

Institute of Peoples, Territories and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP) / Interethnic Environmental Alliance Position Paper April 2026, Santa Marta, Colombia

This is a work in progress; the first draft was submitted to the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels, taking place in Santa Marta, Colombia (April 24–29, 2026). [English version translated from Spanish]

Submitted by: Institute of Peoples, Territories, and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP)

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Context

This working paper / concept document is based on the perspectives, experiences, and lessons learned in the context of the emergence of an alliance called the “Global Interethnic Alliance for Life, Biodiversity, and Environmental Governance,” guided and driven by grassroots organizations of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements and supported by the Institute of Peoples, Territories, and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP) (see declaration at the end of this document). The InterEthnic Environmental Alliance envisions people’s autonomous environmental governance from and with their Territories, and addresses the lack of real and effective recognition in national and international policies and policy frameworks. The environmental Alliance has made progress with the participation of leaders and communities in Colombia, Canada, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the United States, with contributions from other parts of the Americas and Africa. As part of our participation in the “First Conference on the Transition Away From Fossil Fuels” held in Santa Marta from April 24 to 29, 2026, we present this document with the aim of contributing to real and transformative policies and actions to advance a just transition, from and with the Peoples.

The energy transition is a commitment to climate and environmental action that arises in the context of a world where capitalism, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, and racism increasingly shape global policies that result in violence, displacement, and violations of Peoples’ human rights; actions that disproportionately target Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, and women in particular; consequently, these territories face serious impacts that hinder genuine grassroots environmental governance. That is why it is essential that just transition actions and policies center on the experiences, commitments, and ancestral and traditional knowledge of the Peoples.

This document stems from dialogue between the Peoples and their allies, and draws on contributions from academia and grassroots community organizations. We recognize the significant gaps in the current approaches adopted by multilateral organizations (for example, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as within the policy framework of nation-states worldwide, to address one of the main (if not the main) challenges of our generation: reducing dependence on fossil fuels in order to significantly mitigate the effects of the climate crisis on human existence on the planet.

Decolonizing Methodologies: Walking with Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples, with an Emphasis on the Role of Women Toward a Just Transition

This concept paper highlights the experiences and perspectives of key sectors that are often excluded from these conversations yet have made and continue to make a fundamental contribution to climate change mitigation as well as global thinking on this issue. These sectors include Afro-descendant Peoples, Indigenous Peoples—with particular impacts on women and gender-based groups—as well as rural and small-scale producers. We particularly highlight governance models based on indigenous and ancestral ontological and epistemological systems that include historical evidence of the care of Peoples, territories, ecosystems, biological and cultural diversity, and equitable social relations.

These are models that integrate aspects of the relationship between humans and nature, and take into account elements related to the scale of production (avoiding large-scale development that has highly ecologically-damaging impacts, such as fracking) and that avoid excessive consumption—centred approaches, models in many cases governed by the cultural principle of leaving the environment with as few traces of human impact as possible. These models reflect shared, expressed commitments to the “decolonization” of large-scale Western corporate production, shifting toward smaller, self-determined/self-managed, and relocalized economies that foster direct (rather than abstract) relationships between human and non-human relationships, Indigenous and Afro-descendant lifeways, and that take into account the grave inequalities and power imbalances resulting from ongoing historical processes associated with colonization and its economic engine—capitalism. These historical processes led to the systematic and massive displacement of Indigenous Peoples and Africans/people of African descent—through the transatlantic slave trade—as well as large-scale internal forced displacements in Colombia and other parts of the Americas, and the vast global migrations currently taking place.

Colonization and capitalism have also resulted in economic dependence and large-scale environmental exploitation, requiring the massive use of fossil fuels, which has resulted in a differential impact on the lives of indigenous and Afro-descendant women, rural racialized Peoples—who are also land defenders, human rights activists, small-scale producers, and members of grassroots organizations working to combat the exploitative development model, its structural causes, and the dynamics of militarism associated with neocolonial expansionism.

Questions guiding reflections contained in this document are oriented to understanding the relevance of ethnic-territorial rights, self-governance, and a just transition, from the perspectives of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples:

1. What does a **just** transition mean for Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples?
2. What **factors** should we take into account when discussing a just transition?
3. How will this transition affect **land tenure**?
4. What is **environmental racism** and how does it affect Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples?
5. How does a just transition influence issues such as **reparations** and **climate finance**?
6. How can the IPTP, through its work with the Interethnic Alliance, help **build robust mechanisms for participation and decision-making**, such as free, prior, and informed consultation?
7. What specific actions and/or programs is the IPTP currently implementing to **highlight the traditional environmental knowledge** of Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples?
8. What is the importance of, and what are some examples of, **the localization and re-localization of economies**—the Peoples' **own economies**?

One of the flagship policies of Colombia's current government is the Energy Transition, a major commitment that demonstrates global leadership on the issue. However, it is important to stress that, for Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples, energy transition must not be reduced to a technological shift in the energy mix; it entails a profound transformation of the relationships between society, nature, and power—a transformation that is necessary for a truly Just Transition. From the worldviews of these Peoples, expressed in principles such as the Indigenous Peoples' Law of Origin, energy is a vital force that sustains the balance of the world and must flow in harmony. This understanding positions these Peoples as collective subjects with authority over their territories, not merely as subjects or beneficiaries of public policies. Therefore, the fundamental question that guides our journey, as and with Indigenous and Afrodescendant Peoples— also a question for Nation-States—is structural, cultural, and comprehensive: **how can we move toward climate stability if we continue to ignore the spiritual, material, ecological, organizational, and cultural relationships that sustain life in the Territories? In sum: we cannot.**

The framework of the work of the International Environmental Alliance and the IPTP

The Global Interethnic Alliance for Life, Biodiversity, and Environmental Governance, together with the IPTP, has initiated a process of deepening understanding, raising

awareness, and taking comprehensive action towards addressing the root causes of the climate crisis. Although this is an emerging process, it has yielded significant initial outcomes, which are relevant for contributing to the dialogue on the Just Transition in Santa Marta (April 2026) both within the processes of the Assembly of the Peoples as well as the formal institutional spaces of the national government. The inputs in this section are the result of in-person meetings and virtual data collection processes from various regions in Colombia (La Sierra-Santa Marta, Pacific-Northern Cauca, Amazonas), Ecuador, Canada, and also from other global partners who have contributed to the alliance's progress. That said, this is an ongoing process and therefore a "living" document, with many inputs yet to be incorporated, that will continue to evolve over the coming period.

Due to discriminatory environmental policies in the ancestral territories of Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples—rooted in environmental racism—as well as economic and extractivist interests stemming from their location in areas of high biodiversity and natural wealth, these territories often suffer disproportionate impacts associated with the climate and biodiversity crises. The impacts of climate change on Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories have been numerous, profound, and impossible to fully document within the scope of this document. We are, however, convinced of the urgent need for a Just Transition that takes into account the historical and current impacts (colonialism, capitalism, militarism etc) suffered by Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples, including impacts on social, cultural, political, economic, and territorial lives; climate irregularities (flooding from heavy rains, or, conversely, severe droughts) that affect community activities and access to resources necessary for their subsistence (drinking water); health risks (temperature changes affect human health; and food shortages due to climate irregularities that affect the fauna and flora on which some communities depend for food. These are but a few.

Commitments from and with Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples

Discussing a just and decolonizing transition requires considering factors such as equitable access to benefits, land tenure, territorial governance, processes of resistance within the framework of the extractivist colonial project, and the differentiated impacts on racialized and historically excluded communities. There is a clear risk that the transition will reproduce forms of "green extractivism," where renewable energy projects are implemented in Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories without guaranteeing land rights or indigenous forms of governance, and where capitalist economic relations—alien to the realities and ways of relating to these territories—generate new pressures on the land and deepen inequalities. In this scenario, environmental racism manifests itself in the unequal distribution of burdens and benefits: Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples continue to bear the socio-environmental costs, while others reap the benefits including profits. Since the climate crisis is a collective problem affecting the entire planet (both human and non-human life), it must be addressed on a large scale on all fronts; a comprehensive, multi-pronged collaborative approach has a chance to ensure coherence, shared commitment among the various parties and effective collaborative action. Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples, by virtue of their very relationship with the land and nature, possess ancestral practices and knowledge essential for confronting environmental crises, yet they are often marginalized

and excluded from decision-making processes regarding measures and strategies to address the crisis.

For this reason, climate diplomacy is fundamental, not only among nation-states, but more importantly perhaps: from, with, and among Peoples. This is paramount, given that the climate crisis disproportionately affects grassroots, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, as well as small (“developing”) countries, as climate decisions are made at the international level so often without them.

Diplomacy is experienced through the body and the Territory, not only through bureaucratic processes, but through the relationships and connections between the Territory (those who inhabit it), the state, and the international level. Climate diplomacy ensures that those most severely affected by climate crises have a voice in decision-making spaces.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Commit to a diplomacy of the Peoples that enables connections at different levels: from the “chagra” (indigenous sustainable agroforestry system) to other governance processes, linking Territories and Peoples from the local level across diverse geographies globally, inserting common positions into international processes.
2. Include a focus on the environmental governance of historically marginalized Peoples—Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities—who play a fundamental role in protecting biodiversity, combating climate change, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.
3. Strengthen the self-determined economies of Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples that reflect sustainable relationships with nature and provide concepts and models for rethinking a future with less dependence on fossil fuels.
4. Recognize the vital role of women and gendered peoples in thinking, acting, and influencing the policies and actions necessary to advance a just transition, including representation in grassroots and high-level political processes.
5. Explore a macro-level use of renewable energy, through self-governance and self-sustaining economies, within a framework of autonomy and self-determination.
6. Address determinants of and alternatives to armed conflict, militarism, violence, and human and environmental/ecosystemic exploitation, which result from a capitalist, racist, and patriarchal economic model.
7. Incorporate an approach to **historical reparations** that acknowledges the historical and lasting environmental damage accumulated by extractivism within the framework of the system of enslavement and the ongoing colonial project, and guarantees real access to climate finance.
8. Recognize and promote traditional and ancestral medicinal plants and medicines as a sustainable alternative to pharmaceuticals, as well as the important collective knowledge systems from where they emerge
9. Include the protection of riverbanks to prevent soil erosion / integrate hydroponics into projects.
10. Participation mechanisms require substantial transformation. **Free, prior, and informed consultation** cannot continue to operate as a mere formality but must be

established as a binding process that guarantees decision-making by the **Peoples and from within the Territories**. The Interethnic Alliance and the **IPTP can play a key role** in this process by promoting robust participation mechanisms that recognize **organizational diversity** and strengthen **self-governance**.

11. **Positioning the traditional and ancestral environmental knowledge (TEK)** of Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples as a central component of decision-making—not subordinate to technical knowledge, but rather in a horizontal dialogue. The **inclusion of this knowledge** is essential to ensure that the transition is not only efficient but also culturally relevant and environmentally sustainable.

Ultimately, a **just transition means that women, Afro-descendant communities, and Indigenous Peoples must move beyond being peripheral actors to become leaders,, advocates, teachers and associates** in transitioning energy processes within their territories. This requires moving toward models of self-governance, co-governance, and co-ownership, where free, prior, and informed consent and Cultural Objection, is effectively upheld, supporting an approach that prevents conflicts, displacement, and internal fragmentation. Through its work with the Interethnic Alliance, the IPTP has been promoting actions to highlight ancestral environmental knowledge, strengthen territorial capacities, and establish a narrative where conservation is the central pillar of the transition. On this path, the defense of the Territory is inseparable from the defense of Life: there will be no just transition without social justice, racial equity, and full recognition of Peoples as fundamental political actors in building the climate future.

Regulatory framework and supporting materials: [COP Decision 16-6](#); [Colombia's COP 30 Declaration](#); [Law 70 of 1993](#), [Origin Law](#) (general), [Origin Law \(Arhuaco People\)](#), [ancestral knowledge system of the Peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta](#), [Interethnic Alliance Statement](#), [Master Document on the Origin Laws of Indigenous Peoples](#)