaces for reflection.

PARTICIPATION AND DISCUSSION

Social audits, lobbying in decision-making spaces, intercultural dialogue, and the promotion of critical leadership (especially among young people and women).



PANEL 3 – ALTERNATIVE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCES

[Link to watch the panel](#)



PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE (PMPJ)

The PMPJ brings together leaders from communities and organizations in North America (African-descendant, Indigenous, and Native American communities; survivors of armed violence; families of murdered or missing persons; and immigrants), spoke about their dialogue process to build a common front for peace and justice. Their commitment is to build a future of participatory, transnational, multilingual, and multicultural democracy with a collective voice.

The following are their main demands: 1) halt the proliferation of firearms in the U.S. and their uncontrolled flow into Mexico; 2) demilitarize public scrutiny; 3) end punitive laws and the adoption of a public health approach to drug use; 4) binational policies that prioritize people over profits; 5) a binational strategy for the search for missing persons; 6) end racism and discrimination; 7) create a regional group to implement Latin American and Caribbean citizenship and U.S. immigration reform; 8) create a high-level binational working group to address the causes of hunger, violence, and environmental devastation; 9) create a binational fund to compensate environmental loss and damage; and; 10) introduce laws in Mexico and the United States that recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous and Native American peoples.



PHILIP LINDSAY

Heads a program on citizen power at the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard University in New York. He presented key deliberative democracy concepts and shared his analysis on how we can bring together different people, communities, races, and economic classes to make a difference. He highlighted three elements in the democratic practices of many communities that could offer a potential solution: 1) rotation, or not having the same people holding on to power; 2) the random selection of citizens for public office; 3) deliberation, or the possibility of having in-depth discussions among a diversity of people.

We must expand our repertoire of democratic tools, learning from ordinary people and from history. The aforementioned democratic practices can be useful when opportunities arise to bring about change. Deliberative assemblies with lottery-based participation, for example, can complement traditional referendums, helping to raise the voice of social movements vis-à-vis the big-money interests that usually determine the electoral outcomes through advertising.



IRMA ALICIA NIMATUJ

K'iche' journalist, activist, social anthropologist, and politician from Guatemala, gave a historical overview of the political history of Guatemala's indigenous peoples. She highlighted their system of public offices: a hierarchical structure based on community service where work is required to advance, with term limits, rotation of power, a spiritual dimension, an accumulation of local prestige, and collective decision-making.

This system was negatively impacted by the internal armed conflict and genocide. Currently, we are seeing a revival of Indigenous autonomous local governments, with notable examples such as the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán and the Xinka Parliament. Several Indigenous associations and organizations (especially those of Indigenous women) have also been formed, as well as political parties. There has been a strategic hybridization process that has involved fighting for democracy from the territories and historical memory to create a pragmatic proposal for a plurinational country. In this way, Indigenous authorities have been able to reclaim some of what has been taken from them.

PANEL 4 - MEDIA

[Link to watch the panel](#)



MIGUEL MONTES CAMACHO

Program director at the Gabo Foundation, spoke about the challenges that media outlets in Latin America are currently facing; among them, the impact of funding cuts, especially from USAID. Trump's treatment of journalists as "enemies of the people" since his first term has worsened, spread, or consolidated in several countries with authoritarian regimes. Examples span the entire ideological spectrum. Platforms controlled by tech-billionaires have eliminated content moderation and information verification mechanisms, allowing all kinds of disinformation and propaganda to spread, fueled by the unregulated use of artificial intelligence.

Given these circumstances, three basic ideas should be emphasized: 1) the defense of independent and rigorous journalism as a public good is a collective struggle, not just for journalists; 2) unethical and unregulated technology poses a major threat to our societies, so we must encourage discussions about its regulation; and 3) we must highlight the courage of those who continue to practice journalism despite the difficulties, since reporting what is happening with rigor and humanity is still an important form of resistance.



NICOLE KRAMM

Filmmaker and journalist from Chile, works for international media outlets covering Latin American conflicts. She focused her presentation on the repression and precarious situation of independent media in her country. In Chile, freedom of the press and opinion is being rapidly restricted, in conjunction with the rise of right-wing discourse. There has been systemic persecution of all media that engage in communication that includes social criticism, including raids and cell phone tapping. There is widespread violence against journalists, particularly women. Nicole is a victim of ocular trauma; she lost her vision in one eye when she was shot by a police officer in 2019.

There is a bias in the topics covered by corporate media. What is reported serves the interests of the business elite. Criminalization is employed to prevent journalists from entering conflict zones where struggles over land and water are taking place. Legal loopholes weaken potential means to prevent violence, so journalists have had to adopt their own safety and precautionary measures: coordinating in Signal chats, sharing their real-time locations so that people know where they are, and making themselves visible on social media.



PAVEL VEGA

Journalist and communicator from Guatemala, discussed strategies that can be adopted to strengthen independent journalism. It is important to overcome the divisions among journalists. Internal fractures benefit authoritarian governments and mafias, which exploit divisions to hijack narratives.

Training in journalistic principles is necessary: rigor and truthfulness in reporting what is really being investigated; a code of ethics for addressing moral dilemmas; and training in history (including alternative historical knowledge), philosophy, and the theory of knowledge so that communication pieces have a solid foundation and broader impact. The media's disconnect from the information needs and realities of communities must be addressed. It is important to move toward more accessible formats. We must communicate with communities in their languages, on topics relevant to them, and in a way that is understandable. Journalism needs to return to its essence as a public service.



ÁNGELA CUC

Kaqchikel communicator from the Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools (FGER), addressed the perspective of community communication in the face of the takeover of the justice system and the silencing of critical voices through criminalization. She argues that the dangers journalism faces can be direct, such as criminal charges and threats aimed at provoking fear and self-censorship, or indirect: limiting access to information, monopolizing the radio spectrum, excluding languages other than Spanish, making rural and community contexts invisible, etc. The state has played a fundamental role in the erosion of the collective right to information based on ordinary people's narratives. Structural and symbolic violence has deepened by denying women's voices in the media and in the structural racism that has historically excluded native peoples.

An objective and neutral approach to communication is a fallacy. We must embrace a more overtly political and anti-racist stance. This is not about creating new narratives, but rather strengthening and amplifying existing ones that challenge capitalism, patriarchy, and other oppressive systems. We must inform from and for communities, affirming their worldviews and ways of life, and reclaiming joy as a political right. Anti-racist, community-based, and Indigenous communication strategies are not only the response to a democratic crisis; they are seeds that can grow into alternative ways of living that instill a sense of dignity, joy, memory, justice, present, and future.



DELIBERATION: STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES

La polinización es una dinámica que rota los grupos de discusión, permitiendo que nuevas personas sumen a lo que ya había sido planteado por otros/as participantes en rotaciones anteriores. Por medio de esta dinámica, se propusieron estrategias para afrontar los desafíos identificados el primer día y conocer acciones que ya se están implementando. Las estrategias y acciones planteadas se dividieron en los siguientes ejes:

A) SEARCH FOR DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES

Even within the current liberal democratic model, actions can be promoted that take into account the diverse expressions of democracy that exist in the territories.

- **Value the organizational experiences of Indigenous peoples**, including self-determination and self-governance. These are truly participatory democracies that solve problems and exemplify the value of strengthening communities' identities, autonomy and systems.
- **Reform liberal democracy.** Until better alternatives exist, parliamentary quotas can be implemented to represent communities, women, and youth. We must fight for an electoral system that respects the unique ways in which different peoples and identities operate; review the ways in which political parties are financed; create rules and sanctions that encourage competition between different political actors; and include recall elections within the democratic dynamic, among other measures. Other forms of participation beyond the ballot box should be promoted, such as citizen assemblies. These kinds of bodies, along with community organizations, can help to create parallel, complementary democratic mechanisms.
- **Strengthen the leadership of women**, who have played an essential role in defending organizations, territories and life. Women's leadership and power in social movements and organizations must be real and substantial; we must avoid the symbolic instrumentalization of Indigenous and Afro-descendant women's participation.
- **Promote the participation of young people**, who are familiar with the latest forms of communication and can generate innovative strategies. They are also the ones who will, sooner or later, take charge of our struggles.

B) ALLIANCES AND NETWORKS

We are aware that our ties can and must improve in order to reduce the isolation of our struggles and synergize our efforts more effectively. The strategies proposed were as follows:

CREATE ALLIANCES BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Globalizing strategies but implementing them at the local level. We should address problems holistically, coordinating with other actors that share our struggles. We should improve our mediation capacities in order to heal relationships within and outside our organizations.

EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES

We can create a network to share information, analysis, and delve deeper into the issues; disseminate success stories, update risk and opportunity mapping; discuss common problems to formulate joint strategies; consider next steps after large-scale mobilizations; and imagine the democracies and governance systems that we want as an emancipatory project.

SUPPORT SECURITY ISSUES

We must collaborate in order to protect journalists, activists, and community leaders who are under attack; share safety strategies during mobilizations; and assist in the detection and early warning of threats to our territories. Together, we should foment a prevention culture in order to face multiple threats, improving our ability to identify and counter the strategies of those who oppose our struggles, and not just react to them. We should also ensure the use of non-violent actions.



C) POLITICAL TRAINING

This is an essential tool for defending democracies by being able to constantly adapt to the changing circumstances in which we are operating. For effective training, the following factors should be taken into account:

- **Evaluate how leadership is being developed.** We should reflect on the fact that many leaders end up in traditional political parties, and when they rise to power, they abandon the causes and mandates of their constituents. We need to educate ourselves with a vocation for power in preparation for different scenarios, whilst maintaining the ability to keep resisting in order to achieve real impact. We must also learn how to resist self-centeredness, empty self-promotion, and corruption.
- **Critical and inclusive political education.** We should cultivate critical thinking and self-organization in order to build a political project that strengthens women's leadership and involvement in decision-making, and that works with young people to ensure intergenerational participation. We must end the reproduction of systemic discrimination and inequality in training processes, creating political subjects who will be immune to corrupt, racist or sexist practices.
- **Action-based training.** We should develop a culture that embraces ongoing mobilization and coordinated struggle, learns new ways of supporting our communities and territories, and creates political instruments tailored to the needs of the people. We should accompany communities in order to analyze different political options prior to elections in order to promote informed voting. We should also replicate training by "training trainers" and expanding our networks so that we can learn about methodologies being used in other territories.

D) COMMUNICATIONS

The need to promote actions within the current model to generate an environment conducive to democracy and inclusion was considered. The proposed strategies were as follows:



PROMOTE OUR OWN NARRATIVES

This includes thinking about narratives that put the defense of life at the center, by conveying that we can organize and change our lives through politics. We should respect local narratives, oral tradition, cultural wealth, ancestral knowledge, identity, and territoriality. We should condemn the dissemination of narratives by elites that seek to instrumentalize religious discourse. It is important to back content creators, recognizing the extent of their influence, especially among young people. We should also provide tools that strengthen our narratives, influence public opinion, and increase audiences.



TAKE ACTION AGAINST MISINFORMATION

We should provide training in how to classify corporate media and identify owners and funding sources. We should verify the information that we consume, constantly fact-check, and seek out alternative, more reliable media sources. It is important to build alliances with alternative non-profit media outlets that often lack resources in order to offer them support with food, lodging, and fundraising. It is also vital to ensure greater access to public information.



FIND NEW WAYS TO DELIVER OUR MESSAGES TO THE POPULATION

One key issue is to use simple, straightforward vocabulary, speak the language of the communities, and ensure that our communication strategies are culturally appropriate. We should take advantage of community radio stations, which are a great way to reach people, particularly in remote rural areas. Art and culture are powerful creative tools for generating resistance: music, theater, and other creative expressions can help us to challenge, encourage, and support communities. On the other hand, it is indispensable to reengage in grassroots mobilization and community work in order to identify what unites us. When we knock on doors and speak directly to people about their problems, we make politics feel more relevant to everyday life and this helps people to see it as something personal and not distant or alien.



REACH OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENSURE INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Not only in politics but in all spheres. No struggle is sustainable without successors ready to take the mantle. The generation gap can be narrowed with technological tools, creating content that fosters a new generation of critical and conscious individuals. This way, we can generate creative material to reach young people that not only serves to inform, but also to educate and raise awareness.



RECORD OUR OWN HISTORY

We must think long-term so that organizations and groups can carry out their own documentation processes. Keeping collective historical memory alive is an effective way of countering identity dispossession.

E) SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The strengthening of social movements encompasses several of the strategic options outlined earlier. Below are some specific aspects to consider:

STRENGTHEN SELF-CRITICISM / SELF-OBSERVATION FROM A CONSTRUCTIVE PERSPECTIVE

- Self-criticism should be a transformative tool. Sometimes we are overly critical; other times, we are complacent. We should seek a balance between the two that fosters collective learning.
- We propose replacing “self-criticism” with “self-observation” as a less punishing way of carrying out an ongoing reflection.
- Organizations should have the capacity to absorb external criticism by developing analytical tools and methodologies for constructively processing it.
- Extended, day-long retreats with the support of an external facilitator, scheduled breaks, can be a useful way of carrying out an internal review. They should not be seen as an obligation, but rather as an integral part of a dynamic, evolving organizational culture.
- It is key to recuperate each organization’s historical memory and create opportunities for listening that encourage us to see ourselves more objectively at both the personal and collective level.
- Strategies should be holistic: they should not segment problems, but rather address them from an integrated, comprehensive perspective.

RECOVER THE STRATEGIC AND UNIFIED VISION

- Many organizations lack clear, shared goals. It is essential to establish long- and short-term plans with realistic and measurable objectives.
- A genuine evaluation of how power is exercised and toward which objectives collective action is directed is needed.
- Leadership renewal should not be a mere response to exhaustion, but rather the result of clear political decision-making aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the organizational mission.
- The transformation of vertical power structures into a more circular dynamic encourages intergenerational participation and for leaderships to rotate. It is important to prevent personalized or eternal leadership from becoming entrenched, opting instead for more horizontal, flexible, and collective structures.

PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONALITY AS A POLITICAL PRACTICE

- The lack of intergenerational mechanisms weakens movements. Strategies and tools are needed to facilitate the transition between generations.
- Collective healing and care must be part of the political process, creating spaces for sharing feelings, experiences, and historical pain.
- We should analyze the real availability of those best places to assume new leadership roles, without imposing undue burdens upon them.
- We should assume the legacy of those who came before us with responsibility, recognizing the value of the succession process with a strong pedagogical element.

QUESTION THE REPRODUCTION OF SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES

- Organizations often reproduce internally the inequalities that they criticize externally: the concentration of power, the exclusion of young people, gender inequality, etc.
- Upon inheriting power, some struggles are abandoned or diluted by their new leaders. It is essential that they do not lose sight of the political goals or foundational mission that gave rise to the social movements in the first place.
- It is important to rethink organizational structures so that they do not imitate hierarchical models, but rather adopt new forms of collective construction.

REFLECT ON THE DEPENDENCY TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- We should carry out critical analysis on the impact of international cooperation and the NGO-ization of social movements.
- External support should not undermine organizational autonomy.
- International cooperation should serve the processes that they support, not define or condition them. Movements should therefore be clear about their own goals and structures.
- The cost of opting for circular and more democratic processes is high in terms of time, resources, and commitment, but necessary for building strong, bottom up democracies.



F) ENVIRONMENT

Since authoritarian regimes are often allies of extractive capital, democratic defense is intertwined with the struggle to save our planet. Some of the strategies should therefore include the following:

- **Changing the extractive agricultural model.** Extractive economic systems only benefit the elites. We must eliminate monocultural and agribusiness forms of production and invest instead in non-extractive models and indigenous economic systems; support diversified and small-scale production; disseminate existing food sovereignty practices; and promote agroecology as a commercially viable concept that goes beyond own consumption or self-sufficiency.
- **Defending territory to prevent forced displacement.** We must secure the territories of indigenous peoples by highlighting their own community-based, territorial defense strategies in the struggle against extractive models.
- **Encouraging dialogues that promote the exchange of knowledge management and lessons learned between communities** that share the struggle against extractive industries such as mining, soy, palm oil, etc. This can be done through the implementation of deliberative democracy mechanisms in order to identify alternatives and strategies.
- **Researching the impact of the extractive model on the environment,** especially water and energy use. This can help territorial defenders to develop strategies and to use the data to communicate the environmental consequences of these industries.
- **Reflecting on our own consumption practices.** In our daily lives, we consume products that are emblematic of the capitalist production system. In our struggle against big business, we should question the level of coherence between what we consume and what we stand for.
- **Holding large corporations accountable for pollution.** The dominant narrative portrays ordinary people as being responsible for pollution and fails to question the role of the large corporations and consumer systems in which we are immersed. We must fight for legislation that requires companies to be accountable for their production and waste.



DAY 3: LINES OF ACTION

PANEL 5 - FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIONS

[Link to watch the panel](#)



MYRIAM MÉNDEZ MONTALVO

Leader of the "Valiente es Dialogar" platform, focused on the possibilities presented by dialogue processes between opposing and diverse groups in order to address conflicts. While it is true that conflicts are inherent to every society, they are often mediated through violence—whether physical, symbolic (prejudice and stigmatization), or structural (denial of rights, inequality, and lack of opportunities). Violence leads to binary systems (them versus us), fear, anger, revenge, distrust, polarization, radicalization, and the isolation of groups that only hear their own voices.

Forming these bridges entails building trust and recognizing one another as part of a common world, as well as going beyond the temporary (which prevents us from building common goals) with a view to developing long-term strategies. If democracy involves coexistence among different people, dialogue allows us to do what representative institutions and participation have failed to achieve. When a person decides to listen rather than attack, to recognize rather than exclude, they are broadening the common ground a little further; and although it may seem like a small step, it is the beginning of all transformation.



BOSQUE DAVID IGLESIAS

Founding member of "Lab Incide," addressed the topic of intergenerational dialogue as a tool for overcoming collective trauma in times of fascist seduction. When faced with surging fascism we lose our positive memory, forgetting that we have overcome previous periods of danger and that we are heirs of historical struggles. In light of this, we should recover our history of resistance and in so doing establish intergenerational dialogue processes.

Previous generations and Indigenous peoples can teach us how they have navigated and sustained the community through traumatic moments. Lab Incide is therefore translating the teachings of our great thinkers into the communication codes and language through which new generations are asking questions. This is done through virtual political pedagogy schools and intergenerational exploration meetings that give young people the opportunity to speak with Latin American resistance leaders. In these times of across the board shocks, we need to sometimes lower our resistance, our prejudices, our masks, in order to get closer to other generations' experiences with a generous, humble, and an open hearted attitude.



FINAL GROUP DISCUSSION: DEVELOPING ACTION ROUTES

The discussion began with an individual exercise based on three main questions. With this as input, three large groups deliberated, reaching consensus and prioritizing proposals. The results of each question were as follows:

A) WHAT DO I TAKE AWAY FROM THIS MEETING?

- **Hope**
 - Seeing that there are committed and courageous people who keep the struggle and desire for change alive, without losing the joy or the dignified anger that drives us.
 - Knowing that in other countries and territories there are people who share our challenges and dreams motivates us to keep going.
 - Recognizing the value of what we are already doing and the reaffirmation that our actions, however small, have meaning and can generate transformation.
 - The certainty that together, from our own realities, we can advance together with a shared purpose.
- **Learning**
 - We are taking with us information, experiences from other places, and stories from people who, like us, are organizing for a world free of violence and persecution. We learned about resistance strategies in other territories and different perspectives for strengthening our political analysis.
 - We renew our spirit of collective struggle. We are inspired by the organizational experiences that have put the defense of life and the unity of peoples front and center. The experience has awakened a lot of curiosity about others, about their experiences, local strategies, and ways of organizing. It is important to continue working towards the unification of progressive forces so that life and different democratic manifestations remain possible.
 - These lessons can have a greater impact if we share them with our organizations, Indigenous groups, social movements, and communities.
- **Contacts**
 - The opportunity to reconnect with activists and organizations we already knew, or to begin new relationships that pave the way for future alliances and processes.
 - The challenge now is to continue communicating, exchanging ideas and experiences, learning about other projects and processes, and building relationships of friendship and empathy.
 - We see the value in leveraging these connections to build strong alliances and have the opportunity to make international denouncements when necessary.
- **Reflections**
 - Spaces for imagining, reflecting, dialoguing, deepening analysis, and building strategies are important for rebuilding our societies and political forces.
 - Collective deliberation should be designed with methodologies that facilitate exchange, are innovative, and are easy to replicate in different contexts.
 - It is important to create opportunities for dialogue and political training schools that enable young leaders to awaken.
 - Spaces like this serve to energize us and connect us with our roots on an individual, collective, and ancestral level. Love for life, for the community, for our families, and for our countries is vital for our struggles.
 - The exchange between the north and south of the hemisphere makes us feel supported and capable of resisting attacks.

B) HOW CAN WE TAKE ACTION TO DEFEND DEMOCRACY IN OUR RESPECTIVE CONTEXTS?

MOBILIZATION

- Mobilization is very important for defending democracy, because it allows us to generate unity, raise our voices, and highlight the dangers that democracies are facing.
- Taking to the streets is about building resilience, helping to build a larger organization and spreading our message.
- We will mobilize in order to seek transparency, accountability, control over political power, and fight against corruption.
- Indigenous peoples propose mobilization through communication, political advocacy, legal strategy, political training, and alliances among Indigenous communities. They emphasize the need to train communicators and generate networks and coordination mechanisms for recognizing their own forms of government, which are also democratic.

COMMUNICATIONS

- We will promote regional narratives that challenge far right discourses, maintaining an open dialogue between countries, media outlets, and different sectors. It can be thought of as concentric circles that spiral outward, attracting more and more people who question the system. This should be done in communities' own languages in order to reach them directly, using digital media to stay connected, and thinking of innovative ways of sharing information through alternative media as an opportunity for dialogue and debate about democracies.
- We will amplify peoples' knowledge to defend our territories and implement communication initiatives that counter the politics of fear and political persecution. We will develop political communication strategies that reinforce the values that unite us and combat authoritarian discourse.
- We will return to ethical, critical, and political journalism, debunking the manipulation of information by large networks in order to provide people with more reliable information.
- We will propose new legal and public policy initiatives such as the creation of a law for community journalists and the implementation of observatories to monitor communications at the regional or Latin American level.

ALLIANCES

- We must strengthen alliances and solidarity at both the national and international levels, especially between Indigenous communities in the north and the south, by forging ties on both sides of the border. We must nurture and support leadership, promoting the creation of a multinational alliance with a common agenda.
- We will build citizen alliances in defense of democracy for those fighting for the environment, security, justice, and better trade agreements. At the same time, we will propose economic alternatives through the organization of cooperatives that help us remain firm in our convictions.
- We will maintain the alliances and coordination that have been generated at the meeting, strengthening the organizational framework from diverse perspectives.

TRAINING AND DIALOGUE

- We will promote the construction of a common pedagogical agenda that prepares people for their daily struggles, based on solidarity among peoples, intergenerational exchange, dignity and diversity.
- Training and opportunities for dialogue should encourage new democratic and transformative leadership that calls for unity and the capacity to bring people together.
- It is vital to be on the streets, to get involved in popular education work, to be visible, to transmit information, analysis, experiences, culture, autonomy, knowledge, and alternative interpretations of the state and public spheres.



C) HOW CAN WE CONTINUE TO EXCHANGE, ANALYZE, INSPIRE, AND CARRY OUT JOINT ACTION?

- **Create and distribute a contact directory of those who attended the event.**
- **Develop and share the meeting systematization in order to:**
 - Replicate the information and hold similar discussions within our organizations.
 - Use it as input for a strategic plan that could include elements such as communication, political training, and the promotion of democratic practices.
 - Consider building a platform to share what has been discussed in follow-up dialogue processes and analysis, sharing the inputs generated from different territories.
- **Coordinate actions in the countries represented at this meeting through the following actions:**
 - Maintain the event chat and look for safer alternatives.
 - Consider creating a communication network among the meeting participants to share our work and build a strong and united multinational coalition.
 - Create a press agency that helps position the agenda of social movements so that their voices and struggles have greater visibility.
 - Map alternative media outlets where organizations can obtain information, strengthen exchanges between different social actors, expand the reach of our causes, and build a diverse information network that is close to the people.
 - Promote opportunities for the exchange of ideas, reflection, and collective action. Continuing to discuss the type of democracy we want will give us greater clarity in defining our actions. We should explore methodologies and adapt them to a participatory model that allows for greater mobilization.
 - Generate and share a newsletter with each organization and movement that participated in the meeting, strengthening networks within each country, and producing collaborative multimedia materials for a historical archive of movements and organizations.
 - Reorganize our defense of life and build an operational network for the protection of rights. We could create an international alert network for threats against activists, journalists, and human rights defenders.
 - We hope that Global Exchange and FOCO remain involved in follow-up proposals that could be defined around specific topics and the formation of working groups to delve deeper into each of them. This way, we can move forward with greater focus and impact.



METHODOLOGY

To access the methodology for follow-up workshops to the event in your own organization, you can click this link:

[Methodology](#)

