

Ecuadorean Indigenous organization wins UN 2020 Equator Prize



Quito, June 8 (RHC)-- Indigenous-led Ecuadorean non-profit organization 'Alianza Ceibo' (Ceibo Alliance) has been awarded a major United Nations prize Friday for its years-long innovative nature-based work to fight biodiversity loss and climate change.

"It is an honor for us to be recognized by prestigious international organizations such as the U.N. We feel very grateful for this award that honors the work and struggles we have been carrying out in favor of our lives, our forest, and our cultures," the executive director of the alliance and member of the Indigenous Siona nation, Alicia Salazar, said in a statement.

Ceibo Alliance is comprised of members of the Kofan, Siona, Siekopai, and Waorani Indigenous peoples. It was created with the aim of establishing a model of resistance and international solidarity for the defense of Indigenous territory, cultural survival, and the building of viable solutions-based alternatives to rainforest destruction.

As a first alliance of its kind in the region, Ceibo began in 2011 to provide safe access to clean water to all the communities affected by oil pollution. Following this initiative, the members of the Alliance realized

there are more needs and much more work to be done.

Working hand in hand with the communities, the organization has since designed, developed, and managed different projects to help original nations in the South American country to defend and protect themselves, their territories, and their cultures.

The use of solar energy, training of leaders and communicators, the establishment of economic alternatives for families and communities, through initiatives such as tailoring, handicrafts, and the marketing of products such as black garlic, “panela,” (a solid form of sugar) and chocolate, are among the numerous projects developed.

The U.N. prize comes as the organization is fighting along with Indigenous communities against the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak has added to the threats Indigenous peoples face as the numbers of confirmed cases are reaching alarming levels.

“We denounce the central and regional state’s insufficient actions. To date, there has been no adequate response from the government to the claims of our peoples,” the organization said in its statement.

“For this reason, we have also been accompanying legal actions by communities affected by the recent spill in April 2020 in the Ecuadorean Amazon, in addition to a demand for precautionary measures by the Waorani nation.”

The organization has been accompanying significant legal victories against extractivist companies and for the survival of original nations in Ecuador, including the triumph last year of the Waorani in a historical trial against oil firms.

“Amazon means life for our world. For us, as Indigenous peoples, it is our home,” the organization said. “But every day, the threats become greater. Oil companies, miners, cattle ranchers, armed groups are putting our lives and our territories in danger, while governments continue to violate our rights. They want to take the wealth out of our territories, displace us and exterminate us.”

The 11th Equator Prize has recognized 10 local and indigenous communities from across the world. Winners are also based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Canada, Myanmar, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, and Thailand.

“As our natural world faces a range of unprecedented challenges, the Equator Prize lifts the curtain on a range of exceptional nature-based solutions pioneered by local communities and indigenous peoples,” says UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner.

“Indeed, as countries move to build back better after the COVID-19 pandemic, these innovative ways to protect ecosystems, biodiversity, and tackle climate change are more important than ever - I expect that the incredible efforts of the Equator Prize winners will have a ripple effect across the world.”

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