

# The Boriken Declaration

A report from the Gathering of the Americas:  
Resistance, Environments, Decolonization, Indigeneity

January 2020



**H**olding up a solar light bulb system developed and used in [rescue, relief and rebuilding](#) efforts throughout Puerto Rico, Casa Pueblo co-founder Alexis Massol chuckled: “This might not look like a tool or weapon of revolutionary activity...But it is, it is!”

From Jan 17-20, 2020, delegates from across the Caribbean basin gathered in the occupied nation of Puerto Rico. In attendance were representatives of movements from Venezuela, Haiti, Trinidad, indigenous Mexico, and the occupied territories of the United States including from the lands of the Lenape, Ute, and Haudenosaunee (six nations) Confederacy. We came, as Consortium of North American Peace Programs founder Hakim Williams of Trinidad noted, with a shared commitment that peoples have the right and power to “radically decolonize and re-envision their own communities on their own terms.” Delegates were hosted by the Oscar López Rivera Foundation and worked closely with Puerto Rican independence freedom fighters and former political prisoners Luis Rosa Pérez, Adolfo Matos Antongiorgi, Alberto Rodríguez, Alicia and Ida Luz Rodríguez and Oscar López Rivera himself. Through multiple formats on multiple days, these delegates came together to discuss the intersection of ecology, climate change, and anticolonial resistance in order to understand more deeply one another’s liberation struggles and build a shared strategy for overcoming the extractive capitalism that is ripping the Earth, the biosphere, and its peoples apart. Attendees renewed and updated their shared commitment to human liberation within a practice of restoring global ecological balance, rooted in the advancing and growth of non-capitalist and Indigenous-centered modes of production to be essential and irreducible.



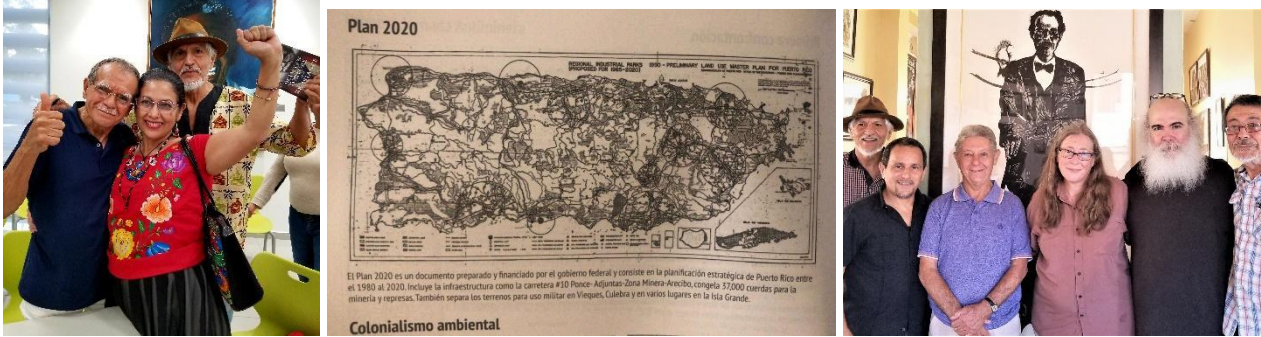
The stakes could not be higher. Arriving directly after the recent mega-Earthquakes, the convergence of this delegation concluded with the eruption of a spontaneous series of mass protests and calls for a general strike. The discovery of hoarded and criminally unused water supplies in a warehouse in the city of Ponce, whose existence only came to light due to activists who broke into an EPA storage facility, highlighted the connections between colonial occupation and climate-induced genocide especially strong in the Caribbean. With Oscar López Rivera and a cadre of Puerto Rican former political prisoners now active throughout the island, and the effects of Hurricane Maria and the new wave of earthquake devastation still deeply embedded in the consciousness of most people, Puerto Rico stands at the precipice of both climate catastrophe and a post-neoliberal revolution.

Luis Rosa Perez, a coordinator of the convergence, noted: “Though the international resistance gathering was planned months ago, the timing could not have been better to spotlight the problems of a people not able to shape or control our own destiny.”

Within this overwhelmingly dramatic framework, delegates were moved to learn of a paradigm shift in how resistance work is conceptualized. At [Casa Pueblo](#), the community center based in the mountain town of Adjuntas which hosted a key part of the delegation’s activities, the revolutionary activism of the Puerto Rican independence movement has been both institutionalized and advanced in exciting and essential new eco-centric directions. Beginning with anti-mining campaigns in 1980, Casa Pueblo has evolved into a project of “communal self-administration” which includes a coffee cooperative, a butterfly nursery, solar panel production and distribution, and a massive reforestation initiative led at the grassroots and communal level. Having planted over 30,000 trees, Casa Pueblo moves beyond top-down reforestation by ensuring that community mobilization, from below and to the left, is at the core of its ecological practice. Reforestation efforts become sites of political education, a kind of people’s school for learning about how plant, animal, and environmental systems interact. Families name the trees they plant in order to ensure intergenerational connections to the land. While whole new ecosystems are being produced, “new” human beings are emerging empowered through Freirean practices of liberation pedagogy.

The founders of Casa Pueblo, Tinti Deya and Alexis Massol González, rose to prominence in the 1980’s as leaders of the successful movement to thwart the US government’s “2020 Plan,” a top-secret program designed to clear the mountainous region of central Puerto Rico through ethnic cleansing. The 2020 Plan, discovered by clandestine independentistas who raided a government facility and widely distributed by Puerto Rican and solidarity activists throughout the Americas, was a widescale extractive mining project which included the construction of industrial parks and military research facilities, all of which were supposed to be completed and operational by the year 2020. Also included was an experimental program associated with manipulating environmental catastrophes in order to generate outcomes beneficial to the U.S. empire—a precursor to the ongoing US military apparatus now known as

HAARP.<sup>1</sup> Massol, now a Goldman Environmental Prize recipient and well-respected scientist and local leader, shared a hug with original solidarity activist Meg Starr of the Free Puerto Rico Committee, who helped to lead US support efforts from the 1980's onwards, as together they noted the need for continued vigilance—as the 2020 Plan in its original form may have been stopped, but many related efforts under other names and continued secrecy are still implemented. Matt Meyer, Secretary-General of the International Peace Research Association, another hosting institution of our time together, added that “the crisis in Puerto Rico is not named ‘Maria’ or any natural disaster: its name is Colonialism and Capitalism.”



Our ability to visually see these plans, thanks to the sacrifice of Puerto Rican liberation activists a generation prior, produced a visceral reaction in the delegation, especially those who are fighting against similar top-down, colonialist, extractivist, and eco/genocidal plans in their own contexts. Shirley Fabre, a Haitian-American activist, founding member of immigrant defense network Proyecto Faro, and UN representative of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, remarked that such industrial parks have already been built in Haiti and the destruction of subsistence farming and land access fueled its labor force and ensured that the Earthquake of 2010 was uniquely destructive. Bettina Cruz of the Binniza people, human rights defender and member of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of Land and Territory, remarked that these plans looked remarkably similar to the current neoliberal program of Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who is planning to build a massive industrial corridor connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

The Mexican government plan is considered one of the largest mega-projects ever conceived of in the Americas, and its impact on ecologies, human rights and Indigenous patrimonies would be devastating and irreversible. The Isthmus megaproject has already constructed thousands of windmills on Indigenous cornfields without the consent of the local peoples—and is expected to construct thousands more. Cruz, a member of the Indigenous Government Council for Mexico (an initiative of the [National Indigenous Congress of Mexico](#)), noted mockingly that “they finally found a value for air!” Thus is raised the essential question of not only renewable energy technology itself, but also who controls and consumes it: “the peoples or the corporations that have produced the climate crisis.” This is an important distinction which the historic struggles of Indigenous communities call upon all peoples to answer. Casa Pueblo

provides one such answer in the context of the Caribbean, characterized by Cruz as an honorary “Caracole of Resistance” (a Zapatista reference to small, independent, self-sustained spaces in the face of globalization).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See History and applications of HAARP technologies: the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program, <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/661959>

<sup>2</sup> See Caracole de la Resistencia: Zapatista Symbol References Maya Past, <https://web.stanford.edu/dept/archaeology/cgi-bin/archaeology/?p=141>





Livio Rangel, a Venezuela-based Trueke (bartering) organizer and Water-sower who is an adherent of the First Ecosocialist International, also commended Casa Pueblo and their “sowing of forests” as a meaningful and essential activity of decolonization and ecological regeneration. In the wake of the massive fires in Australia and the Brazilian Amazon of the past year, this activity is especially essential. Noting that capitalism now systemically produces mass ecological catastrophe especially of this variety, the sowing of forests is vital not only for restoring ecological commons and to produce oxygen, but also to serve as buffers for future hurricanes. Citing the First Ecosocialist International’s [Plan of Action](#) and noting that we were meeting over the weekend widely celebrated as the birthday of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Rangel noted: “We must dream and act without sleeping!”

Guinea-Bissau revolutionary strategist and leader Amilcar Cabral noted:

“Just as occurs with the flower in a plant, the capacity (or responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the germ which ensures the continuity of history lies in culture.”

Our time together in Puerto Rico emphasized the role of culture in germinating its experimental commons. One of Casa Pueblo’s early anti-mining events, we were told, had several speakers but only one attendee—a heartbreaking image—but through the mobilization of communities through dance and music, their numbers grew into the thousands. “The culture of an oppressed group is always revolutionary,” reflected founder Alexis Massol. Understanding the Caribbean as a cultural heart of resistance to the colonialism, we celebrated the production of anticolonial musical forms which have dominated popular consciousness and the language of liberation—from salsa to bomba y plena and meringue, from reggae to hip-hop (whose pioneers include many Jamaican emigrants to the north). Our own opening event featured a spotlight on the Puerto Rican folk styles of iconic singer/guitarist Marta Rodriguez, whose contributions included a version of Boricua en la Luna, the classic poem of Juan Antonio Corretjer put to music by Roy Brown. After the official gathering was completed, some remaining delegates were able to meet with the inspiration of that poem—Lucy and Alicia Rodriguez—who currently directs a grassroots pottery initiative, [Project Guaguarey](#), as well as visit Taino sites in Loiza and the El Yunque rain forest.

[The Afro-Yaqi Music Ensemble](#), fusing jazz, Indigenous Mexican opera, and many other cultural forms, also played an important part of our time together—both as performers at the opening and in the persons of co-founders Gizelxanath Rodriguez and Ben Barson as delegates. They noted that “Louisiana also forms an essential part of the Caribbean, and all those committed to the elevation of culture as an essential part of our shared political work must help to recuperate ancestral cosmologies and modes of production and social reproduction.” Their words and work blended perfectly with the hand-made maracas and percussion instruments brought to the gathering from Venezuela and played by all participants. We must understand that politics and culture are equivalent and codependent expressions of human existence and self-determination.

With these lessons, meetings, and examples firmly engrained in our mind, delegates agreed to

- 1) Develop a strategy which will help fortify and unite an anticapitalist, anticolonial movement in the Caribbean basin in which the self-determination of peoples is linked with ecological regeneration and the restoration of ancestral modes of production;
- 2) To send a delegate to the gathering of the Sowers of Water in Venezuela planned for July 2020;
- 3) To visit the Zapatista caracoles and Indigenous groups in struggle in the Istmus region;
- 4) To bring Casa Pueblo and Puerto Rican activists to Caribbean peoples under particularly intense occupation and economic colonialism, particularly the peoples in struggle in Haiti and Trinidad, and possibly activists in the Istmus as well;
- 5) To convene, at the invitation of the Mapuche peoples, at the Ecosocialist International gathering planned for April 2021;
- 6) To send a correspondence through Bettina Cruz to Mexico's National Indigenous Congress, of our desire to work closely with them—both inviting their delegates to witness anti-imperialist prefigurative projects such as Casa Pueblo as well as to host a similar gathering in their regions;
- 7) To link with another new related initiative, the Network of Occupied Peoples, currently led by an Indigenous leader from West Papua;
- 8) To continue our conversations towards the possible formation of a Caribbean Anticolonial Ecological Network;
- 9) To raise funds to accomplish all of these goals.

**We encourage all people of conscience and all those who struggle for the survival of humanity to learn more about each of these initiatives and movements... and help us achieve our objectives!**



***The Gathering of the Americas: Resistance, Environments, Decolonization, Indigeneity was organized by the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), in the spirit of the First Ecosocialist International. It was held in conjunction with the Oscar Lopez Rivera Foundation, co-sponsored by the Resistance Studies Initiative, the journal Capitalism Nature Socialism, and Ecosocialist Horizons!***