

Land & Life Stories Series # 1

'Land is everything': Reclaiming grabbed indigenous land in Colombia

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I was eight years old when they killed my father, and that was when we left this territory... I had to wander like a stranger, aimlessly... People from the government left me an orphan... They killed my father, my uncle and eight more people. There was a massacre, that is why we abandoned this [the land].

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo, Puerto Gaitán

Before returning to the territory, we lived in Vichada here and there ('del timbo al tambo') without a permanent place...

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo, Puerto Gaitán

When I returned, I began to see enormous tractors and white people, not from around here.... People call them "The Mennonites"... They were already here but still far from where we are now... Today the ploughing almost reaches our houses.

-Leader of Iwitsulibo, Puerto Gaitán

This is a story of indigenous peoples who were forced to abandon their land many years ago because of violence. When they came back, they found their land being occupied and farmed in a big agribusiness operation. Since then, they struggled to reclaim their land. It is a terrible story of displacement, and an inspiring story of courage to resist, and a story of hope in fighting to reclaim their land, which for them is everything that could guarantee the maintenance of life. It is not an isolated story – not in Colombia, not in the world.

The indigenous peoples of *San Rafael Warrojo* and *Iwitsulibo* in Puerto Gaitán (Department of Meta) in Colombia have been struggling to recover their ancestral territories for more than a decade. Many were violently expelled from their land in the context of the armed conflict and have been forced to move to townships and cities. Several others have fled to the borders of the agricultural frontier, trying to escape from the violence exerted by *colonos*, government forces and armed groups.

In 2021, members of the two communities decided to settle in 'de facto' in what constitutes their ancestral land. While they have pursued countless attempts of regaining control of their territory through judicial means, these have all been in vain. They have started to construct their houses with their own hands and to cultivate the land amidst threats and intimidation. A majority of their ancestral lands are now in the hands of individuals and corporations. They have been denied access to various portions of the territory and have been repeatedly threatened with eviction, which makes it difficult for indigenous to effectively use the land for their daily needs. The decision of indigenous communities to remain in their territories, despite distressing circumstances, constitutes an act of resistance. As long as effective access to land by ordinary people - like those in these two communities - is not guaranteed by the State, the very existence of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* remains under serious threat. Land lies at the heart of their subsistence and existence. Land is everything to them.



The savannah landscape in Puerto Gaitán, Meta. Photo by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.

The indigenous leaders of *San Rafael Warrojo* and *Iwitsulibo* were born in the savannahs of Puerto Gaitán, to the east of the country – in a region often referred to as the [Altillanura](#) or High Plains. “I am born from here like the trees”, says one of the leaders while we chat at one of the few available spots to sit down at the indigenous settlement of *San Rafael*. José¹ (an averaged-sized man in his 60s) welcomed the visit with a big smile and treated me with such kindness, despite the very harsh living conditions of the settlement. He had “dressed for the visit”, wearing black pants, a blue shirt and a traditional Colombian hat made out of fique; no shoes. The place he chose to converse was in plain sight. Occasionally, children and adults joined the talk and helped to reconstruct pieces of their past and present life. At *Iwitsulibo* I was greeted with a similar generosity. I chatted with Antonio, the indigenous captain, while he rested in his hammock just before the sunset. Other members of the community eventually joined in the conversation as well. For them all, life is traversed by their relationship with land.

Earlier days

During the 1970s, at a peak of the country’s armed conflict and the threat of [indigenous hunts](#), many people from José and Antonio’s families (or what was left of them) fled to the neighboring provinces of Casanare, Vichada and Guainía seeking refuge.

They took us out of the territory in 1971. We stayed in Guainía for seven years... When we returned in 1979 there were already people with their own animals and we couldn't enter. We went to Vichada (San José de Ocuté). We stayed there working and I got this woman. I returned to the region in 2009 with all the children.

-Leader of Iwitsulibo, Puerto Gaitán

¹ Names of indigenous people and other personal data has been anonymized for security reasons.

In Vichada and Guainía², they tried to make ends meet by working as day-labourers (*'jornaleros'*) in cattle farms and rubber plantations or by engaging in temporary jobs at the town centers. Over the years, however, job opportunities started to considerably decrease, leaving indigenous without enough resources to subsist. While in these provinces, they had no land of their own.

The return to the ancestral territory

Having to abandon their ancestral territory at a very young age, José and Antonio were unsure where exactly their land was located. It was the elders who encouraged the resettling and guided the communities across the widespread savannahs of Puerto Gaitán. In the words of José:

I came back here because of my older brothers. I was very young when I left so I didn't know, but they told me that this belongs to us... I entered and founded the community with my family. I left this land as a child and came back being an old man.

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo

To date, despite the fact that members of the indigenous communities have resettled in their territory, the struggle goes on. Neither *San Rafael* nor *Iwitsulibo* were constituted as official 'resguardos' – indigenous land under collective title – before the indigenous communities fled the region. In other words, they have no formal legal records to demonstrate that the land they are claiming is theirs. At the time of their displacement, *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* were semi-nomadic communities that practiced shifting cultivation throughout the savannahs, i.e. during some months of the year they would cultivate at a specific area of their territory and would later move to another spot while letting the soil to rest. Large extensions of land also served other day-to-day life activities like fishing and hunting. To demarcate their territory they used natural benchmarks such as spring waters and rivers. Access to land and its related resources were key to sustaining life.

Around the mid-2010s, the national government issued a decree (Decree 2333 of 2014) that mandated the protection of so-called 'ancestral territories' from any thread of eviction or dispossession by a third party. This protection was meant to serve as a provisional measure over the lands, while indigenous communities undergo the many required steps to constitute or expand a 'resguardo' before the National Land Agency and other government offices. At the time, the decree represented a breath of fresh air and a hope for many of the members of San Rafael and Iwitsulibo - who thought of it as a useful tool to defend their claims. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this decree is far weaker than originally enthusiastically anticipated.

I started passing requests in 2016 when I found out that the government had issued a decree that said that people who have their ancestral territories have the right to claim... but there is one person who does not accept [our claims], he was born here in the region.

-Leader of Iwitsulibo

² Casanare, Vichada and Guainía are provinces to the east of Colombia characterized by a similar ecosystem of savannahs; the large extension of their territory contrasts with its low population density. Together with Meta, they constitute one of the different geographical regions of the country (the eastern plains or 'Llanos Orientales').

The process to legalize the land is an entirely different question. Members of the communities have knocked at the door of Puerto Gaitán’s town hall, and have reached government offices in Villavicencio (the province capital) and the national capital, Bogotá. However, government functionaries do not seem to listen. The little actions that the government has performed so far (e.g. sending a team to measure the area claimed by the indigenous) were only the result of much insistence on the part of the indigenous.

But government’s inertia is not the only obstacle to realize the aspirations of the indigenous communities. The economic and commercial interests that are playing out in the area are a major impediment for indigenous’ desire to reclaim their lands. By 2013, when members of *Iwitsulibo* first attempted to enter their territory, they were shocked to see the profound transformation of the landscape. The relatively open savannahs that they recalled from their childhood years were now mostly in hands of private owners: large swathes of the plains had been divided into different land plots and secured with fences and iron gates. For example, a major company associated with a religious congregation has gained control of several thousands of hectares in recent years. This investor is loosely and popularly called in the region as “The Mennonites”³ (in the absence of a company name); it now controls and owns portions of the ancestral territory of *Iwitsulibo* (see: [Rutas del conflicto](#)).

People belonging to *Iwitsulibo*, and any other person different from “The Mennonites” and its workers, must pass through a security check established by the latter few kilometers from the township of La Cristalina. In order to reach the indigenous settlement one must then drive for over an hour deep inside the plains, within the area controlled by “The Mennonites”, along dirt roads that are in fact in quite good maintenance. On every side of the road, there are vast extensions of soy and maize crops that fade away into the lowlands horizon. Grain silos and tractors are also part of the landscape, together with houses built in the style of US farms. Indeed, throughout the entire journey I could not help but thinking how surreal this scenery was: the zone resembled more a scene from a Hollywood-type movie based in the mid-south US states of Nebraska or Oklahoma, rather than a settlement in the heart of Colombia’s high plains.



The drive to ‘Iwitsulibo’ along the area controlled by “The Mennonites”; constructions owned by “The Mennonites” on the path to ‘Iwitsulibo’. Photos by Lorenza Arango (June 2022).

³ “The Mennonites” refer to a group of people that have taken control of land in Puerto Gaitán, Meta in recent years and are said to belong to the same Christian order: mennonite. In the absence of a company name, people from the region have started to call them “The Mennonites”. I have decided to use the term employed by the residents, although aware of the risks of using it – for example, the fact that it can be interpreted as a sort of ethnicizing. This is not my purpose.

Soy and maize crops, owned by “The Mennonites”, are rapidly approaching the area where the indigenous of *Iwitsulibo* are raising their houses. Every attempt at dialoguing with members of the congregation and other neighbors has met with rejection.



Soy plantation owned by “The Mennonites”, in proximity to the indigenous settlement of ‘Iwitsulibo’. Photos by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.

Residents of *San Rafael* were equally surprised by the dramatic changes that have occurred in their ancestral territory. Whilst visiting Meta in the mid-2010s, and exploring the possibilities of resettling, they realized that *colonos* and companies had also appropriated their land almost in its entirety. The 13,500 hectares that *San Rafael’s* community seek to recover are surrounded by/or are part of cattle farms whose owners are unwilling to negotiate over the land. Oil reserves are also said to be present in the area and so community members believe that the influence of a nearby oil company may interfere with their plans of securing back their territory.

Before it [the ancestral territory] was bigger: from the banks of the Meta River to the jungle and the banks of the Manacacías [River]. Now we are cornered, we do not feel ok, everything is smaller.

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo

Accessing *San Rafael* is possible via two different routes, but in reality only one is available for the indigenous community. There is a straightforward and logic path from the municipal town center to the indigenous settlement, but this route is under control of a [national meat-processing company](#) that has limited the access to it to “authorized personnel only”. There are a number of different gates along the way that are secured by armed guards; “we are under a ‘do not pass’ warning”, indigenous say. As a result, members of *San Rafael* are obligated to take another path to reach their settlement. The latter is not only longer than the first one, but it is also replete with life-threatening situations. Cars are only able to get until a certain point of the path; from there, one must walk an hour or so traversing gallery forests and water ponds that are typically the habitat of snakes (*wios*) and other dangerous animals.



Traversing the open plains and water springs by foot on the way to 'San Rafael Warrojo'. Photos by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.



People in *San Rafael* are particularly worried about their children, who risk being attacked by wild animals. Parents stop sending them to school because of these dangers; kids are not allowed to hang out away from the adults view.

The closest route for us is [via] La Cristalina, but since we cannot go through it, we feel compelled to go the other way.... But it is very threatening to us: the wibo, the water snake... It has been 2 years since the children stopped going to school.

-A resident of San Rafael Warrojo

Finding an ally: The Norman Pérez Bello Claretian organization

Residents of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* believe that corporations and individuals are behind the repeated threats of eviction they have been subjected to since they decided to enter their ancestral territory. Eviction orders are signed by the local government and armed groups, but at times it is even difficult to draw a strict division between these actors – according to their testimonies. For many indigenous, the persecution and violence exerted both by the government and armed groups serve the purpose of protecting the private and commercial interests that are present in the area and that are generally backed by the State.

The State and the armed groups do not allow us to be here... the government does not recognize us as owners of the territory, but we are natives. The company also wants to get us out of here; they sent the police to kick us out. We have gone through eviction attempts by the government and by illegal armed groups, but these are ordered by the company.

-A resident of San Rafael Warrojo

The decision of indigenous communities to remain in their territories amidst such circumstances constitutes an act of resistance. The Norman Pérez Bello Claretian organization or [*Corporación*](#)

[Claretiana Norman Pérez Bello \(CCNPB\)](#) is an ally in this resistance. The CCNPB is a non-profit organization that works to promote social justice and peace, and accompanies peasant and indigenous communities who assert their rights through non-violent mechanisms. The organization offers legal advice and assistance, as well as psychological, pedagogical and communications support. From 2003, the CCNPB has continually supported efforts by different groups of people to improve their living conditions in [Colombia's eastern plains⁴ and other regions of the country](#). The indigenous of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* in Puerto Gaitán are just two in a long list of communities.

Last year, when the indigenous received the first threats of eviction only months after they have resettled, the CCNPB travelled to their settlements and joined in their resistance. They presented legal arguments that justified the presence of indigenous in those lands and showed why eviction orders were out of place. From then on, the organization has taken the case to different government offices at the regional and national level and has helped the members of the communities to navigate the often difficult and bureaucratic procedures that entails legalizing land in the country:

If it wasn't for the corporation we wouldn't be here. Last year they [people in control of the land] 'threw' us the police, but the Corporation came and prevented us from being evicted.

-A resident of San Rafael Warrojo

The work performed by the CCNPB comes at a great cost to their members. Defending the rights of different land activists has made them, in turn, the subject of persecution and intimidation. Whilst accompanying the indigenous communities in Puerto Gaitán, every step must be carefully calculated. Only people whom they have worked with before and are considered as reliable are allowed to tag along with them to the indigenous settlements (including drivers, volunteers, and international observers). I am profoundly grateful with the CCNPB and the communities they support in Puerto Gaitán for allowing me to join them on a recent field visit to the area (June 2022). The communities generously took me in to their places of work and their homes, and shared with me their stories of land (dispossession) and life. The CCNPB also provided me with insightful information that I may have otherwise missed, and patiently guided me through the typical challenges of doing fieldwork in hostile environments. I became an admirer of their work some three years ago when I began researching recent land investments in the Colombia's high plains, as part of the [RRUSHES-5 project](#), and the resistance they have entailed. Working closely with the organization in the last months has only increased that admiration. The work they perform is simply invaluable!

The present

As of June 2022, the communities of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* live in extreme poverty conditions. They sleep in improvised shelters covered by plastic sheets, which barely protects them from strong rain or high temperatures. There is no drinkable water nor electricity. Most road infrastructure is

⁴ As a result of their work at the service of communities in the eastern plains, the CCNPB has delivered a number of different reports: "[Los Nuevos Llaneros: el despojo de territorios, tierras y recursos en los Llanos Orientales](#)" (2021); "Ni coca ni Estado: historia y desafíos de las comunidades indígenas y campesinas del sur de Cumaribo, Vichada – Colombia" (2020); "[Tierra y despojo en los Llanos](#)" (2019); "Sistematización de experiencia con el pueblo indígena Maiben Masiware – Gente del río Ariporo 2006-2016" (2018); "[Despojar y desplazar: estrategia para el desarrollo de la Orinoquía](#)" (2017).

deficient or lacking. Where roads and electricity poles do exist, they are only servicing the nearby businesses. Because crops were established only some months ago, they are not producing enough food for consumption yet. Children dropped school almost two years ago and have not been able to rejoin because of the long distances and the dangers they may face in the savannahs.

We are struggling to recover this territory so that we can work the land. Land is everything, everything is produced from the land: one can raise animals, plant crops...

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo



The informal indigenous settlement of 'San Rafael Warrojo' in Puerto Gaitán, Meta. Photos by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.

In the absence of job opportunities nearby, young men have had to look for jobs at rubber and oil palm plantations or in the oil sector, some six hours away from their settlement. They are hired for two to three months only and meals are deducted from their already low monthly incomes (some \$134 USD). Most families at the indigenous settlement are dependent on this income to survive. That is the case of José and Antonio - the indigenous captains - and their wives, already in their 60s, who cannot longer perform heavy work and rely on their children completely. In their words:

Kids go out to work and they give me money to buy the soap and some coffee; we cannot afford to miss that.

-Leader of Iwitsulibo

Families are out of the settlement looking for jobs because we have no food in here. They are in the oil camps, or the 'fincas'; they are all spread... Sometimes they are out for one month working in whatever they can find (...). Some women work as maids in Puerto Gaitán, but that is rare; we are barely surviving.

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo

While men are working outside the settlement, women are left with a high burden of responsibility: caring for children and the elderly (including meal preparation, illnesses), raising animals, gathering firewood and doing housework. Many ask themselves whether the circumstances they are living in will pay-off at the end.



An improvised kitchen at the indigenous settlement of 'Iwitsulibo' (Puerto Gaitán, Meta). Photo by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.

During my recent field visit to the indigenous settlements of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo*, I was able to witness these pressing circumstances first-hand. Colleagues from the CCNPB and I stayed overnight at one of the improvised shelters built by the community, and experienced both the unbearable early morning cold as well as the high temperatures at noon. In the absence of water supplies for daily needs (taking a bath, washing clothes and dishes), people usually take a bath in a nearby spring and take turns; first the women, later the men. We did so too.

Lunch and dinner included a rather big portion of protein ranging from wild boar meat, deer or 'lapa' (from the rodent species), though this is rarely their day-to-day reality – people say. Both corporations and individuals, who claim ownership of the land, have limited the access of indigenous to certain areas of their territory, which makes it difficult for communities to do the hunting for their subsistence. Having meat on the plate felt like a true privilege.

Accessing *Iwitsulibo* was only possible thanks to the guidance of one indigenous captain, who escorted us from the main security point established by "The Mennonites". Before, we had spent around four hours in a 4x4 car from the town center of Puerto Gaitán to the township of La Cristalina – covering a distance of just 74 kilometers. Due to the poor road infrastructure, however, this short distance ends up making a long trip.



Informal shelters built by indigenous of 'Iwitsulibo' – awaiting for a legal recognition of their ancestral lands. Photo by Lorenza Arango, June 2022.

The same applies to San Rafael: an active participant in the indigenous resistance against eviction accompanied us throughout the entire journey, from the town center of Puerto Gaitán to another township, closest to the indigenous settlement (that also took some four hours in a 4x4 car). The distance between both towns is of only 60 kilometers, but the road becomes impassable during the rainy season prolonging the ride for several hours. Once in there, we continued our journey on foot, traversing forests and water springs (another two hours, approximately) until reaching the settlement. While this is perhaps a journey I will only make few times in life, long and tiring rides are one of many unfortunate aspects of the communities' daily lives today.

The settlements of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* are increasingly turning into real enclaves inside their own ancestral lands limiting the possibilities to sustain life. At the other extreme, the so-called “Mennonites” and their agribusiness company has become quite economically productive in their business, as well as individual cattle farmers enjoying a privileged life – all at the expense of the indigenous.

Land and life at a critical political conjuncture

Indigenous of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* in Puerto Gaitán have a single demand: that their ancestral territories are restituted soon so that they can bring back some balance to their daily subsistence and, ultimately, realize their life-projects. In real terms, while communities have settled in their ancestral territories ‘de facto’, they have no actual control over the land they are claiming. Competing economic and political interests are given preference over those of the indigenous

communities, with serious impacts for their well-being. The repeated threats of eviction have meant that indigenous live in a permanent state of uncertainty: for instance, not knowing if it is safe to invite the rest of their relatives to establish in the ancestral territory; and with fear of a possible retaliation from those in control of the land (e.g. if they prepare a larger area for cultivation or start raising livestock).

On top of this, as long as *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* remain as ‘informal’ and ‘unofficial’ indigenous settlements, not legally recognized, they cannot access public health or education services. They might be a vivid example of “the nobodies” – a term popularized by the recently elected vice-president of Colombia, Francia Márquez, which refers to people living in extremely vulnerable conditions and that are frequently overlooked by those in power positions. These constitute, according to Márquez, a large segment of the Colombian population e.g. domestic workers, informal vendors, recyclers and peasant and ethnic communities (the indigenous and Afro). “The nobodies”, that includes the residents of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo*, represent the people that the incoming government promised they would fight for. The challenges ahead are enormous.

The recent victory of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez (the first left-wing coalition to win the presidency in the history of Colombia) has brought back hope and enthusiasm to many people, including peasant and indigenous communities. Their announcement of a program on ‘agrarian reform’ comes at a critical time, with the country exhibiting one of the highest levels of internally displaced population (IDP) and land inequality. The appointed Minister of Agriculture, Cecilia López, has so far shared some of the main features that would guide this reform (e.g. formalization of land titles over different lands, aside from *baldíos* (‘public lands’); land distribution in favor of those with little or no land; stricter taxation laws for idle or unproductive properties, and a boost to land productivity, among others). In some of her interviews after the official announcement of her appointment as incoming minister, López repeatedly emphasized that what she does not like is the ‘unproductive cattle lands’ but that she prefers and will support conversion of such unproductive land use to ‘productive land use’ in the form of agribusiness; that the idea of a ‘social function of the land’ will be upheld even at the same time as she repeatedly emphasized that this will be pursued without expropriation. This means that lands used productively will not be affected by the so-called agrarian reform program by López. What then does this mean for the indigenous communities of *San Rafael Warrojo* and *Iwitsulibo*?

Consider the lands controlled by the so-called “Mennonites” and those in the hands of the nearby meat-processing company, discussed above. These are highly productive enterprises dedicated to intensive agriculture and animal husbandry – precisely one of the conditions welcomed and encouraged by the new Minister of Agriculture. The fact remains, however, that no matter how productive these lands are now, the productivity variable conceals the violent origins of the land acquisition and does not provide an account of the difficulties that the indigenous communities of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* have faced from the moment they were dispossessed from the same land.

Under the incoming administration, what then will be the fate of these lands? How will land restitution work out in cases where land is proved to be highly productive today? Which mechanisms can ensure that indigenous people from *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* can recover their ancestral territories?

Our desire is to plow one hectare in the savannah so that support the community. We want to harvest panela, rice, corn, have pigs, raise livestock... we want to recover this territory to work, to produce food, to live...

-Leader of San Rafael Warrojo

For indigenous peoples like those in *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo*, land constitutes the basis of life. The restitution of their ancestral lands is then a necessary condition to ensure their continuity. Restitution, however, cannot follow the principle of ‘individualization of land claims’ that has long accompanied the implementation of restitution policies in the country. Recall that when residents of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* were forced to abandon Puerto Gaitán it was not individual land plots that they lost, but rather their collective access to the savannahs, their community, their social life – land as the glue to their community life. Land restitution must therefore guarantee access to land as a community, as a collective. What needs to be restituted is the social life that was previously destroyed, and where land serves indeed as the glue.

Certainly, land restitution is one key aspect of the land and life nexus. But this is one in an array of other crucial components. Restituting the rights of indigenous communities over their ancestral territories is intimately tied with the redistribution of land across Colombia. A majority of lands in the country are controlled by a mere handful of individuals and corporations, while historically the ‘working people’ has had limited or no access to land. In addition, at the center of ‘Restitution’ and ‘Redistribution’ also lies the ‘Recognition’ of different social groups and their rights to land, in accordance with their own ‘cosmo-vision’ or worldview. This is particularly true for ethnic communities, such as the indigenous of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo*, who have specific beliefs and practices on how to relate with the land and its associated natural resources.

The particular relationship of indigenous communities to land, including the preservation of the different ecosystems and the promotion of harmony with the natural world, is precisely the one that is at stake in the contemporary era. The dramatic land use conversion of vast tracks of land to agro-industrial practices and other land-intensive uses has often meant the depletion of natural resources and overall ecological destruction. Examples of the latter are not only found in the savannahs of Puerto Gaitán, but also across the entire eastern plains (see: Arango 2021) and the country’s Amazon region (see: Rojas 2022). Hence, together with Restitution, Redistribution and Recognition, there is a need to regenerate ecosystems impacted by unsustainable production practices. ‘Regeneration’ of the forests, water sources and soils also comes as an indispensable element for the maintenance of life.

The realization of these ‘Rs’ is ultimately possible through ‘Resistance’ against the rapid advance of land concentration affecting human and natural environments. Also, through opposing the different forms of repression and violence exerted to rural communities, including indigenous. This all-encompassing and urgent agenda constitutes the inseparable **5Rs** as a coherent [framework](#) towards reorganizing the politics of land to sustain life in the contemporary era.

Whether the land policy framework of the new Petro/Márquez government will eventually evolve into something close to the 5Rs briefly discussed here is something that is important to wait and

see. As observers wait and see, it is important to remember that the indigenous communities of *San Rafael Warrojo* and *Iwitsulibo* cannot afford to just sit, wait and see –as they need to defend and reclaim their land.

While I write this entry, the CCNPB members are preparing a legal strategy to fight against yet another eviction order for the indigenous settlements of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* and are getting ready to travel to the area to accompany the communities first-hand – despite serious threats against their lives. The story of indigenous peoples of *San Rafael* and *Iwitsulibo* is a story that reminds us that land *is* life.

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