

FOREWORD

B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal / Alcaldía Indígena of Cotzal

On January 15, 2008, the B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal (Alcaldía Indígena / Indigenous Authorities of Cotzal) was reestablished by the councils of elders of several Ixil Maya communities in the municipality of Cotzal, Quiché, Guatemala. Our ancestral authority and midwife Txutx Ni'l (Inés Chamay Poma) was one of the people who helped to revive the ancestral authority system with a group of ancestral midwives.

The various activities of the Indigenous Authorities of Cotzal / B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal contribute to the construction of a more harmonious nation based on mutual respect and equal rights between Indigenous Peoples and mestizos. We work to build a democratic state based on social justice and respect for Mother Earth. The Indigenous Authorities of Cotzal seek to protect, promote, and strengthen unity and harmony among the communities of the Ixil Region of Guatemala by strengthening the values of our shared Maya culture and respect for traditional ancestral authorities who guide our communities. At the same time they involve communities in processes to improve our social, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual well-being in accordance with our shared worldview, all of which gives rise to a community that in Ixil is called “Etetz u qetz, qetz vetetz” (Ours is yours, yours is ours).

Regarding our structure, B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal / the Alcaldía Indígena is made up of twenty people appointed by consensus in assemblies of Councils of Principals of all the communities of the municipality of San Juan Cotzal (figure 1). There are four *alcaldes* (mayors), four second *alcaldes*, eight *consejos de principales* (Councils of Principals), and four secretaries. Each first *alcalde* has a

Translated from Spanish by the author.

second alcalde, two councils, and a secretary. The positions are held for one year by the Maya calendar.

From the reconstruction of our ancestral authority system, we attend to residents who come before the B'o'q'ol Q'esal Tenam K'usal to request resolution of conflicts which we collectively provide according to the ancestral principles and values of the Ixil Maya culture.

In 2008, shortly after the ancestral authority (B'o'q'ol Q'esal Tenam K'usal) was reconstituted, social instability caused by the arrival of the Italian company Enel Green Power in the territory of San Juan Cotzal, Quiché, began happening again. In collusion with the municipal mayor of that time, José Pérez Chen, the company announced the construction of the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant on the *finca* (plantation) San Francisco, owned by Mr. Pedro Celestino Brol. This caused discontent among the inhabitants of the municipality, generating an uprising of the communities and the holding of municipal assemblies of community authorities. The communities then wrote to the municipal mayor demanding that a good-faith community consultation be carried out before the start of construction of said hydroelectric plant.

The silence in response, and community divisions caused by Enel Green Power regarding the construction of the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant, led the communities to hold peaceful demonstrations starting in May of that same year 2008. The first peaceful demonstrations took place at El Entronque, Pulay Cotzal, a cross-roads where one road leads to Cotzal and the other to the municipality of San Gaspar Chajul, Quiché. Then one of the largest took place on September 1, 2008, a massive gathering of community authorities and neighbors in the central park of the municipality of San Juan Cotzal. On that date, the municipal mayor did not appear before the communities and only left his secretary, Isaías Villatoro, a resident of the community of Santa Avelina, to face the crowd.

At this rally, the municipal secretary made public the contents of the minutes signed by the previous Municipal Council, led by former mayor Baltazar Toma Sambrano, which granted permission for the construction of the Palo Viejo hydroelectric project without the consent of the population and the community authorities of the municipality. At the end of 2008 and during 2009, the municipal authorities and Enel Green Power dedicated themselves to persecuting and criminalizing those who led the community movements, while making false promises to the communities to carry out infrastructure and electrical energy projects.

In 2010, we, the B'o'q'ol Q'esal Tenam K'usal, together with the community authorities of the municipality, began a new resistance against Enel. The demand was now that the company fulfill its promises to the communities. By that point, it was clear that every promise to the communities since 2008 was false. This motivated a new movement that began on January 2, 2011, with attempts to conduct a dialogue with Enel during that month, but because of the bad faith of the Enel company, the attempts at dialogue failed.

The communities of the municipality of San Juan Cotzal, and we the B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal, Alcaldía Indígena of Cotzal, decided to declare ourselves in permanent peaceful resistance through a gathering on the main road in San Felipe Chenlá, Cotzal, that leads to the Finca San Francisco. This peaceful demonstration once again led to the persecution of members of the B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal. Nine of its members were denounced for crimes not committed; each one has been accused of at least eight crimes, including death threats, sedition, instigation to commit a crime, and coercion.

One of the shocking events was on March 18, 2011, when the tranquility of the community of San Felipe Chenlá, Cotzal, was disrupted. Enel Green Power influenced the minister of the interior Carlos Menocal and the minister of defense Abraham Valenzuela to order a *desalojo* (eviction) to break up of the demonstration, as well as the destruction of a *talanchera* (pole used to block the road) that the communities had placed there. More than seven hundred members of the National Civil Police (PNC) and the army surrounded and intimidated the community, searching for the members of the Indigenous authorities who had been reported and whose arrest had been ordered.

This operation reminded us of the internal armed conflict that had just ended in 1996, for on that day some people had nervous breakdowns and a woman fainted just from seeing army members and helicopters flying over the community.

Enel Green Power, in complicity with the Finca San Francisco, made several attempts to defeat the B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal Indigenous authorities by trying to capture them, forcing them into a dialogue, and dispersing the demonstrations in the community of San Felipe Chenlá. At last on May 2, 2011, under the coercion of threats and arrest warrants, the communities agreed to a *mesa de diálogo forzado* (forced dialogue) that ended in December of that year without any positive results for the municipality of San Juan Cotzal, Quiché.

In the midst of that dialogue with Enel Green Power, we met Dr. Giovanni Batz, in one of the meeting rooms of the parish of the Catholic church in the municipality. A university professor who accompanied Batz informed the Indigenous authorities, the B'òq'ol Q'èsal Tenam K'usal, that Batz was coming to carry out a study in the region for a stipulated time and that he was a student at the University of Texas at Austin, in the United States.

Batz settled in the community of Santa Avelina, where he carried out his first research work. Then we invited him to one of our meetings, where we asked that he continue his study in San Juan Cotzal and focus his work on investigating the origins of the fincas that had invaded the territory of the Ixil Maya people of Cotzal. From there the questions arose: How did the Spanish arrive? How did the *finqueros* (plantation owners) arrive? How did they come to invade so much land? At that time, Batz returned to Austin, Texas, where he presented the research proposal that we as authorities and communities had requested of him.

Upon his return, Batz settled in the community of San Felipe Chenlá, where he lived for several years while conducting fieldwork and constantly updated us with the information he obtained, from the progress of his research until its completion. From the moment we met Batz, we established a relationship of *confianza* (trust). This *confianza* was strengthened when he accepted our request as authorities of the Ixil Maya people of Cotzal interested in knowing the origins of the conflicts that have affected our people.

Batz's first book, *La cuarta invasión: Historias y resistencia del Pueblo Ixil, y su lucha contra la hidroeléctrica Palo Viejo en Cotzal, Quiché, Guatemala* (2022b), will help the people of Cotzal know their history. It will help our children and future generations know what the invasion, colonization, slavery, and internal armed conflict that we suffered were like, but above all, how we have managed to resist the atrocities of the different conflicts that we have faced as the Maya Ixil people. Furthermore, it demonstrates the flagrant violations of our rights as Indigenous Peoples, the dispossession of lands, the genocide, the massacres, the destruction of our territory, and now the new invasion of extractive multinationals, such as Enel Green Power and other corporations that have arrived in Ixil territory.

Batz returned in January 2023 to present the book on three consecutive days. The first day he did so at a Maya ceremony held in the sacred place Vi'kaab'eb'al at the suggestion of the spiritual guides of Cotzal, Quiché, since the book carried the memories and words of our ancestors and our grandmothers and grandfathers. The second day of the book presentation took place in the town center of Cotzal, Quiché, where the ancestral authorities were present. The presentation was also attended by the *principales*, community authorities of each of the communities, professionals, and teachers and educational administrators at the primary, basic, and diversified levels, who committed to incorporating the book into their local curriculum plan. Authorities from the Ixil University and the Alcaldías Indígenas of Chajul and Nebaj were also present. Batz provided seven hundred free copies of the book, five hundred of which went to the communities of Cotzal. On the third day we traveled to Guatemala City, where together with Batz we presented the book at the office of the National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA). There we held a national press conference where the research results were presented; copies of the book were provided to the audience free of charge. By returning in this way, Batz actively kept his word that he would always return and that one day he would return with a book.

For more than a decade, Batz's actions and research process, from research questions to disseminating work in multiple ways, demonstrated his commitment to not reproducing academic extractivism. We encourage other researchers to follow his example.

In the same way, this book *The Fourth Invasion: Decolonizing Histories, Extractivism, and Maya Resistance in Guatemala* demonstrates the struggle of the Ixil people in the face of a new invasion. It shows that one can struggle against social

adversities caused by extractive capitalist interests. That Batz's research is appearing in English is of vital importance. His detailed work offers the international audience a local perspective on what has happened in the Ixil Region and during the struggle against Enel Green Power. Our aspiration is for this book to be published and widely known, because in it is our history, and we know that knowing it will open new paths for us, new strategies to fight against future invasions of our territory.

We value and appreciate the *lucha* (struggle) of Dr. Giovanni Batz to finish this book. We know that it meant hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleeplessness, worry, and risks throughout the compilation of each piece of information it contains. This will go down in local, national, and international history, since we consider it to be the first book completed for the Maya Ixil people of San Juan Cotzal; there may be many more, but those compiling part of the history of Cotzal have been very few.

Finally, we, the B'oq'ol Q'ésal Tenam K'usal / Alcaldía Indígena of the municipality of Cotzal, Quiché, Guatemala, invite everyone to immerse themselves in and learn about our history and our path of struggle that this book documents: "THE FOURTH INVASION."

WELCOME!

October 2023
San Juan Cotzal, Quiché, Guatemala