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Whose Truth? Navigating COP30's Contradictions and Indigenous Peoples' Rights

Nina Bries Silva

During his speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly in New York last September, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared that "COP30 in Belém will be the COP of Truth." But whose truth is being spoken? Who gets to define this Truth? Whose voices truly count in the current climate debates?

This year's COP, dubbed the "Forest COP", is the first one hosted in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, with a historic participation of Indigenous communities. Thousands of Indigenous people journeyed to Belém, including by boat on the *Yaku Mama Amazon Flotilla*, to voice their realities, to speak out their truth, to honor their territories and to advocate for their rights. However, only a few can enter the Blue Zone where negotiations are held, and even then, still struggle in having their voices heard and valued.

News of Indigenous-led protests has spread across the world, highlighting the "*mutirão* spirit"of COP30, or "collective effort" in Indigenous Tupi-Guarani language. However, a closer look at the spaces occupied by Indigenous peoples, inside and outside of the negotiation rooms, reveals a more complex picture. Representation remains predominantly Brazilian and Amazonian. An Aymara

Indigenous member from the Indigenous Climate Forum (FICC) lamented that high travel and accommodation costs prevent many Indigenous people of the Southern Cone from participating in this COP, even when their countries have granted them observer status. Similarly, a Colombian Indigenous representative from the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*-CRIC mentioned they had six seats available but could fill only three because of financial constraints.

While the COP framework requested Indigenous communities to unite despite their diversity and disparities, the voices from the Amazon have been this time comparatively louder and more resonant. Brazilian Amazonian Indigenous representatives have articulated demands rooted in their own realities, advocating strongly for the recognition of their lands. Shortly thereafter, the Brazilian government announced the demarcation of ten Indigenous territories. But what about the broader scope of Indigenous rights and the potential "*mutirão"* spirit of the upcoming COP30's agreement?

Despite being among the most affected by climate change and acting as guardians of Mother Earth, Indigenous peoples remain largely excluded from the relevant decision-making processes. One Indigenous leader from Mexico declared: "We do not want only participation but sits in the decision making bodies so that we can have an influence. We don't want to say only participation because we all know what that means, we get to do a statement and that sit".

The few Indigenous representatives permitted into the negotiations sit in AC rooms far from the realities of their territories, listening to technical jargon that often clashes with their lived experiences. When they finally get the chance to speak at the end of the session, they have limited time to make a non-binding statement. At a session on Tuesday 18th, after ministers, humanitarians, and scientists spoke, an Indigenous representative finally got the floor and remarked, "I apologize for speaking beyond the two minutes, but we don't have enough spaces at this COP to speak from authority to authority. I am here to represent over 1200 Indigenous people, I must clearly convey our demands."

To be heard and influence the final decisions, Indigenous peoples must frame their messages within technical, legal, and political language that aligns with dominant climate frameworks. Disharmonies to Mother become threats to biodiversity; traditional knowledges are turnt into sustainable solutions, often backed up with scientifics data, given states' resistance to accept Indigenous knowledge as science. Despite their sustained collective effort, negotiations have now progressed into the second week, drafted articles have been proposed and Indigenous groups need to lobbying hard with States for political support, as they do not have a final a say in the COP's ultimate commitments.

According to a Colombian Indigenous participant, "the real discussions are happening away from the negotiation rooms. Here, it's all air conditioning and lies". Indigenous communities have therefore created alternative spaces to discuss and act on climate issues on their own terms—spaces that honor their ceremonial traditions, spiritual mandates and governance structures. Social media, music and song have become powerful tools of resistance and storytelling, amplifying Indigenous solutions and narratives of resilience. Outside the formal arena, the "*Cúpula dos Povos"*, the Peoples' Summit, serves as a vital gathering place where Indigenous peoples can organize, articulate demands and discuss "the real changes" which must "come from those who live the reality, from those who know the land, the territory, and the collective pulse of the future". It is here in these authentic, culturally and spiritually rich spaces that one can truly feel the Territory, connect with the Amazon and hear its voice. It is probably in these spaces, beyond the sanitized, impersonal chambers, that the Truth lies and that the real People's or Forests' COP is unfolding.

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