

Filling The Gap With Abya Yala Fund

The first foundation in the Western Hemisphere run by and for Indigenous People of South and Meso America.

Indigenous representatives from Mexico, South America, Central America and North America have established a new fund to support Indigenous communities and organizations that are organizing to guarantee the survival of our people.

A group of prominent Indigenous men and women have formed this Fund with the goal of enabling Indigenous communities to achieve self-reliance through locally-initiated improvement efforts. The Abya Yala Fund provides critical training in organizational development, communications, administration, fund-raising and project management. The Fund also gives grants and loans for small-scale community projects emerging from Indigenous communities and their organizations.

"We created the Fund due to our perception that a wide gap of communication and understanding exists between international funders and development agencies and Indigenous communities," said Leonardo Viteri, a Quichua from Ecuador and board member. There is also a great need for organizational development among Indigenous communities that traditional funding sources are not addressing.

To fill these gaps, Abya Yala

Fund works through local contacts to discuss directly with Indigenous people their priority issues and needs. By working with existing organizations and community projects, the Abya Yala Fund enables local residents to define their own priorities and helps the community access technical and financial resources.

On May 4-7, 1995, Abya Yala Fund held its second meeting in Oakland, California, with board members from South and Meso America as well as advisors from North America attending. In that meeting, the board developed a five-year plan for the organization.

The Abya Yala Fund has already received many proposals from Indigenous communities working on projects to protect the environment, land rights, human rights; to address women's issues; to support education projects; and to maintain the cultural integrity and spirituality of Indigenous Nations.

Nilo Cayuqueo, a Mapuche from Argentina and a founding member of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC), and Atencio López, a Kuna from Panama, are the Co-directors of the Abya Yala Fund. Luis Macas, a Quichua from Ecuador and winner of the 1994 Goldman Environmental Award, as well as other Indigenous

leaders from across the Americas are on the Board. Amalia Dixon, a Miskitu from Nicaragua and member of the Board of Directors, will help promote the Fund in the US.

Abya Yala Fund has established an office in Oakland, California, with the support of SAIIC. Until Abya Yala Fund receives its own non-profit status, the San Francisco-based Tides Foundation will be its fiscal sponsor. Abya Yala Fund has established contact with foundations and individuals who are very supportive of this unique initiative. In addition, the Fund has become a member of foundation networking organizations such as Native Americans in Philanthropy, Hispanics in Philanthropy, and the National Network of Grantmakers.

Monetary contributions are greatly needed for project support and operations. The Fund is also seeking the donation of computers and modems, in order to facilitate regular communication with Board members and local contacts in Mexico, Central and South America. Please send tax-deductible donations or information requests to: Abya Yala Fund, c/o Tides Foundation, P O Box 28386, Oakland, CA 94604, Tel/Fax (510) 763-6553. ☺