

An Introduction to Our New Executive Director: Laura Soriano Morales

SAIIC is proud to have the presence of Laura Soriano, as a our new Executive Director. It is important for us to recognize Laura's accomplishments and to acknowledge her energy and contribution as a young Mixteca and Zapoteca woman, originating from Oaxaca, Mexico. Laura has emphasized that she is guided by the words and advice of her elders, her grandparents and family. Her father is Mixteco from a community near Nochistlán, Oaxaca. Laura's mother is a Zapoteca from Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca. Their family migrated to Oaxaca City, where she was raised in a traditional family environment, as well as being exposed to an educational system that to this day, is demeaning and discriminatory towards Indigenous students. She persevered and received a full scholarship to attend Principia College, in Illinois, where she received her Bachelor's degree in International Relations.

While in University, Laura had the opportunity to complete an internship with the Council of Mayan Peoples in the Guatemala countryside. While working with the elders in these communities, she defined that her life work and purpose is to serve and to dedicate herself to issues relating to Indigenous peoples.

Laura has worked with the Bi-National Oaxacan Organization, a grassroots Indigenous organization that fights for the rights of Mixtec, Zapotec and Triqui people across both Mexico and the United States. Laura has also provided workshops on human rights, as well as educational workshops on international trade agreements that have had a direct impact on Indigenous communities. She

presented these workshops in communities that are primarily monolingual, speaking their own Indigenous languages and dialects, and need help with Spanish. She learned to be creative and clear in her explanation of these international issues to the people with whom she worked.

She also worked with the Center for the Homeless Children of the Streets, which provides social services and resources for homeless children of Oaxaca City. She worked with these street children living amidst intense poverty, many of whom are young, orphaned, Indian children. She could relate to the children's experience of explicit discrimination.

While here in the San Francisco Bay Area, Laura has worked as a "community organizer" with the Center for Third World Organizing, based in Oakland, California. Laura has also provided valuable input towards the initial organizing and formation of the Abya Yala Fund, working directly with Indigenous representatives and leaders and facilitating their meetings. It is most evident, from her wide range of experiences, that Laura meets each challenge with the greatest capacity and potential.

During the summer of 1996, Laura attended an intensive journalism training program in Madrid, Spain. Provided by EFE, the Spanish International News Agency, it was a successful step in including Indigenous journalists in the multimedia, mass communications world. The purpose of the program was to provide an opportunity for Indigenous journalists to develop their networking skills, and to create a space for Indigenous issues to be in publication and featured in the various communication media. Laura expressed that one aspect of this challenge was the

constant, yet subtle need to prove herself amongst Native men. Many Indigenous women who are actively involved in Indigenous organizing find that this need to emphasize the importance of mutual respect is a crucial step in beginning the consciousness raising amongst our own men in our communities. There is a need to continue nurturing a reciprocal relationship of respect and responsibility and to constantly reaffirm the value of the roles and responsibilities of Native women.

Laura continues to coordinate SAIIC's radio program, "Indigenous Voices" which is sent to 110 Indigenous organi-

zations in Mexico, Central and South America. From the positive feedback and encouraging letters of support from the recipients of the radio program, it is apparent that Laura's work has been very successful. She is now doing a year long apprenticeship at KPFA, in Berkeley, where she is learning radio production and engineering.



Laura Soriano, SAIIC's newly elected Executive Director

Laura shares with us her enthusiasm, her determination to struggle for the ideals and the cause of Indigenous peoples; to persevere, to be patient, and to be conscious of the spiritual ways and traditions. Laura is a great inspiration and example to all Native women. The successes and accomplishments of Indigenous women are not only personal, but are also reflective of the strength of our people. We at SAIIC are honored to work with Laura and to share our experiences, visions and to nurture the on-going process of assuring the inclusion of Indigenous women in decision making processes.

Gina Pacaldo

President of SAIIC's Board of Directors