Emerging Democracies and the Indigenous Peoples: A Peruvian Perspective

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"EMERGING DEMOCRACIES AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: A PERUVIAN PERSPECTIVE"

One of the issues that have concerned the international community in the last decades is that of “social exclusion”, in its widest sense of expression. This means, truly, a “condition of life”. Social exclusion means to live completely outside the formal world; out of the social participation process and production of our modern economy, and sometimes it can simply mean riskier mortality conditions.

Along with the problem of social exclusion and facing the major transformations that have been occurring in the global arena where social change has become the leit motiv of our current world, the question of “governance” is raised as a complex problem that societies have to overcome.

In many cases, we witness the limited capacity of our governmental mechanisms and practices to be sufficiently agile and capable, not only to anticipate the changes but at least to try to be close to them. The complexity of our modern world and the speed of social change have surpassed political systems in general.

There are many ways to focus this problem. We want to insist in a manner which considers these phenomena in an interrelated way. We must think and assume that one of the principal factors of this “generalized crisis of governance” is the unresolved problem of “social exclusion”, exclusion of great minorities that has not allowed them to legitimize the validity of democratic spaces and processes, as truly representative of all of our differences and values.

This unresolved problem is a phenomenon that in Latin American countries, especially those that have specific socio-cultural and historical components like Peru, represents “a big problem to solve”. In this case, the key point is the cultural marginalization that has historically accompanied our original cultures from the beginning of the social, economic and political contact with the European world.

Currently, we clearly observe that many social actors and many areas of social interaction related to the Peruvian “indigenous world” exist and reproduce hidden from formal societies. In fact, many social indigenous actors exist outside of the official history, the current political system and, in many cases, outside from the market.

Along with the problem of cultural discrimination, the indigenous peoples of Peru have had to deal endemically with the problem of poverty. Historically, in our
country there is a very direct statistical correlation between being an indigenous
and being poor. Therefore, we can state that all policies oriented towards the
social inclusion of indigenous peoples constitute an action in the fight against
poverty.

Historically, we know that exclusion, at least in terms of the modern world,
has been a “negative practice of many” and particularly the result of the
encounter generated by the clash of civilizations whose values were completely
different. They refer to the first step towards globalization given by the great
geographical discoveries of the 15th and 16th centuries and the following process
of conquest and colonization.

One of the most concrete examples of this situation is the case of Peru. In
this case, we would like to make some general remarks about the problem of the
indigenous peoples and their participation in the democratic systems of our
country. We must highlight the importance of this matter for the governance of
our countries in the near future. We suggest that the indigenous issue, in our
reality, is the cornerstone of our democracy, as a system looking for good
governance and a system capable of distributing goods and services. Actually,
we are talking about creating a new social pact.

The Peruvian indigenous peoples: a matter of ethnic “majorities”

To start focusing on the problem of the indigenous peoples in Peru, we
must be aware that in our country social exclusion for cultural and ethnic reasons
is not a problem of minorities as it can be in the case of other South American
countries. It is a problem of majorities, “silenced” and absent of all debate and
participation. Just to give you an idea of what this statement means, we should
recall that during the Agrarian Reform, in the 1970s, 75% of the Peruvian
population, culturally being of indigenous origin, lived in rural areas of the country.

The social conditions in which the majority of this population lived were, in
general terms, of an almost complete exclusion. It reflected in the 20th century the
same social structures that were inherited directly from the colonial system. The
Peruvian society during the second half of the 20th century represented the
situation of a republican project that more than a century and a half after its birth
was unable to overcome its previous colonial background.

When we talk about indigenous peoples in Peru, whom are we really
referring to? This is a question that we ask the indigenous peoples themselves.
Which of you consider yourself indigenous and under what criteria? It is important
to point out that there is no indigenous census in Peru. There are demographical
and employment censuses, but there is no indigenous census. The reason is quite
simple: we are unable to find indicators that will measure the essence of being
indigenous. We are still having a debate on this issue at the Indigenous Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean and for which we have requested the support of CEPAL and CELADE, to have experts design, in consensus, a complex index based on different socio-economic and cultural indicators.

In legal terms, when we talk about indigenous peoples we are referring to those people that in public registers are recognized as “peasant communities” in the Andes and “native communities” in the Amazon. These communities are the contemporary correlate of those “Indian people” established during the colonial period. I want to point out that we do not use the term “Indian”. Rather, we have replaced it with the word “indigenous”. We talk about indigenous peoples or native nations, we use the word “pueblos” as creators of original, traditional and live cultures which allow them to identify with specific ethno linguistic patterns and territory.

According to the figures of the Special Program of Land Titling from the Ministry of Agriculture of Peru, there are approximately 6,000 peasant communities, which encompass a population of almost 2.5 million inhabitants. According to the Third National Agrarian Census of 1994, those communities are owners of almost 40% of the agricultural lands of the country: 14 million hectares.

Until December 1999, 1,267 native communities with a population of 300,000 inhabitants have been recognized. The territory of those Amazonian communities encompasses close to 10.5 million hectares. It is important to indicate that apart from taking into account collective land we have protected areas for our natural resources, which are fairly large in Peru. These natural reserves are also known to us as a “voluntarily isolated population” or “non-contacted population”, which is a unique characteristic in Peru.

In linguistic terms, numbers are increased if we use the "mother tongue" indicator. Accordingly, the Peruvian indigenous population is made up by the people of Quechua, Aymara, Uru and Hakaru tongues in the Andes. The Amazon indigenous population is comprised of 14 linguistic families that live in the Peruvian rainforest, from which we could further derive up to 60 languages.

From this standpoint, using only the spoken mother tongue as an indicator, in the Andes, indigenous communities constitute a population of approximately six million inhabitants. The Quechua population is made up of approximately five million Peruvians, the Aymara population is 500,000, while another half a million is comprised by the Amazonian indigenous population.

I must also mention that during the last 50 or 60 years Peru has lost a great variety of languages in its coast. Anthropologists and linguists tell us that 50
years ago, we could listen to many indigenous languages in the Peruvian coast. Currently, these cultural manifestations have totally disappeared.

Despite the demographic importance of the indigenous population, there are no accurate and reliable statistics or censuses about them. The data available is just a mere estimate taken from national statistics that consider a person as indigenous because of their occupation or the language spoken. In Peru, we have not yet asked the question of “auto-recognition” for a person to define himself or herself as indigenous. This question would require a previous consultation process.

It must be noted, however, that the criteria of language-demography is quite feeble as an indicator and frequently underestimates the actual numbers. In Peru, because of social discrimination, a great number of people prefer not to declare in censuses that they speak or understand a native language. On the other hand, there is indigenous urban population that does not find the means to vindicate their indigenous identity in official registries.

Taking into consideration all these factors, we can estimate that at least a third of the Peruvian population, some 8 million people, could vindicate a cultural identity related to the existing indigenous population, either from a legal, linguistic or cultural standpoint. This is indeed a very peculiar situation worldwide: 8 million people with no formal political representation have been excluded for now more than five centuries from participating in the decision making process of their own country. This is the situation we encountered at the beginning of our mandate.

**Socioeconomic inequalities and its cultural correlate**

Following the general description of Peruvian indigenous population, it is now necessary to consider the existing relationship between cultural variables and socioeconomic conditions.

It is a well known fact that great disparity exists in the distribution of wealth in Peru. The great majority of the population is within the margins of poverty or extreme poverty, while a small percentage has a higher income and the possibility for capital accumulation. Mainly population with indigenous cultural traditions makes up this poor majority.

Gini’s coefficient measures the level of socioeconomic disparity between rich and poor in a country. This indicator establishes that 0 points would mean absolute equality and 1 absolute inequality. According to this indicator, between 1950 and 1990, Peru had an index of 0.6, while Latin America had an average of 0.5 and more developed countries an average of 0.33.
When we compare the ethno-linguistic map of Peru with the Index of Human Development map by regions—created by the United Nations Program for Development—we can observe that the areas where one or more native languages are spoken, those with a greater indigenous population, are precisely the poorer areas of the country.

Therefore, while these may be mere socioeconomic indicators in other countries, in Peru they have a cultural and ethnic connotation, and reveal the state of marginalization of the indigenous population.

Social awareness and diversity

Thirdly, to understand the current problems that indigenous Peruvians face it is necessary to make a historical analysis. Although we should bear in mind the historical processes that have defined the present and that without any doubt will mark our future.

Peru is one of the few countries in the world that has the fortune to coexist everyday with its history. Our legacy from the past, from all eras, from thousands of years, is there in each corner of our country, exemplifying intense and extended social activities and, of course, a very rich cultural tradition, subject to admiration.

There is barely any area in Peru, especially along the coast and sierra, where you will not find evidence from the past. Thousands of years of cultural development literally emerge every day and make us aware of our great past, specifically the pre-Hispanic period, and this is not a symbolic or poetic image, but rather a real image.

The fact is that in Peru we constantly find archeological remains that surge from the earth. Lately, we have discovered around two thousand mummies in the ground under a shanty town land. Their inhabitants were thrilled to have their ancestors buried under their homes. But at the same time, this was an obstacle for them to acquire their title deeds for their houses because the land was considered cultural heritage of the Peruvian State. The result now is that the people from this town have become archeologists and have been working with the National Culture Institute, in order to obtain their property titles. Peru is a country where we live in harmony with the land, which in turn returns our remains every day.

Notwithstanding, and as a paradox, we are so involved with Peru and its past, we are so used to this historical evidence, that we have forgotten how to understand its message and its lessons.
We have forgotten our own capabilities. Somewhere along our history there was a coherent coexistence between our social world and our own environment. Definitely, the wisdom of our ancestors has not been legitimized in the Peru of today. At the time of the approval of the Kyoto Protocol, our wise men and shamans had already foreseen that the success of the societies they created before the arrival of the Spaniards, relied on a perfect complementarity between the different ecological regions and the economies they built, thanks to a sophisticated system of interethnic alliances.

On the other hand, and this is a very serious problem, we have forgotten that we inhabit a space where nature is marked by its diversity, both culturally and ecologically.

Our world before the Spanish conquest was culturally, economically and politically diverse and plural. This fact forced our people to build strong liaisons and original, complementary and reciprocity mechanisms in order to survive. Here is where this bright territorial and administrative organization known to you as the Inca Empire starts; which we call Tahuantinsuyo, the space of the four cardinal points.

The establishment of a European colonial system in a social universe that developed during thousands of years in its own autonomous way is, without a doubt, one of the causes of this problem, of this historical amnesia and loss of conscience of our own nature.

In the past, we were the center of a region where cultural uniqueness and different ethnicities formed political alliances, and flowed without major problems. Still, this multi-colored universe, during the colonial and republican period, was suddenly hidden under a monotone veil in search of a supposed “homogeneity”.

**The Colonial Episode**

With the arrival of foreign conquistadors, our multicultural world was reduced to the notion of "the other". Since then, the Andean and Amazonian population was homogenized under the category of “indians”, in fact "defeated Indians". Under this category, and of course because of the new written language, a "new history" began for them. The official history imposed by the conquerors tried to eliminate, through the use of force, the indigenous collective memory, along with their technologies and their knowledge, calling them "savages" and "ignorant", in their effort to justify the seizure of power, with the help of the Catholic Church and the Inquisition.

The conquistadors arrived on the Peruvian coast in 1532. Since then they began a quick process of occupation of the Andean territory. Their main strategy
was to establish alliances with the enemies of the Incas, the dominant group in the region, and thanks to their support they managed to take the Tahuantinsuyo capital, Cusco, in 1534, thus putting an end to this great empire.

Shortly after, the indigenous population which supported the Europeans realized that the system established by the conquerors would be worse for them than anything else that had happened before.

The delicate balance, in which the Andean and Amazonian worlds were built during thousands of years, was broken in just a few decades. And as the colonial system progressed, the indigenous world entered into a phase of chaos, a phase that was described in their time and cosmological conception as part of the "pachacuti" (A measure of time and space where alternative periods of good and bad times complement each other every 500 years). In 1532, a period of bad governance began, that would take 500 years to be reversed. The way to good governance “Allin Kamachikuq” (In Quechua) is what this government is seeking to recover nowadays and this was made explicit in the inaugural speech of President Alejandro Toledo in Machu Picchu in 2001.

A new language was imposed as a means of communication. Its kind of registration -writing on paper- was used as a tool to build the legal and political apparatus of the colonial regime, as well as to write the “new history” in the books of the conquerors: a history that had the objective of legitimizing the “new rulers”. In this way, the conquest went from a military phase to a legal and ideological one.

Economically, the land ceased to be the main way to balance between employment and the satisfaction of basic needs. From that moment on, the Andean agriculture, with all its advances in terms of technology and organization was replaced by other activities of major interest to the conquerors: mining and sea trade, which still constitute the major components of the current Peruvian GDP.

The use of vertical space, what I consider one of the most outstanding concepts of the Andean world was lost. It is a concept closely linked to the Andean cultures. Each ecological level from one thousand meters above the sea level up until five thousand meters is used for its own value and part of one system, where all units are complementary and trade between communities was encouraged. When the vertical ecological levels administration disappeared from the State level, the colonial elites kept the best lands of the valleys, leaving the indigenous peoples with lands located between three thousand and five thousand meters above sea level. This way, the indigenous peoples became “serranos”, a word used evidently with the most negative connotation imaginable.
With this fact, a fundamental question of the original cultures of the region is broken: the umbilical link that unites them ideologically with the land, the relation of reciprocity and the ensemble of sentiments this link produces on themselves and the environment. The land, from that moment on, becomes simply an asset, an economical factor. The “official world” establishes the demystification of the land and the breaking of the umbilical cord with the “Pachamama”. Our world then entered total chaos and broke away from balance, harmony and equilibrium.

**Political break in the indigenous world**

One of the immediate consequences of the Conquest, which we are very interested in this lecture, is the fate of the political structures of Pre-Hispanic people.

As you are aware, at the time of the Spanish conquest, an ethnic group from Cusco called “the Incas” had achieved to build, during a long process, a huge state apparatus, which through a strategy of political alliances and military conquests had for the first time achieved the political union of the whole Andean territory, from the South what is today considered Colombia and Ecuador, to the North of Argentina and Chile, passing through Peru and Bolivia.

This mega-State, titled by history as the “Inca Empire” was, however, inside of a complex net of powerful states and macro-ethnic groups.

We now know, thanks to the progress made by Andean archaeology and ethno-history that in the Andean world, particularly in the area of the Central Andes, the formation of great political structures is a phenomenon that took place approximately between the 5th century B.C. and the 5th century A.D.

The Andean political history is based on the development of great regional States and some supra-regional States of expansive nature like the State of Tiahuanaco located in the Peruvian-Bolivian highlands; the network of Moche States (one of their rulers is the famous “Señor of Sipan”), the Huari Empire: its center was located in the current Department of Ayacucho and it was their political structures that the Incas used to build up the imperial project; the Chimú State, which ruled over the north and central coast of the current Peruvian territory and of course the great Tahuantinsuyo, with its capital in Cusco, among others.

In the Inca era, many States and macro-ethnic groups formed the great Tahuantinsuyo Empire. These political macro-structures were linked through a
complex spectrum of particular relations and ideologies in which principles such as reciprocity and redistribution of wealth were highly important, in what we know were the cornerstone of what we call the social Andean organization.

With the foreign invasion and conquest, these political structures, this ideology and political practice were soon taken apart on a great scale, being replaced by administrative structures of the European colonial project.

The direct consequence of this process was the atomization of the political Andean world and the generation of dependence toward the new political centers. This dependence became a generalized competition between Andean social groups who tried to have the closest relationship with the metropolis. “Indian communities” were formed and became the colonial background of the current indigenous communities.

Although during the colonial era the indigenous groups had been limited politically, they were not an invisible social sector. The Republic of Indians was the institutional space that they were granted, which was totally subordinate to the Republic of Spaniards, but it allowed a direct relation between the indigenous “curacas”, the indigenous authorities, with the peninsular administration, in this case represented by the Council of Indias.

In this dual legal system, indigenous people could have some of their rights respected. For example, in the Colonial era, there was an acknowledgement of the indigenous elite—the Curacas—whose leadership was based on the acceptance given by the Spanish Crown of its inherited rights to possess political status.

**The Modern Republics**

With the advent of independent republics, this entire system collapsed with the implementation of liberal programs of government promoted by foreign “libertadores” who sought to establish what they perceived as “citizen equality”. Therefore, indigenous peoples lost the political action margin they had in regards to the State. The republican projects were somewhat less politically condescending with the indigenous peoples than the Viceroyalty administrators and furthermore broke down the geographical unity of regions.

It is known that Latin American State-Nation projects, which took place under the framework of liberal ideas from the 19th century, had the objective of eliminating all cultural differences by recognizing only one type of citizen, conceived and based on the image of the illustrated European.

In the early years of the 21st century, it is now obvious that the republican, idealistic and liberal projects implemented by the “libertadores” contained the
seed of cultural segregation, ethnic marginalization and social exclusion. The reason for that was found in their search for culturally homogeneous societies.

The indigenous peoples in the Republican era of Peru were considered “people without history”, little or non-civilized people. For that reason, many policies were established to favor foreign immigration - basically European - in order to colonize territories that were supposedly unoccupied, without considering these territories were ancestrally inhabited by our native people.

Educational projects were executed in the rural areas to bring “culture” to indigenous peoples and take them away from everything related to their “pre-civilized past”.

An immediate consequence the Peruvian State faces now is the problem of territoriality, like most Latin American countries, in relation to their indigenous peoples. We can express the same about the high migration index of indigenous peoples to the urban centers of the country and the region, which have become overpopulated and face the collapse of many public and municipal services.

Evidently, this big migratory mass is trying to participate in the society based on what they have been taught as a culture of development and progress, although in practice it turned out to be unsatisfactory even for their basic needs.

The governmental balance of the 19th and 20th century show us that the direct cost of the State-Nation projects we funded to liberate ourselves from colonial oppression are the huge circles of poverty and people taken away from their original cultures who now live in the big cities of the region.

Currently, in Peru, more than 50% of the population lives in poverty conditions of which approximately 17% lives in extreme poverty. Peru has a population of 28 million, so we can say that approximately 5.6 million Peruvians live in extreme poverty, that is, live on less than 2 dollars per day.

In summary, history leaves us many elements of analysis in terms of the political situation of the Peruvian indigenous peoples. We have to be aware that, between the political atomization that occurred as a result of the colonial and republican historical processes and the culturally diverse nature of the indigenous peoples of Peru, the question of its political representation before society becomes a project we have to assume in the long term, where only through consensus and the good will of the official society we can create the mechanisms, -non existent today- for that representation to be effective. This good will has to be matched with training processes that allow the understanding of “the other”. This means discovering and implementing different forms of being and living together.
Back to the present: global processes and its impact in Peruvian society

Post colonial times and the consolidation of the globalization phenomenon have produced new currents of thought and action, making possible the existence of new energies in our societies. It is clear now that any social development program pretending to establish new guidelines of coexistence worldwide cannot ignore cultural diversity. These new times compel us to look in other directions. The main international organizations have already recognized and declared that the “cultural diversity” in our planet has turned from being “an outdated factor” to become “the hope for the future”, therefore considering it as a main “world heritage”.

The State-Nation projects, heirs of the modern liberal traditions, must be redefined based on the concept of multiculturalism. “Multicultural States” is the name of the new political project brought by the current century and this is the challenge we have to face: to have concrete programs to make these projects feasible. This means making them “inclusive”, “more democratic”. In fact, it is about perfecting our democratic system and making it viable.

Our notion of “demos” should be opened to its maximum expression: In Peru, our native people, having the patience of the mountains, have waited the most and must now be the first participants of this new project meant to represent all citizens. This can be done by integrating their own ways of social organization, which centuries later, still reproduce a collective participative democracy worthy of being taken into account while reformulating our own “demos”.

Democracy as a promise?

However, as any ideal, democracy, including its different expressions as a political project, will never stop being a promise. This condition far from creating frustration and pessimism has to lead us to a scenario where there is no place for mere spectators; on the contrary, it has to be a scenario where we will all have an opportunity to actively participate on the social life of our countries.

The “history of democracy” has to acknowledge that today its future depends on other fundamental element to which it is related. We can only talk about democratic projects for the future if these have been adapted to the human condition of cultural diversity and the key for that is “participation”. Consequently, we cannot talk about democracy without talking about the respect of cultural identities.

The 21st century is a milestone for democracies all over the world because now the claim to multicultural citizenship condition has been added to the equality
of citizenship rights. The rights and obligations have to be the same for everyone but recognizing in advance the difference that our cultures determine for each of us: equality in diversity, this is the great paradox to solve in this new century.

**Democracies in crisis**

However it is true, that currently we have to face a generalized crisis on political representation mechanisms. The lack of confidence generated by the “official” democratic systems has developed a sort of “alter ego”, renewed and complementary, to find a solution to social demands that are growing everyday and are strongly demanded. Nowadays, we talk almost naturally about two parallel political dimensions: the representative democracy and the participative democracy, a sort of dual political reality.

Before, society was considered as a whole, and the State as part of it, but at the same time it represents society as a whole. Now we talk about the State and distinguish it from civil society, the latter made up by institutions and citizens in general that are not represented by the State apparatus or do not find the official channels to make their opinions and decisions known.

It is a fact that there is a need to create new dialogue spaces. This is how they have risen in all our countries, demonstrating that they are more than necessary for any political program established for more than a short term. The recent experiences in Peru have demonstrated that our state apparatus is obsolete and unable to take into account the whole Peruvian society, mainly because the traditional elite remains opposed to it and in this is largely supported by the media who refuses to be part of a real transformation project.

**The recent and painful Peruvian experience**

The crisis of the official democratic system in Peru, related to the ability to represent the state powers and the political parties increased on the second half of the mid 1980s.

The “devaluation” that suffered the figure of the so-called traditional politicians, together with an internal war situation generated by different terrorist groups and a severe economic crisis, favored the emergence of a military authoritarian regime, hidden under the rhetoric of pseudo-democracy. The end of this regime was determined by its own internal decomposition, the generalized corruption it provoked and finally by the destruction of the country’s institutions. All this made Peru a socially unfeasible country in the long term. **A country that now needs to be restructured under a new “social contract” that might need many decades to be implemented with the collective will.** Peru needs a long standing, sustainable road map for reconstructing new
social paradigms with new actors. The status quo imposed by the traditional elite and political parties is no longer viable for ensuring the country’s stability.

(In memoriam)

It cost many lives in Peru to overcome the 80’s phase: Close to 70,000 Peruvians lost their lives because of the generalized violence, the social chaos and the indiscriminate and blind war.

Thanks to the efforts and professionalism of the “Truth Commission”, statistics on this regard. Under their scrutinized work, we now know that the victims of the political violence were three times more than the previous official figures estimated for the 1980 – 2000 period.

This situation was always viewed from an urban point of view, where the official data only referred to 25,000 victims. It was necessary to have a rural view of things for Peruvians to understand the real dimensions of the events where a struggle was held largely away from urban areas, with the indifference marked by the official urban world.

Before the report of the “Truth Commission”, 50,000 Peruvians, those considered from the “invisible sector” had disappeared. They had disappeared without leaving any trace. We must highlight that close to 75% of them were Quechua speakers, rural, indigenous people. These indigenous people found themselves trapped in a conflict unrelated to their own culture, which did not care for their cultural identity, by having a unique Marxist authoritarian vision of the world.

The return to democracy and the construction of an inclusive democratic project

The return to democracy demanded Peruvians to use their unique creative resources. Political mechanisms were activated, which opened the spaces for an alternative democracy. In Peru we have plenty of social capital and its capacity to coordinate actions, to provide mutual support and concrete actions of solidarity. It was through the dialogue tables, public protests, which the Peruvians, with a consensus, worked to reestablish a democratic system and started an authentic institutional rebuilding process.

This was accomplished while uncovering the depth of the corruption and disintegration of all democratic values, a process that had originated with the dissolution of Congress in 1992.
After a decade of silence and fear as a result of Fujimori’s dictatorship and confiscation of all democratic representation (including trade-unions, congress, senate, legal system, bribery of media, among others); the people of Peru suddenly realized that their old potential for social and political organization was still intact and capable of rising, claiming their rights to a more decent and transparent governance. All levels of society became involved in the recuperation of democracy, but the most interesting and unique phenomena was indeed called the “Marcha de los 4 Suyos”. In remembrance of the Tawantinsuyo organization in four cardinal points, a massive involvement of popular organizations and particularly rural campesinos and indigenous people was prepared without precedent.

With much courage and facing strong repression from the Fujimori regime; regional and local organizations resurfaced using their old traditional symbol of the Inca and Pre-Inca times, which suddenly, like never before, entered the political arena as values to be reconquered. The figure of Pachacuteq; the great Incan reformer and organizer of the Tawantinsuyo was suddenly evoked by large crowds of students and campesinos.

Although weakened through the centuries, the traditional village organization still exists and functions in rural areas, and in migrant populations in large cities. They elect their representatives in a different manner which is a direct democratic vote based on a previous consensus-building to select their own authorities to preserve order, interface with local and government authorities and manage, in an equitable manner, their resources and way of life (Allin Kausanapaq). This organization is often very complex in remote traditional villages, where it also involves wisemen, mid-wives, and shamans who are in charge of preserving rituals for the collective well-being. The main purpose of which is to ensure the balance and equilibrium between mankind and nature in a continuous effort to avoid chaos and destruction.

In modern days, destruction is a continuous threat and comes in many ways: The exploitation of their rich natural resources by others (mainly unresponsive private sector and transnationals), and the contamination of land and water are every day struggles which they have to confront, while the legal system remains largely indifferent and non interested in their claims

This is why this Government is elaborating a program to train indigenous leaders in their own school of governance, and to promote the formation of bilingual teachers and professionals willing to return to their original villages to guide the youth, as well as to implement large networks of teaching through internet with bilingual programs specific to each region.
The local and regional arena is probably the most suitable space where indigenous representatives could begin practicing their political know-how. The unique knowledge they possess of their territories and resources allows them to make real contributions to local governance.

The recent decentralization process implemented by this Government allowed for the democratic elections of regional presidents, district and municipal representatives, as well as for the transfer to the regions of public services, such as health, education, agriculture, etc. It also allowed for a transfer of financial resources deriving from the exploitation of mining, gas, oil, timber, directly to the municipalities where such exploitation is profitable. Although these are all necessary reforms, they still have no direct impact on the well-being of the indigenous communities. The greatest paradox of Peruvian society remains the fact that the poorest populations literally sit on the wealth of the nation with no access to it.

Therefore empowering the indigenous people needs to undergo a reform of the Constitution, allowing them to directly benefit from a percentage of the exploitation of their own natural resources in their own territories. This royalty would increase their scarce monetary resources and facilitate their integration to the modern economy. At the same time, royalties should be paid by all kinds of industries who process their knowledge and technology without previous consent. This refers to the existing law on traditional knowledge promoted by this government in order to protect such knowledge and provide the indigenous communities with brand names and patents. Such an initiative, if successful worldwide, would definitely empower them and provide much leverage for their political and economic participation.

It must be mentioned that regional and local governments very rarely sympathize with indigenous claims and often clash in their interests. To date, very few indigenous people managed to be elected to local governments; their lack of preparation to political western life, to ways of conducting an electoral campaign and lack of access to the media, have been the main factors in preventing better representation. It is to be feared that such phenomena could be repeated during the general elections of 2006. Therefore, the need for training and involvement of the general public - who have to date taken little interest - in subjects of interest to indigenous life is vital and must be promoted urgently through public forums on poverty, workshops and the media.

We still have a lot of hard work ahead of us to improve and empower the indigenous people to guide and govern their nation. There is a large pending agenda which will take decades to be implemented, provided all the future governments will be committed to it, along with the international community.
Undoubtedly, this issue has occupied an important space in this government's agenda, after being unresolved throughout our republican history, and it must be mentioned that we have paid a high political price for promoting it.

There is still much left to be done. There will continue to be obstacles, even hostility, and there is a long way ahead of us: since the time of our independence, there has been no indigenous representation, as such, in any of the branches of government, congress, or even civil society.

Certainly, to talk about a representative State in Peru has historically been a political euphemism. Democracy itself is barely 20 years old, and this is why it has to be invented in our case: we have to design our own form of representations.

The current government has been keen to create spaces, implementing different pilot projects and proposals, such as inserting specific articles in the Constitutional Reform, promulgating specific laws (Traditional knowledge, Protection Laws and Territorial Protection of Population in “voluntary isolation”), creating internal dialogue spaces, such as CONAPA (National Commission of the Andean, Amazonian and Afro Peruvian Peoples), and promoting their participation in international forums such as in the Indigenous Fund, the OAS, among others.

This issue has practically become an international requirement. Nevertheless, there are still many citizens of our nations that have not understood this message brought on by globalization: this world trend of multicultural self-affirmation has not been well received by traditional elites who feel threatened by it. In many cases, they also resent the fact that the President of Peru is also indigenous.

We unfortunately observe that, at least in the Peruvian case, this social conglomerate known as civil society has not established spaces for the inclusion of indigenous peoples. These spaces are mainly programs that try to incorporate them in a participative democracy. Consequently, the indigenous participation in conciliation forums where representatives of the productive sectors, professional associations, labor unions, universities attend is, in summary, non-existent. This is particularly important in the case of extractive industries where consensus building with the indigenous would be the key to success and would allow for a new pacific coexistence.

There are still political movements which attempt to, based only on their own interest, associate the indigenous issue with their ideologies based on political social class confrontation. Since the 1960s, the activities of these movements have deformed the nature of the indigenous struggle, thus transforming it into a “peasant class” struggle, ignoring all cultural claim factors. These types of
movements are anachronistic and oppose the establishment of inclusive democratic projects and have lately been linked to the financing of illicit drug production.

An optimistic glance towards the future

Despite the problems that our countries confront vis-à-vis their original populations and even though some of their demands are radical (in this regard we may confuse the demands of the coca producer with legitimate indigenous claims). We consider that the current global social conditions are in favor of solutions based on a consensus.

Change is occurring and, in many cases it is generating mutual trust between the State and the representatives of indigenous peoples. Spaces have been created now during the past three years for a constructive dialogue, and in some cases, specific projects and laws that benefit indigenous population directly. Despite the complexity generated by this encounter, the path is finally opening and this in itself is of great merit.

In a certain way, we consider that despite all that occurs around us, we can be optimistic about the future. We have to recognize that our problems are extremely complex and that we have to confront radicalisms and understand that dialogue and consensus are the best ways to face them. We will move forward through a democratic rebuilding process which has to be based on a system that can generate mutual trust among the State, the representative institutions, indigenous peoples and civil society at large.

Put simply, we need to do what has not been done in five hundred years: invent a real democratic inclusive society, respectful of all values and ways of life. We are doing it right now. No roadmap exists for it, so it is difficult. This is the reason for conciliating all of our traditional ancestral knowledge and projecting it to a mature, multicultural society, which constantly recreates itself for the common good.

Thank you.