

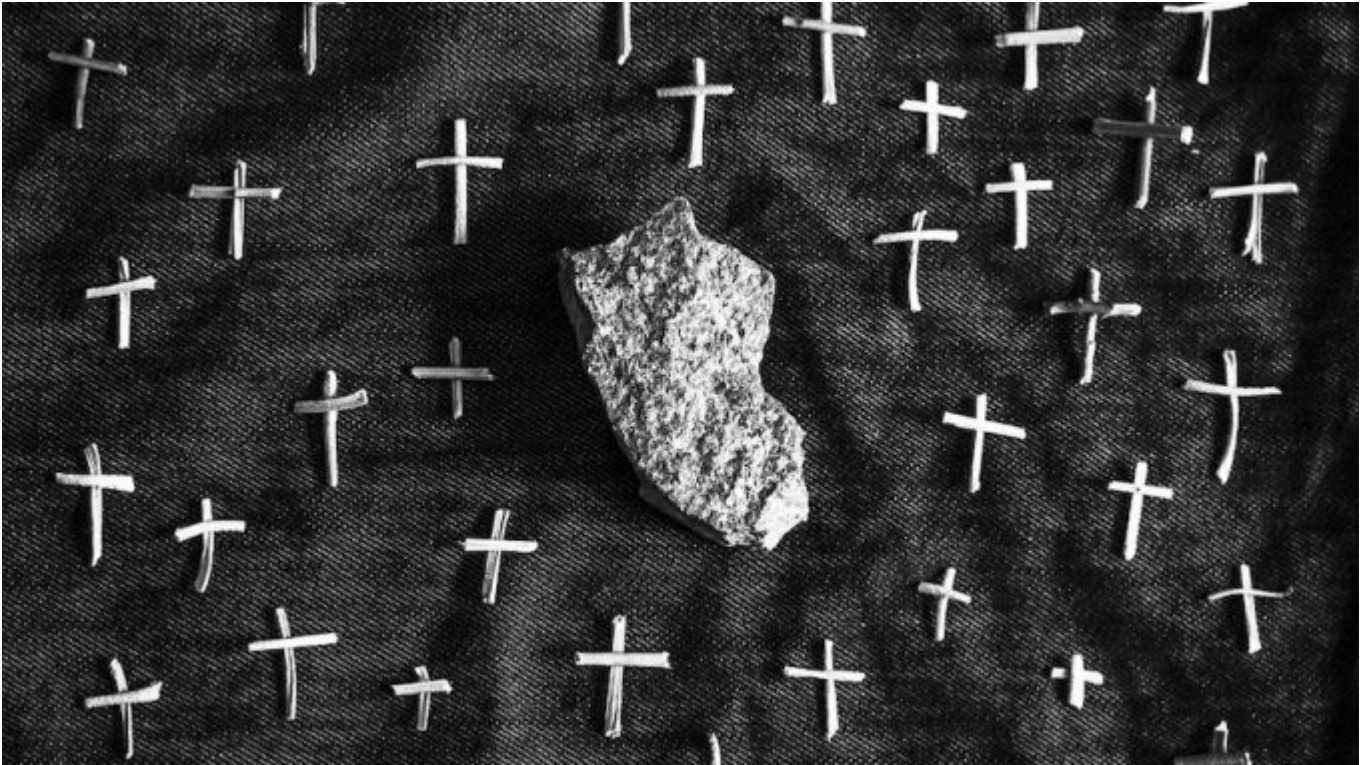


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Peru : “Our Demands Are Now Political” - Interview with Lourdes Huanca Atencio

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**A conversation with Lourdes Huanca Atencio,
President of the Federation of Peasant, Artisan,
Indigenous, Native and Salaried Women of Peru
(FENMUCARINAP)**



The peasant uprising in Peru has achieved what seemed impossible: the left and academia have been left speechless. Or at least it seems so, since their analyses have been silenced under the popular Indigenous clamor, which has organized delegations from the four “*suyos*” of Peru in “The Taking of Lima,” as the march to the capital has been called.

Few suspected that the removal of Pedro Castillo was more than a political crisis in partisan terms. Rather, it was the beginning of a symbolic and historical cataclysm, threatening the very foundations of the colonial pact still in force in the country that is seen abroad as the land of electronic cumbia, magical villages, and Ayahuasca retreats.

The story begins with an electoral campaign strongly marked by racist violence directed at Castillo, a peasant and rural teacher originally from the Northern Andes. Insults such as “donkey,” “brute,” “illiterate,” and “beast,” among others, have a

genealogy clearly located in the tradition of the *haciendas*, authentic fiefdoms under the control of a white oligarchy until their expropriation during the Agrarian Reform in 1969. Since then, colonial-racist interests have been busy maintaining the narrative of the dumb, at best naïve, Indigenous person who wastes the capitalist potential of the land and does not know what to do with freedom.

Lourdes Huanca Atencio, President of the Federation of Peasant, Artisan, Indigenous, Native and Salaried Women of Peru (FENMUCARINAP), is currently in Europe, asking for the support and solidarity of the international community.

E.F.: What motivates this tour?

L.H.A.: I have come to denounce the militarization of our country, because they are killing us one by one. Our right to protest is being brutally violated. It has reached a point where we can no longer even walk freely. To speak of peasant or Indigenous people in Peru under this dictatorial regime of terror is tantamount to being considered a terrorist. All of the government agencies are colluding, and we have no one to protect us or guarantee our rights. The police and the army shoot us at point-blank range; the legislature and the executive give orders together. The church's pronouncements are lukewarm.

What is the human rights situation?

This began before the president was elected when, during the campaign, the press called him all kinds of racist insults. We, rural men and women, felt those insults as if they were also for us—because they were! Since Castillo's dismissal, the response to our peaceful protest has been bloodthirsty. Sixty dead and rising, more than a thousand wounded, arbitrary arrests, missing persons, sexual violence and torture. In addition, we have evidence that the army infiltrates agents in the demonstrations to generate all kinds of disturbances and, thus, criminalize us. We have Congressmen demanding: "Shoot the terrorists." The police are shouting at us:

“Shut up, Indian!” We are in the hands of a genocidal and racist government. There are no guarantees for Indigenous lives.

What interests are behind these actions?

Those of the big transnational corporations, the mining companies, the oligopolies. This year is crucial for them in terms of renewing the concession contracts on the extractive exploitation of our territories. In the Puno region there is lithium, what they call white gold. Before this massacre took place, the U.S. Ambassador spoke with the executive branch and Dina Boluarte. Immediately after this meeting, a state of emergency was declared.

They want us as a tourist attraction, as decorative objects, as “the *cholita* with her llama” for their photos, not as people conscious of the knowledge they safeguard and as political agents. We know that while they poison the Earth, we cool the planet and guarantee food sovereignty. We know that cities do not feed on gold, silver, and copper, that they depend on us for food. We know that our worldview is invaluable for the survival of life on this planet. And today we have risen up against racism, against the contempt for Indigenous blood.

They thought that since Pedro Castillo was of peasant origin, it would not be difficult to get him out of the way. They believe that the impoverished education reserved for us has made us submissive, but they have been mistaken. We are not going to back down. The only thing they have left is to kill us.

What are the demands?

They are clear: dismissal of Dina Boluarte, freedom for Pedro Castillo, justice for the more than 60 murdered protesters, closure of Congress and installation of the Plurinational and Parity Constituent Assembly. Previous governments have tried to silence our demands for justice with schools and roads. It is not enough. Our

demands are now political.

What does a Plurinational Parity Assembly mean?

There is an abysmal difference between what we consider “*buen vivir*” (good living) and what is considered development in the capital. For us, the most important things are land, seeds, and water. The Plurinational Assembly is about respect; about participating in the processes of political deliberation based on the full recognition of our value and political legitimacy. Regarding the parity aspect, we want women to be considered as agents within this construction.

What is the status of the articulation process between the different peasant and Indigenous communities, unions, associations, and collectives?

We entered into this dialogue a year and a half ago—since President Castillo took office—always with the aim of working on a new constitution. Articulation is a process and a project. It is not easy, but we are getting closer and closer to reaching consensus. It’s not only with them, though: we also need the support of the academy; the intellectuals.

Many in these communities, both academics and leftist activists, might be tempted to want to intervene in the peasant deliberation processes. Some, to this day, still think their role is to guide them. It has happened before...

We will defend our rights and demand respect. There are times when we will be open and receptive and times when we will raise our voice, as we are doing now. I respect intellectuals if they respect me, but many have to shake off the need for prominence. They don’t have the answers to everything. But we do not lose hope. We have great allies like Héctor Bejar and within some sectors of feminism.

What tasks arise from all this?

When there is an earthquake, the walls fall down. The roof falls down. But then comes the calm, and from there, an opportunity to build something better; to lay very strong foundations so that the new house is resilient. The most difficult thing will be to abandon the legacy of the neoliberal right-wing, which always puts the individual before everything. We have to unlearn a lot and turn our gaze toward the collective.

Are we at the beginning of an anti-colonial revolution?

Absolutely. Fear is over.

Elisa Fuenzalida is a researcher and cultural worker.

Source: [Resumen](#)

