Meeting with His Holiness Pope Francis

Mirna Cunningham, in representation of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD

Naksa. Lamkula tara maiksna, Miskitu tasba wina. Bakanu wan sinska nani kumi ra mankai, asla laka wal sipsa pawaia, laman laka ba yabalka (receive greetings from our indigenous Miskitu territory. If we put all our thoughts together, we can move forward and reach the path of Good Living).

We, women and men of indigenous peoples, are honoured that you receive us. We thank you for your contributions and reflections toward world peace. We thank you for your calls to follow the path of dialogue, over any attempt to use force instead of words, and the search for understanding.

Our peoples have past experiences, and unfortunately current ones, about what where the path of violence and disrespect for the rights of others leads to. We share and we make ours words your words: "To achieve peace, courage is needed, much more than to wage war."

We appreciate the messages you have given the world in relation to us, Indigenous Peoples. You recognize our strength as authentic interlocutors for any national, regional or global efforts to improve the living conditions of those who inhabit this planet. You recognize our role in sustainable development. And you have emphasized how important it is to establish solid and institutional structures of dialogue and participation.

We fully share what is expressed in your Encyclical "Laudato si", dedicated to the care of our Common House.

If something characterizes us as Indigenous Peoples, it is our deep relationship with the environment, with our ancestral territories, with the Pachamama, which are part of our identity. We practice a vision in which human beings and nature are in close and harmonious relation, a relation that guarantees the life of all beings.

It is no coincidence that the places on our planet whose natural conditions are better preserved are those places that have been inhabited for millennia by Indigenous Peoples. But our ancestral practices face powerful enemies each and every day.

There is violence, which you highlighted in your Encyclical. We are being expelled from our lands for the sake of extractive, agricultural and even energy projects, projects that seek profit and turn an eye away from the degradation of nature or the
aggression against native cultures. Almost every day, sisters and brothers are being killed and criminalized somewhere in the world because they are defending their lands and their waters, because they are defending the Pachamama. These injustices demand attention and action at all levels.

We also face conservationist views, which separate the flora and fauna from their ancestral inhabitants, denying the human beings and the environment the possibility to cohabitate in harmony and with integrity.

These problems take place despite the recognition of our fundamental human rights through international declarations and treaties; human rights which, in practice, are still far from being realized.

Dear Pope Francis,

As you yourself have remarked so eloquently, "The defence of the land has no other purpose than to defend life."

Indigenous Peoples defend life, we defend the environment, we defend our ancestral territories. We defend the diversity of cultures, of languages, of ways of seeing the world. We protect this planet, which is the only one we have. And we defend humanity, our Common House.

We wish to collaborate with the initiatives that you promote to prevent our home from being destroyed and our communities from being marginalized further. We wish to work together to develop an intercultural dialogue that allows concrete actions to protect the planet and its inhabitants. We wish to do these things. And we are ready.

We invite you to continue accompanying us in the efforts that Indigenous Peoples of the world are making. Efforts such as this, the Indigenous Peoples Forum at IFAD, where we promote actions to apply the traditional knowledge and innovations of our peoples to face climate change, and where we also promote sustainable development initiatives that respect cultural diversity and our vision of Good Living.

We are confident that your commitment, capacity and vision on the great issues of humanity will enable us to find in your person an ally in building a world in peace, with dialogue and without wars, where we can restore our Common House as a place where all peoples and cultures can coexist with respect.

Thank you for joining us and for enlightening us on this path. We continue praying for you.