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PRESS RELEASE

Indigenous Women from 12 Latin American Countries Gather in Colombia to Strengthen Their Leadership and Transform Democracy

- The intensive training organized by CIM/OAS is supported by MAPP/OAS, the Ministry of Equality and Equity of Colombia, and funded by the U.S. Mission to the OAS and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
- The program was designed to provide essential tools for building political agendas, access to electoral funding, public speaking, social media management, and crisis management from an intersectional and gender perspective.
- The initiative has been named in honor of Cristina Bautista Taquinas, a renowned Colombian Indigenous leader and defender of Indigenous peoples' and women's rights.

Popayán, Colombia. October 10, 2024. Zulya Dogirama Dequia, an Indigenous woman from the Embera Katio people, began a long journey from her community in Juradó, Chocó, on the northern Pacific coast bordering Panama, to Popayán in southwestern Colombia.

To reach the "Course for Candidates for Ordinary Elections and Indigenous Self-government," organized by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS), she had to travel three hours by canoe, another three by boat, half an hour by car, and take two domestic flights.

There, Zulya joined more than 50 Indigenous women from 12 Latin American countries. "It has been a difficult journey, but it has all been worth it. I am here to learn and take this knowledge back to my community," Zulya said, highlighting her commitment to strengthening her community through participation.

Alma Rocío Tunubala Hurtado, from the Misak Misak Indigenous people in Colombia, attended the course with her seven-year-old daughter. "It is important for children to participate in these processes. My daughter is learning about the importance of Indigenous women's leadership, just as my parents taught me," she commented.

Pamela Altamirando, from the Kolla people in Argentina, traveled from Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, known as "the end of the world," to participate in this initiative. "The collective learning we are gaining here with the elders and the younger generation is essential to strengthening our influence and positively impacting our communities."

They are joined by women from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela in an intensive three-day training on key topics such as political agenda building, access to electoral funding, political communication, public speaking, social media management, crisis management, and other essential tools to face the challenges of campaigns and electoral processes from an intersectional and intercultural perspective.

The course, taught by an international faculty of Indigenous leaders and experts, aims to provide women with the tools to navigate political and electoral arenas in their respective countries successfully.

Tamara Ospina Posse, Colombia's Deputy Minister of Women, emphasized the importance of Indigenous women being at the forefront of leadership processes because "they play a fundamental role in the care and defense of life." She added, "The course is an opportunity to continue strengthening their tools and strategies to achieve greater influence in decisions that impact their territories, their communities, and the possibilities of life on the planet."

Alejandra Mora Mora, Executive Secretary of the CIM/OAS, highlighted that "democracy needs women's political participation because we are half of the population, but also because Indigenous women, in particular, bring invaluable richness. They must be present in decision-making spaces since their knowledge of Mother Earth, ancestral wisdom, and focus on collective work can positively transform the public sphere and places of power."

Finally, Roberto Menéndez, Head of the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS), emphasized the importance of this course for the peace process and the strengthening of Indigenous leadership. "The role of Indigenous women in peacebuilding is fundamental. This initiative provides them with political tools and the opportunity to be protagonists in decision-making that affects their territories and the future of their peoples," said Menéndez.

The course, named in honor of Cristina Bautista Taquinas—a brave Colombian Indigenous leader who dedicated her life to defending the rights of Indigenous peoples and women—is financially supported by the U.S. Mission to the OAS and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

Through this tribute, the aim is also to bring visibility to other women who, both in the past and present, have given and continue to give their lives to defend their rights and those of their communities.

The opening ceremony, held the previous Tuesday, featured Katie Garay, Political Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Colombia, and Marion Giacobbi, Political Counselor of the French Embassy in Colombia. Colombia's Deputy Minister of Women, Tamara Ospina, participated in the closing ceremony held on Thursday afternoon.

****INFORMATION FOR JOURNALISTS**

The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS) is the main hemispheric forum dedicated to promoting and protecting women's human rights and gender equality. Founded in 1928, the CIM has pioneered identifying the barriers women face in social, economic, and political spheres and formulating policies and programs to overcome these barriers. The CIM collaborates with OAS member states, civil society organizations, and other key actors to advance the gender equality agenda in the Americas.

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